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**ISLAMIST TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS IN AFRICA:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AL-SHABAAB AND
BOKO HARAM**

by

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June 2022

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STUDY OF AL-SHABAAB AND BOKO HARAM**

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ABSTRACT

Terrorist activities have eroded the stability, development, and security of a growing number of African states.

The objective of this thesis is to better understand the terrorist groups Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab based on their strengths and weaknesses, and to identify their vulnerabilities in order to deduce their resilience to counterterrorism measures. The study also aims to shed light on the applied countermeasures. For this purpose, comparative case studies of two terrorist groups in Africa are presented, based on the available unclassified literature. The thesis adopts a qualitative approach to examine key elements of their organizational structures, ideologies, activities, and methods of recruitment and funding. In addition, the current counterterrorism efforts used on the African continent and their effectiveness are assessed.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFRICOM	U.S. Department of Defense Africa Command
AIAI	Al-Ittihad al-Islami
AMISOM	African Union Mission Group in Somalia
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AU	African Union
CEWS	Continental Early Warning System
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CT	Counterterrorism
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GWOT	Global War on Terrorism
ICU	Islamic Courts Union
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IS	Islamic State
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance
ISWAP	Islamic State's West Africa Province
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MUJAO	Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest [Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa]
MYC	Muslim Youth Center
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
TFG	Somali Transitional Federal Government
UN	United Nations Organization
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

When Al-Shabaab gained prominence, it was considered “the most deadly terror group in Africa in 2017,”¹ but at the same time scholars also assessed that Boko Haram “will remain one of Africa’s enduring insurgencies.”² Both were listed amongst the “four deadliest terrorist groups [in] 2019” worldwide by the Global Terrorism Index.³ To better understand the terrorist groups Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab now and in the future, this thesis analyzes key elements of both organizations in a comparative case study. By comparing the two largest and most dangerous terrorist organizations in Africa, this thesis seeks to address the following question: What determines the strengths and weaknesses of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, and which of each group’s vulnerabilities stem from organizational differences? This thesis aims to identify not only the patterns and characteristics common to Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab but also those that distinguish the two organizations from each other in order to propose solutions for combating them, both through counterterrorism (CT) and other state actions.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Insurgent groups have existed for centuries, and they have increasingly adopted terrorist tactics and strategies.⁴ These insurgents’ operations have repeatedly caused state crises, destabilized peace, and led to the collapse of countries’ economies. Overall, insurgent activities have had a negative impact on the stability, development, and security

¹ Jason Warner and Ellen Chapin, “Targeted Terror: The Suicide Bombers of al-Shabaab,” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, February 13, 2018, IV, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/targeted-terror-suicide-bombers-al-shabaab/>.

² Jakob Zenn et al., “Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa’s Enduring Insurgency” Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 9, 2018, VI, <https://ctc.usma.edu/boko-haram-beyond-headlines-analyses-africas-enduring-insurgency/>.

³ “Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism,” The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), November 2020, 15, <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/?s=Measuring+the+Impact+of+Terrorism>.

⁴ Lauren O’Brien, “The Evolution of Terrorism Since 9/11,” *FBI: Law Enforcement Bulletin*, September 11, 2011, <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/the-evolution-of-terrorism-since-911>.

of an increasing number of African states.⁵ These phenomena are expected to continue into the future, which is the fundamental importance of the present work. This thesis aims to highlight the importance of the fight against terrorism and the regional reference to the African continent. This work aims to explore which parts of the terrorist organizations are more open to influence from the outside. Furthermore, it aims to make projections on the likely future development of the organizations and their resistance to countermeasures. Ultimately, this thesis aims to contribute to improving the effectiveness of strategies⁶ and policy responses to combat terrorist groups.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis draws on literature detailing theories on two separate areas of study relevant to the research objectives: terrorist organizational structures, and terrorist tactics and targeting, and insights from the literature will be applied to the respective case studies on the two terrorist organizations, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab.

1. Terrorist Organizational Structures

In the past decades, a multitude of scholars have studied the organizational structure of terrorist organizations. These authors have been able to establish a wide variety of connections between structural characteristics and secondary phenomena like information flows, operational autonomy and efficiency, and resistance against network penetration by CT operations. A selection of these connections is reviewed in the following paragraphs.

It is a basic observation that terrorist organizations are not necessarily identical, as there are considerable differences within their structures.⁷ Some scholars point out that beyond the organizational structure, the internal constraints of an organization also have

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy* (New York: MacMillan Press Ltd., 2014); David Henley, *Asia-Africa Development Divergence: A Question of Intent* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2015).

⁶ To combat, deter, deny, and disrupt.

⁷ Martha Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism," *Orbis-A Journal of World Affairs* 29, no. 3 (1985): 466–67.

multiple effects.⁸ These researchers also argue that the structure of a terrorist organization dictates the way its members interact, specifically focusing on the networked dynamics of the organization.⁹ One of the main distinctions that scholars make is between decentralization and centralization—which has manifold effects, particularly in the realm of operations.¹⁰ The literature argues that in a decentralized organization the decision-making authority is assigned to leaders of subordinate units. Doing so provides them with more autonomy in their decision-making process, promoting agility and innovation. But this also comes with some disadvantages. Decentralized organizations are in danger of creating higher levels of redundancy. Challenges may also emerge from misunderstandings, misalignments of goals, and inefficiencies.¹¹

Scholars describe that decentralization of a terrorist organization is usually accomplished by establishing individual cells that are independent of each other. These cells—and especially their core leadership—are subsequently much more difficult to combat.¹² Furthermore, scholars argue the fragmentation and decentralization of groups that adopt a cell-like structure may enhance the autonomous operation skills of the lower-

⁸ Jacob N. Shapiro and David A. Siegel, “Moral Hazard, Discipline, and the Management of Terrorist Organizations,” *World Politics* 64, no. 1 (December 20, 2011): 42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887111000293>.

⁹ Ethan Frisch, “Insurgencies Are Organizations Too: Organizational Structure and the Effectiveness of Insurgent Strategy,” *The Peace And Conflict Review* 6 (2012): 1–23; Victor H. Asal, Gary A. Ackerman, and R. Karl Rethemeyer, “Connections Can Be Toxic: Terrorist Organizational Factors and the Pursuit of CBRN Weapons,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 3 (March 1, 2012): 229–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2012.648156>.

¹⁰ Steven T. Zech and Michael Gabbay, “Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Insurgency: From Organization to Politics,” *International Studies Review* 18, no. 2 (June 1, 2016): 6–7, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viv011>.

¹¹ Zech and Gabbay, “Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Insurgency”; Arindra Mishra, “Centralized vs Decentralized Organization,” *Management Weekly* (blog), April 27, 2021, <https://managementweekly.org/centralized-vs-decentralized-organization/>; Arie Perliger and Ami Pedahzur, “Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 1 (January 2011): 45–50, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096510001848>.

¹² Daniel Cunningham, Sean Everton, and Philip Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks: A Strategic Framework for the Use of Social Network Analysis* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Sean F. Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

level cells.¹³ This fosters the development of the increasing autonomy of the different (sub-) units, which in turn potentially promotes even further fragmentation and decentralization in an organization. Groups decentralize to make themselves more resilient, but this happens at the expense of focused and coherent operations; it also results in the deterioration of information transfer.¹⁴ The consequence is a decrease in efficiency and likely a lack of empowerment to carry out larger (and thus coordination- and resource-intensive) operations. Some scholars agree that individual cells in decentralized organizations are much more difficult to lead and coordinate and require considerable additional effort in contrast to centralized organizations.¹⁵ Furthermore, in such individual cells, the adherents lack personal connections with other members of the organization or the group leaders.¹⁶ Martha Crenshaw describes it as the phenomenon of social isolation.¹⁷

Decentralized organizations are described in contrast to social networks and their particular communication challenges. The use of social networks, which has been on the rise during the last two decades, does not require a hierarchical structure for the arrangement of plans and actions and does not depend on sophisticated information technology. Easily accessible, they connect members in such a way that they can evade being detected and at the same time work effectively.¹⁸ A centralized organization provides much contrast to a decentralized one. The literature generally characterizes a

¹³ Suranjan Weeraratne, "Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 4 (July 4, 2017): 627, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2015.1005742>.

¹⁴ Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Calvert Jones, "Assessing the Dangers of Illicit Networks: Why al-Qaida May Be Less Threatening Than Many Think," *International Security* 33, no. 2 (October 1, 2008): 19–20, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2008.33.2.7>.

¹⁵ Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks*; Everton, *Disrupting Dark Networks*; Renate Mayntz, "Hierarchie oder Netzwerk? Zu den Organisationsformen des Terrorismus [Hierarchy or Network? On the organizational forms of terrorism]," *Berliner Journal für Soziologie [Berlin Journal of Sociology]* 14, no. 2 (June 1, 2004): 251–62, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03204707>.

¹⁶ Martha Crenshaw, *Explaining Terrorism: Causes, Processes and Consequences*, 2021, 71, <https://www.routledge.com/Explaining-Terrorism-Causes-Processes-and-Consequences/Crenshaw/p/book/9780415780513>.

¹⁷ Martha Crenshaw, "An Organization Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism," *Orbis*, no. 29 (1985): 465–89.

¹⁸ U.S. Army TRADOC, "TRADOC G2 Handbook No. 1 / A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century" (U.S. Army TRADOC Intelligence Support Activity, August 15, 2007), <https://irp.fas.org/threat/terrorism/>.

centralized organization as a top-down system in which higher-ranking leaders are in control of the lower-ranking layers. Ideas, strategies, and executions flow from top to bottom in the organization's structure.¹⁹ Scholars point out that highly centralized organizations have the advantage that their leadership has tight (not necessarily total) control over all sorts of aspects within the organization. This creates a greater internal cohesion in achieving the organization's goals and ensures that its members are better aligned with the organization's mission and overall vision. The implementation of operational decisions is also simplified because of the hierarchical organizational structure.²⁰ Overall, the literature describes centralized organizations as generally more efficient but also as "less resilient to counter-terrorism measures".²¹

The literature describes the tradeoff between efficiency and resilience. Centralized terrorist organizations are capable of greater operational prowess, but decentralized ones are more likely to survive counterterrorism efforts.²² Nevertheless, Crenshaw considers membership in a larger, centralized organization as advantageous, describing such organizations as usually better able to protect their terrorist activities through well-developed networks.²³ This seems like a possible point for further examination, especially since these scholarly opinions come from distinctly different eras of terrorism research.

Adam Dolnik weighs the structure of a terrorist organization as being of great importance. In his view, the structure significantly shapes the dynamics regarding operational decisions. He asserts that a structurally determined top-down or consensual approach makes a significant difference.²⁴ Jacob Shapiro makes similar arguments. He

¹⁹ Zech and Gabbay, "Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Insurgency"; Perliger and Pedahzur, "Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence"; Mishra, "Centralized vs Decentralized Organization."

²⁰ C.J.M. Drake, *Terrorists' Target Selection* (London: MacMillan Press LTD, 1998), 165.

²¹ Rafael Prieto Curiel, Olivier Walther, and Neave O'Clery, "Uncovering the Internal Structure of Boko Haram through Its Mobility Patterns," *Applied Network Science* 5, no. 1 (December 2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41109-020-00264-4>.

²² Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks*.

²³ Crenshaw, "An Organization Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism," 467–68.

²⁴ Adam Dolnik, *Understanding Terrorist Innovation: Technology, Tactics and Global Trends* (London: Routledge, 2007).

shows how the centralized structure allows for better funding of an organization since centralized management of funding appears to be least problematic when groups have reliable donors. He also points out that donors prefer to engage with a central leader rather than having to deal with different organizational elements. Concurrently, a centralized process has significant control advantages for the leader of the organization when it comes to (financial) resource control.²⁵

2. Terrorist Tactics and Targeting

Another determinant of a terrorist organization's output is its ideological orientation. Ideologically, the majority of Islamic insurgencies today are usually grouped under the term of radical Salafism.²⁶ During the last twenty years, a theoretical consideration of the role of ideology for armed groups has increasingly expanded. Several scholars have shown the extent to which ideological commitments affect the actual behavior of armed groups, though the research has not necessarily explained how these are related to the respective organizational structures of the groups.²⁷

This field has been dominated by the writings of Adam Dolnik and C.J.M. Drake. Dolnik regards insight into the "ideology and strategic objectives of a group" as key elements for the assessment of their threat potential.²⁸ To him, these two factors give an understanding of the rationale by which a specific group's decision is made for carrying out a given type of operational activity at a particular moment in time. Regarding the

²⁵ Jacob N. Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma: Managing Violent Covert Organizations*, Course Book (Princeton: University Press, 2013), 105–6, 262–63, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400848645>.

²⁶ Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Quintan Wiktorowicz, "Anatomy of the Salafi Movement," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 3 (May 1, 2006): 207–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500497004>; Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism," *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, 2009, 244–66.

²⁷ Juan E. Ugarriza, "Ideologies and Conflict in the Post-Cold War," *International Journal of Conflict Management* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 82–104, <https://doi.org/10.1108/10444060910931620>; Juan E. Ugarriza and Matthew J. Craig, "The Relevance of Ideology to Contemporary Armed Conflicts: A Quantitative Analysis of Former Combatants in Colombia," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 57, no. 3 (June 1, 2013): 445–77, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002712446131>; Kai M. Thaler, "Ideology and Violence in Civil Wars: Theory and Evidence from Mozambique and Angola," *Civil Wars* 14, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 546–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2012.740203>.

²⁸ Dolnik, *Understanding Terrorist Innovation*, 137–38.

organization's targeting, he differentiates between "narrow and discriminate targeting logic" and "highly indiscriminate targeting logic," with the respective logic determining the group's chosen modus operandi.²⁹ Along the same lines, Drake describes in his work that although terrorist operations may differ in their techniques and goals, they do have a certain phased sequence.³⁰ Some of these phases are (intentionally) observable, while others remain concealed. He describes the process of selecting a potential target as most appropriately considered to be a course of action in which the terrorist's room for maneuvering is limited by the influence of several elements. Drake develops a model that illustrates the underlying dynamics of terrorist target selection based on the concepts of "ideology, strategy, and tactics."³¹

Beyond the role of ideology, Dolnik also points to the level and availability of funding for a terrorist group as one of the most significant drivers of the group's operational activities. Furthermore, Dolnik attests to a correlation between the lifetime of the organization and its capacity gain. He considers the scope of experience as fundamental for a positive innovation process.³² Drake also admits to the relevance of intelligence and logistics as determining factors for the application of a certain tactic, adding that the availability of weapons and personnel are further conditioning factors.³³ Such conditioning then initiates and further fuels a learning process.³⁴

In addition, how well an organization's structure is adapted to its environment, whether it is a centralized or decentralized kind, seems particularly relevant to the overall

²⁹ Dolnik, 16.

³⁰ Drake, *Terrorists' Target Selection*, 54–56.

³¹ Drake, 57, 175.

³² Dolnik, *Understanding Terrorist Innovation*, 150–52.

³³ Drake, *Terrorists' Target Selection*, 80–81.

³⁴ Maria Rasmussen, "Terrorist Learning: A Look at the Adoption of Political Kidnappings in Six Countries, 1968–1990," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 40, no. 7 (July 3, 2017): 539–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1237226>; Maria J. Rasmussen and Mohammed M. Hafez, *Terrorist Innovations in Weapons of Mass Effect: Preconditions, Causes, and Predictive Indicators. Workshop Report, No. Asco 2010–019. Ft. Belvoir, Va.: Defense Threat Reduction Agency, Advanced Systems and Concepts Ofc, 2010.* (Monterey, CA, 2010).

effectiveness of the respective organization.³⁵ According to David Tucker, the type of organizational structure and the capabilities of the respective organization's opponent are determining factors that should not be overlooked.³⁶

3. Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab

Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab can both be considered terrorist organizations with a network character. In their organizational structure, both organizations are of a similar design. Although they combine hierarchical and network elements, along with additional characteristics that go beyond hierarchical and network categorization, and they have decentralized structures. Both organizations show similar components, for example, a Shura, that exercise identical functions. On the other hand, subtle differences in their structure do appear to have an impact. Each group varies in its orientation toward hierarchy or network. Boko Haram, for instance, seems to lean more in the direction of a network, given its simpler, more exclusively terrorist strategy.³⁷ Al-Shabaab, in line with its claim to seize and control territory, tends more in the direction of a hierarchy, particularly as the centralized elements extract revenues collected at the local, cellular levels.³⁸

a. Boko Haram

Boko Haram is described as a militant group that evolved out of the “radical Islamist youth who worshipped at the Al-Haji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri,” drawing radical Islamist ideology from the context of Wahhabism and Salafism.³⁹ Andrew Walker describes the ideology as a combination of Islamist, Salafist, and strongly anti-

³⁵ David Tucker, “Terrorism, Networks, and Strategy: Why the Conventional Wisdom Is Wrong,” *Homeland Security Affairs* 4, no. 2 (June 2008): 2, 4–5.

³⁶ Tucker, 12.

³⁷ William Hansen, “Boko Haram: Religious Radicalism and Insurrection in Northern Nigeria,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 52, no. 4 (June 1, 2017): 551–69, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909615615594>.

³⁸ Frederick Appiah Afriyie, “Terrorism and Its Negative Effects on Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Al-Shabaab,” *European Scientific Journal ESJ* 15 (April 1, 2019): 63–77, <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2019.v15n11p63>.

³⁹ Andrew Walker, “What Is Boko Haram?,” Special Report (Washington, DC, United States: United States Institute Of Peace, May 30, 2012), 3, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2012/05/what-boko-haram>.

Western elements. It is deeply embedded in the traditional branches of radical Islam that have emerged in northern Nigeria. As jihadist Salafists, the followers of Boko Haram focus on struggle in the form of jihad.⁴⁰ Roman Loimeier argues one of the group's primary strategic objectives is to supersede national institutions by creating an Islamic caliphate, which the organization seeks to accomplish by widespread use of violence—acting against the political order.⁴¹ By contrast, Suranjan Weeraratne describes Boko Haram as a ragtag collection of clusters, ranging from Islamist fanatics to opportunistic criminals.⁴²

In addition, Weeraratne examines Boko Haram's expansion outside of northeastern Nigeria, incorporating changes in target selection, strategies employed, and increases in violence.⁴³ He argues that ties to al Qaeda were a critical factor in the organization's growth, as were Nigeria's counterterrorism measures.⁴⁴ He also blames these for the internal fragmentation of Boko Haram. He describes the splitting of the originally very closed organization into an increasingly cell-like structure in which each sub-cell is loyal to its respective leader.

Boko Haram seems to occupy an ambivalent position between hierarchy and network, which scholars attribute to a change of leadership in the Emir's top position that took place in 2009.⁴⁵ In their report *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines*, Jacob Zenn et al. describe the structure of Boko Haram, focusing on the organization's Emir seconded by an advisory body (Shura Council) which also represents the highest decision-making level.⁴⁶ Below this level, several individual cells are attached, which are dedicated to regional relevance. The authors describe the Shura Council as the directive planning body, with the

⁴⁰ Roman Loimeier, "Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria," *Africa Spectrum* 47, no. 2–3 (August 1, 2012): 137–55, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971204702-308>.

⁴¹ Loimeier, 151–52.

⁴² Weeraratne, "Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria," 620.

⁴³ Weeraratne, 615–19.

⁴⁴ Weeraratne, 622–23.

⁴⁵ Patrick Zimet, "Boko Haram's Evolving Relationship With al-Qaeda," Geneva Centre For Security Policy, September 13, 2017, <https://www.gcsp.ch/global-insights/boko-harams-evolving-relationship-al-qaeda>.

⁴⁶ Weeraratne, "Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria."

final decisions being made solely by the holder of the top position. The operations level of Boko Haram is highly decentralized, with local commanders carrying out day-to-day operations independently in their respective areas of responsibility. Characteristic features of networks are thus evident at the operational/council level. However, there is no central control of the cells' actions by the upper leadership, and there is no central funding mechanism.⁴⁷ Scholars regard this fragmentation as responsible for the increased versatility of the group's capabilities. This versatility in the form of increased operational skills goes hand in glove with local commanders having significant autonomy—as long as they follow the instructions of the higher leadership.⁴⁸

b. *Al-Shabaab*

Al-Shabaab is described in the relevant literature as a militant group that has emerged from Somali society.⁴⁹ Al-Shabaab's ideology is a combination of Islamist, Salafist, and nationalist elements, dating back to the Islamic revivalist movements that became influential in Somalia in the 1960s.⁵⁰ With Al-Shabaab's origin being rooted in a civil war, scholars furthermore point out that this experience has probably left a lasting mark on the group, which manifests itself in particular in the confrontation with and opposition to state repression.⁵¹

The group's main strategic goals are the introduction of radical Sharia law, the implementation of a caliphate, and jihad—waged against the institutions of Somalia,

⁴⁷ Zenn et al., "Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines."

⁴⁸ Daniel Thorbjörnsson and Michael Jonsson, "Boko Haram – On the Verge of Defeat or a Long Term Threat?," November 2017, 4, https://www.academia.edu/35419972/Boko_Haram_on_the_Verge_of_Defeat_or_a_Long_term_Threat.

⁴⁹ Daniel E. Agbibo, "Al-Shabab, the Global Jihad, and Terrorism without Borders," News, Aljazeera, September 24, 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2013/9/24/al-shabab-the-global-jihad-and-terrorism-without-borders/>.

⁵⁰ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199327874.001.0001>; Annette Weber, "Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God]," in *Jihadismus in Afrika: lokale Ursachen, regionale Ausbreitung, internationale Verbindungen [Jihadism in Africa: local causes, regional spread, international linkages]*, ed. Guido Steinberg and Annette Weber, vol. 7/2015, SWP-Studie (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), 2015), 15–33.

⁵¹ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 2–4.

Kenya, and Tanzania, where Al-Shabaab maintains a permanent presence.⁵² Scholars state that its followers belong to radical Islam and mostly consist of members of Somali clans as well as individual foreign fighters who join for various reasons.⁵³ By this perception, the foot soldiers of Al-Shabaab are primarily interested in matters that concern the clan as well as financial gain, rather than global jihad.⁵⁴

In its jihad, Al-Shabaab had apparently become so potent that the group was able to hold its own in direct combat against African Union (AU) troops.⁵⁵ Increasing military pressure from 2011 onwards pushed the organization to fall back on its tried-and-tested guerrilla tactics. With mounting losses, Al-Shabaab then shifted to a radical strategy of terrorist violence. By doing so, they still keep their aim to gain and maintain control of conquered territory, where their own ideas of how to rule—based on the caliphate idea—are to be imposed by force.

Scholars describe Al-Shabaab as being led by an Emir, who is assisted by a subordinate advisory council, the Shura, which supports him in his decision making.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, the inner circle of the organization consists mainly of Somalis; however, foreign members also play a role within the Shura that should not be underestimated. Several different departments (*Maktab*) are subordinate to the Shura Council, each with its own specific area of expertise. Below the Shura, Al-Shabaab is divided into four geographical regions led by regional commanders who can operate independently of the

⁵² 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): 220–22, 233, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2010.533071>.

⁵³ Guido Steinberg and Annette Weber, eds., *Jihadismus in Afrika: lokale Ursachen, regionale Ausbreitung, internationale Verbindungen* [*Jihadism in Africa: local causes, regional spread, international linkages*], vol. 7/2015, SWP-Studie (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik -SWP- Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, 2015), 15–16.

⁵⁴ Steinberg and Weber, 7/2015:23–24.

⁵⁵ Daniel E. Agbibo, “Ties That Bind: The Evolution and Links of Al-Shabab,” *The Round Table* 103, no. 6 (November 2, 2014): 587–88, 594, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00358533.2014.988028>.

⁵⁶ David Goldmann, “Exposing Al-Shabaab’s Leadership Structure and Precept Ideology – Strategic Intelligence Service,” *intelligencebriefs.com*, *Bi-Weekly Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Brief for East Africa* (blog), July 31, 2018, <https://intelligencebriefs.com/exposing-al-shabaabs-leadership-structure-and-precept-ideology/>; Guido Steinberg, “Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.],” Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), November 21, 2013, 20–22, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/somalia-shabab-kein-al-qaida-ableger>.

leadership and are allowed to act without the involvement of the Shura—if required. Thus, in practical terms, and matching the definitions there is no central control of the commanders by the leadership.⁵⁷

4. Countering Terrorism

In the literature, counterterrorism is a sprawling topic, largely due to the fact that there is no unified definition of terrorism, as well as the differing views of scholars regarding the practical implementation of counterterrorism.⁵⁸ This phenomenon is particularly evident “in the context of domestic counterterrorism obligations.”⁵⁹ While an extensive body of literature addresses the various types of military and intelligence actions and means, and their effectiveness and appropriateness for countering terrorism,⁶⁰ another scholarly faction asserts that kinetic means are incapable of addressing terrorist threats, let alone depriving terrorist organizations of a breeding ground for recruits and support.⁶¹ In this view the mere application of military force to address terrorism cannot overcome the problem. By contrast, the so-called soft approach is described as promising, inherent with the application of a holistic concept, consisting of various influencing factors. Those factors include the possibility of mediation, strengthening of information sharing, and the

⁵⁷ Mayntz, “Hierarchie oder Netzwerk?,” 254.

⁵⁸ Susan Tiefenbrun, “A Semiotic Approach To A Legal Definition Of Terrorism,” *ILSA Journal of International & Comparative Law* 9, no. 2 (January 1, 2003): 389–93.

⁵⁹ Sudha Setty, “What’s In a Name? How Nations Define Terrorism Ten Years After 9/11,” *University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law* 33, no. 1 (2011): 1.

⁶⁰ U.S. Department Of State, “Countering Terrorism,” United States Department of State, accessed February 3, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/policy-issues/countering-terrorism/>; *U.S. Counterterrorism Priorities and Challenges in Africa: Testimony before the Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on National Security U.S. House of Representatives*, Congressional Research Service (statement of Alexis Arieff, Specialist in African Affairs), December 16, 2019, 1–13; Stephen Van Evera, “Assessing U.S. Strategy in the War on Terror,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 607 (2006): 10–26; Steven Simon and Richard Sokolsky, “19 Years Later: How to Wind Down the War on Terror,” *Quincy Papers*, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, no. 1 (2020): 1–31.

⁶¹ James JF Forest, “Crime-Terror Interactions in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2019, 1–21; Sven Botha and Suzanne E. Graham, “(Counter-) Terrorism in Africa: Reflections for a New Decade,” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 28, no. 2 (2021): 127–43; Bruno Charbonneau, “Intervention in Mali: Building Peace between Peacekeeping and Counterterrorism,” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 35, no. 4 (2017): 415–31; Juliet Wambui Kamau, “Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive? A Case Study of Kenya’s Response to Terrorism, 1998–2020,” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 28, no. 2 (2021): 203–31.

funding of local counter-extremism and counterterrorism research, enhancing the involvement of humanitarian diplomacy, and, in particular, focusing more strongly on the interlinkages between development and peace processes—including the availability of an amnesty plan with possibilities for the reintegration of former combatants.⁶²

Another body of literature considers the links as well as dynamics between organized crime and terrorism to be of particular relevance to successful counterterrorism efforts.⁶³ Guillermo Kreiman and Mar C. Espadafor consider it a relevant prerequisite to understanding the respective interrelationships of these entities in order to take suitable political actions to address them. Their studies demonstrate that “terrorism reduces the legitimacy of states,” enabling elements of organized crime to take advantage of the legitimacy deficit by expanding their spheres of influence geographically and substantively within the country.⁶⁴ Jeremy Lind et al. also identify a connection between international terrorist and criminal networks as a contributing factor to the negative manifestations of threats to peace and security. In their research, they demonstrate that the combination of internal factors, such as social inequalities and unequal treatment of citizens by the state, and external factors, such as a terrorist threat (in their study, Al-Shabaab), provides a breeding ground for further insurgency and escalation of violence.⁶⁵

Another concept pursued by scholars is that counterterrorism measures lead terrorist organizations to adopt strategic countermeasures for the affected sectors of terrorist organizations.⁶⁶ These countermeasures are referred to by proponents of this idea as the crowding-out or substitution effect. The phenomenon they describe manifests itself

⁶² Kamau, “Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive? A Case Study of Kenya’s Response to Terrorism, 1998–2020”; Marisha Ramdeen, “Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa,” *African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes* (blog), July 21, 2017, <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/countering-terrorism-violent-extremism-africa/>.

⁶³ Guillermo Kreiman and Mar C. Espadafor, “Unexpected Allies: The Impact of Terrorism on Organised Crime in Sub-Saharan Africa and South-East Asia,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2019, 12–13.

⁶⁴ Kreiman and Espadafor, 12.

⁶⁵ Jeremy Lind, Patrick Mutahi, and Marjoke Oosterom, “‘Killing a Mosquito with a Hammer’: Al-Shabaab Violence and State Security Responses in Kenya,” *Peacebuilding* 5, no. 2 (2017): 133.

⁶⁶ Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, “The Effectiveness of Antiterrorism Policies: A Vector-Autoregression-Intervention Analysis,” *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 4 (1993): 829–30.

in the fact that once state institutions enforce certain types of counterterrorism measures, the affected elements of the terrorist organization turn to alternative courses of action that are not affected by the same antiterrorism program.

With regard to the question of why people join terrorist organizations, one prominent theory has been the idea of a “Crime-Terror Nexus,” arguing that the use of crime is one of the determining factors for the development of terrorism in certain areas.⁶⁷ Luca Raineri theorizes that in remote African areas poor governance, manifested as (perceived) abuse of state power, is responsible for the influx of people into jihadist organizations.⁶⁸ Less responsible seems to be inaction, i.e., the mere absence of state violence. According to this theory, the misconduct of state-appointed proxy forces in the performance of executive duties, for example, would have a direct influence on segments of the population turning toward terrorism.⁶⁹

Another group of researchers has looked at why counterterrorism projects and measures in Africa do not bring the success that was expected or sometimes even fail.⁷⁰ Scholars attest to the inability of most African governments and their decision makers to adequately address the phenomenon of domestic terrorism, let alone transnational terrorism.⁷¹ A significant factor behind this weakness can be seen in what appears to be the government-focused and militaristic character of most African counterterrorism efforts.⁷² Ariel Ben Solomon describes that “any military strengthening of an illegitimate African state by the international community not only serves to bolster a predatory state

⁶⁷ Tamara Makarenko, “The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism,” *Global Crime* 6, no. 1 (2004): 129–45.

⁶⁸ Luca Raineri, “Explaining the Rise of Jihadism in Africa: The Crucial Case of the Islamic State of the Greater Sahara,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no. 1 (2020): 1, 10–11.

⁶⁹ Raineri, 4.

⁷⁰ Forest, “Crime-Terror Interactions in Sub-Saharan Africa”; Hussein Solomon, “The African State and the Failure of U.S. Counter-Terrorism Initiatives in Africa: The Cases of Nigeria and Mali,” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 20, no. 3 (2013): 427–45; James J.F. Forest and Jennifer Giroux, “Terrorism and Political Violence in Africa: Contemporary Trends in a Shifting Terrain,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 5, no. 3/4 (2011): 5–17.

⁷¹ Forest and Giroux, “Terrorism and Political Violence in Africa,” 12.

⁷² Solomon, “The African State and the Failure of U.S. Counter-Terrorism Initiatives in Africa: The Cases of Nigeria and Mali,” 427.

but also undermines the human security of citizens.”⁷³ In his view, this approach blends “sub-state and international terrorism,” undermining both regional and transnational security while encouraging international terrorism.

D. EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The in-depth comparison of the two organizations, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, reveals that they share a few commonalities, specifically in generic strategies and tactics. However, this thesis outlines specific organizational differences between Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab in the development, financing, and distinct formation of their command structure. These differences may not be well captured in the existing literature, but as this thesis proves, they influence how these two organizations operate.

Tying the observable results of the comparison to the available literature regarding terrorist organizational structures, one finds that the dichotomy between centralized and decentralized organizations only partially applies to the case studies, which are a blended form of both characteristics. This phenomenon may not be captured in scholarly works that describe the “new terrorism” organizations which tend to be decentralized and dispersed, while tightly centralized and hierarchical schemes connect the militants. This thesis researches and documents the organizational evolution of both groups, assesses the impacts of specific blends of hierarchy and decentralization, and systematically compares the different impacts of each blend on terrorist tactics, future development, and susceptibility to/or resilience against counterterrorist measures.

E. RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis addresses the research question with comparative case studies of two terrorist organizations in Africa: Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. It encompasses a systematic comparison of their structure to identify differences and similarities in their respective strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities that stem from organizational differences, and, where possible, identifies their potential as well as their capacity for future development.

⁷³ Solomon, 427.

To do so, the thesis draws on the available, unclassified literature to determine how Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab are composed and structured, to assess what conclusions can be drawn from the respective organizational structure and incentives to identify tackling points, and to evaluate whether and to what extent their structures influence the strategy of the respective terrorists. The comparative analysis adopts a qualitative approach, since no clear quantitative method for analyzing these networks has yet been established.⁷⁴ The comparative analysis is based on a set of criteria chosen by the author: In addition to the history of Al-Shabaab's and Boko Haram's origins and development, the analysis uses the framework developed earlier to systematically analyze how organizational structure influences the ideology, tactics, and development of both groups.

There is extensive literature on Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. However, there seems to be a need for a direct comparison, especially regarding their strategies and tactics. Islamist terrorism in Africa is quite complex and encompasses many more than the two organizations being analyzed in this thesis. There are many other jihadist groups of differing sizes and with different ideological orientations to be found in various regions and/or countries. It should also be pointed out that there is a lack of openly accessible primary sources, such as religious literature, correspondence, internet sites, and social media accounts of Islamist groups about the two groups to be studied.⁷⁵ If these are available, their authenticity and credibility are difficult or almost impossible to verify. Furthermore, they are rarely in Western languages but in Arabic, Afro-Asian languages, or dialects. For these reasons, only secondary sources where information has already been processed scientifically or (in some cases) journalistically, as well as policy documents and NGO reports—all the before mentioned in English, German, and to a minimal extent in the French language—are used.

⁷⁴ Cale Horne and John Horgan, "Methodological Triangulation in the Analysis of Terrorist Networks," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35, no. 2 (February 1, 2012): 182–92, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2012.639064>.

⁷⁵ Robert Kluijver, "Al Shabaab Governance," The Zomia Center for the Study of Non-State Spaces, July 10, 2019, <https://www.zomiacenter.org/posts/2019/4/19/al-shabaab-governance>.

F. TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS – CASE STUDIES APPROACH

It is well documented that Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram both are highly active. Figure 1 illustrates the main areas of operation of both organizations on the African continent (marked in red circles) and provides an overview of the concentration and intensity of terrorist attacks between 1970 and 2015 to illustrate the relations. Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram both want to establish a religious state in their respective spheres of influence and have declared the current government institutions to be their bogeymen, in the fight against which both organizations use terrorist means such as guerrilla tactics and suicide bombings—but how do both organizations behave more precisely?

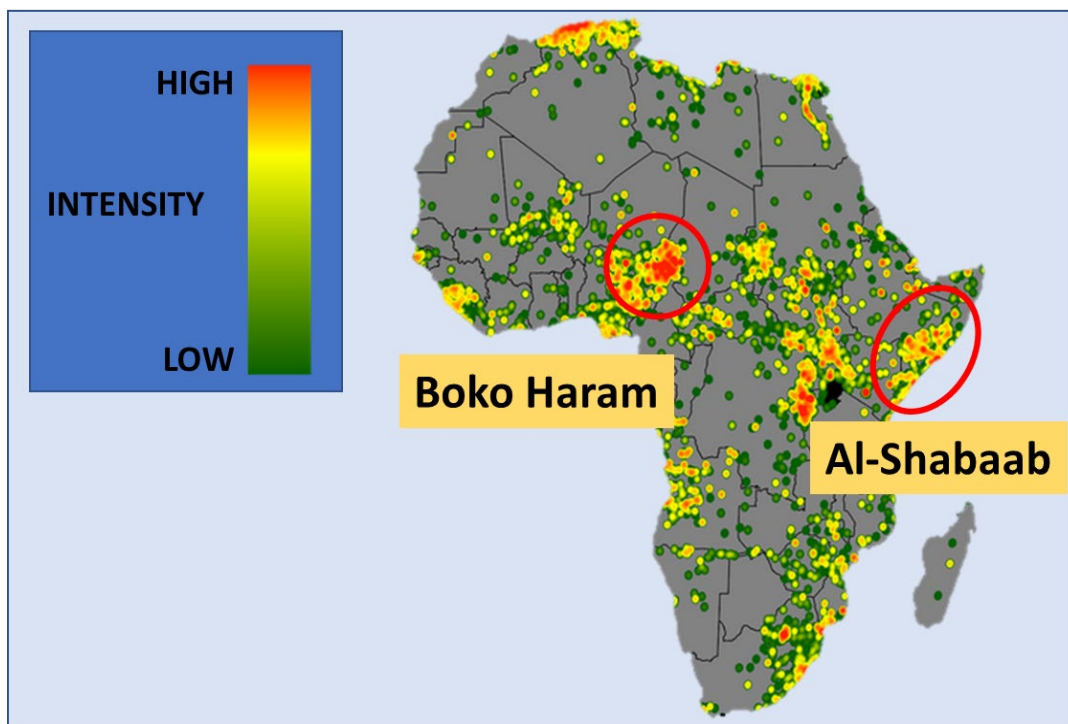


Figure 1. Terrorist Attacks in Africa 1970–2015 - Concentration and Intensity.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ Adapted from: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), “The Global Terrorism Database (GTD),” University of Maryland, 2022, <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>. The intensity value is a combination of incidents fatalities and injuries, Boko Haram’s and Al-Shabaab’s AOO are indicated by the red circles.

This is explored and answered in the following chapters—by examining the two African terrorist organizations one after the other in terms of a set of criteria. Both are closely looked at in terms of “Evolution and History,” “Command and Control and Group Structure,” “Logistics, Financing, and Recruiting,” and “Strategy.” This selection is based on the assumption that the structures of the organizations reveal their most relevant aspects, which determine both the capabilities and, in particular, the functioning of each organization—as depicted in the theoretical bodies of literature on terrorist organizational structures.⁷⁷

Consideration of the evolution and history of organizations provides a basic understanding of historical behavior. The history of each organization is of great relevance to the future actions of that organization. The study of each ideology, which is done in the following chapters, serves the purpose of understanding and identifying the ideas and goals of each organization. This is the basis for understanding how the respective organization justifies its own actions. An examination of the tactics adopted by the organizations, as well as the emergence of strategies used by each group, reveals the evolutionary steps undergone. The goal is to shed light on the structures, tactics, and motivations of both organizations to create the prerequisite for the comparative analysis, which is conducted in Chapter IV.

⁷⁷ Crenshaw, “An Organization Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism”; Shapiro and Siegel, “Moral Hazard, Discipline, and the Management of Terrorist Organizations”; Frisch, “Insurgencies Are Organizations Too”; Zech and Gabbay, “Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Insurgency”; Cunningham, Everton, and Murphy, *Understanding Dark Networks*; Dolnik, *Understanding Terrorist Innovation*.

II. BOKO HARAM

This chapter reviews the origins, structure, and development of the terrorist organization Boko Haram. Of relevance here is the context in which the organization emerged and how it was shaped by key events as it evolved over time. Boko Haram is considered one of the world's deadliest and most dangerous terrorist organizations, both in terms of the quantity and quality of its attacks, which have resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of victims.⁷⁸ To a large extent, it has successfully destabilized Nigeria through its strikes, and has become a major threat that has spread beyond Nigeria. Boko Haram's continued conquest of new territories in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon dramatically demonstrates the weakness of local governments to successfully counter its threat.⁷⁹

A. EVOLUTION AND HISTORY

This part of the chapter provides an overview on the origins of the terrorist organization Boko Haram. It illustrates how the organization has changed over time and highlights the most relevant individual events.

1. Genesis

Nigeria, the country in which Boko Haram originated, is the most populous in Africa—with approximately 220 million inhabitants—and also per capita one of the poorest countries on the African continent, despite its wealth of natural resources.⁸⁰ In terms of religious affiliation, Nigeria can be divided into the North, which is predominantly Muslim, and the South, which is predominantly Christian—with a nationwide total of over

⁷⁸ Institute for Economics & Peace, "Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism," The Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP), November 2020, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram*, Princeton Studies in Muslim Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

⁸⁰ "Nigeria," in *The World Factbook* (Central Intelligence Agency, January 18, 2022), <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nigeria/>, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nigeria/>.

53 percent Muslims and close to 46 percent Christians.⁸¹ The conflict mixture in Nigeria, consisting of a general political crisis as well as economic disadvantages for the Muslim north, was made more volatile by the increasing spread of Islamist and Salafist currents.⁸²

As with the terrorist organization Al-Shabaab, there are divergent accounts of the origins of Boko Haram. Freedom C. Onuoha attributes to the organization a total of four pertinent phases in the history of its development: “the latent incubation stage (1995–2002); the militant mobilisation [sic] stage (2003–July 2009); the Islamic insurgency stage (August 2009–May 2011); and the domestic terrorism stage (June 2011 to date).”⁸³ Yet, most scholars trace Boko Haram’s actual year of origin back to 2002.⁸⁴ This date marks when Salafi preacher Mohammed Yusuf founded an Islamist group, later called *Jama’at Ahl as-Sunna li-d-Da’wa wal-Jihad* (lit.: People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad), in the city of Maiduguri in northern Nigeria.⁸⁵ He did so despite the lack of a formalized religious education, solely relying on his experience as a former member of a Wahabi-oriented Islamic group whose non-violent orientation he regarded as too moderate.⁸⁶ This group has generally gained notoriety under the name *Boko Haram* (meaning: “Western civilization/education is forbidden/sinful”).⁸⁷ The name Boko Haram was given to the organization only later by the media and the local

⁸¹ “Nigeria.”

⁸² Roman Loimeier, “Boko Haram: The Development of a Militant Religious Movement in Nigeria,” *Africa Spectrum* 47, no. 2–3 (August 1, 2012): 138–39.

⁸³ Freedom C. Onuoha, “From Ahlulsunna Wal’jama’ah Hijra to Jama’atu Ahlissunnah Lidda’awati Wal Jihad: The Evolutionary Phases of the Boko Haram Sect in Nigeria,” *Africa Insight* 41, no. 4 (March 1, 2012): 160, <https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC119960>.

⁸⁴ Loimeier, “Boko Haram”; Virginia Comolli, *Boko Haram: Nigeria’s Islamist Insurgency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Abdulbasit Kassim and Michael Nwankpa, *The Boko Haram Reader: From Nigerian Preachers to the Islamic State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Thurston, *Boko Haram*.

⁸⁵ Onuoha, “From Ahlulsunna Wal’jama’ah Hijra to Jama’atu Ahlissunnah Lidda’awati Wal Jihad,” 159–61.

⁸⁶ Moritz Hütte, Guido Steinberg, and Annette Weber, “Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors],” in *Jihadismus in Afrika. Lokale Ursachen, Regionale Ausbreitung, Internationale Verbindungen [Jihadism in Africa: Local Causes, Regional Spread, International Linkages]*, ed. Guido Steinberg and Annette Weber (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), 2015), 91–93.

⁸⁷ Benjamin Maiangwa, “Killing in the Name of God? Explaining the Boko Haram Phenomenon in Nigeria,” *The Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 1–2.

population.⁸⁸ In this context, *Boko* is the Hausa word for book, and *haram* is Arabic for bad, sinful, or godless. Yet this name must be seen metaphorically and more broadly to include “against Western education,” “against modern science,” or “against Western ways of life.”⁸⁹

Yusuf’s primary imperative was the implementation of Salafist Sharia law and the formation of an Islamic state in Nigeria. He considered the implementation of Islamic law already in place in the twelve states in the north of the country to be deficient, because the state law still in force would interfere with its implementation. In this context, Yusuf criticized any Western interference, including Western education. In addition, he denounced cooperation with the Nigerian state as unbelief.⁹⁰ In 2003, a militant group of young Salafists withdrew to rural Kanama on the neighboring border with Niger to set up an Islamist community. They launched anti-state agitation in Nigeria, calling on Muslims to abandon secular life and return to true Islam. This group came to be known as the Nigerian Taliban, though it had no actual connections to the Deoband Islamist militia. In late 2003, the group came into conflict with the government and began targeting local police stations as well as government installations. The military subsequently killed most of the insurgent group members. The remaining members of the group returned to Maiduguri in 2004 and founded the *Yusufiya* group under the now well-known preacher Mohammed Yusuf, which would later become Boko Haram.⁹¹

Unchallenged by the government forces, the organization was able to progressively expand in northern Nigeria. Over time, the organization formed state-like structures and was able to attract members from the lowest social strata, especially through its charitable

⁸⁸ Thomas Mättig, “Das Gespenst Boko Haram - Nigeria Nach Dem Anschlag Auf Die UN-Zentrale [The Specter of Boko Haram - Nigeria after the Attack on the UN Headquarters],” *Perspektive - FES Nigeria* (Berlin: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2011), 1, <https://library.fes.de/opus4/frontdoor/index/index/docId/9706>.

⁸⁹ Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 13–18.

⁹⁰ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, “Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors],” 94.

⁹¹ Emilie Oftedal, *Boko Haram - an Overview, 2013/01680*, FFI-Rappor 2013/01680 (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment (FFI), 2013), 15–19, <https://ffi-publikasjoner.archive.knowledgearc.net/handle/20.500.12242/1000>.

work.⁹² In the course of this, Yusuf's supporters roamed the northern Nigerian cities, appealing for a life that conforms to Islam. According to the Islamic principle of *al-amr bi-lma'ruf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*,⁹³ the moral decline and sinful conduct of the Muslim population were to be restrained. Violent attacks on Muslims drinking alcohol or indulging in gambling often led to minor confrontations with the police.⁹⁴ Other than such incidents, the group remained fairly quiet between 2005 and 2008, concentrating primarily on developing resources and recruiting new members.⁹⁵

2. Confrontation

In July 2009, the increasing pressure applied by Nigerian institutions on Boko Haram led to an overt conflict with the government. There had been recurring confrontations between Yusuf's supporters and elements of the Salafist Izala movement, with the authorities increasingly intervening and arresting Yusuf's men. In June 2009, the conflict escalated when seventeen members of the group were injured by police firing at a funeral.⁹⁶ In the following multiple confrontations with the Nigerian army, most of Yusuf's followers as well as innocent bystanders and civilians, a total of more than 800 people, were killed within a few days. The group simultaneously executed forty Christians and burned down twenty Christian churches. The military, in turn, demolished the organization's headquarters, the Ibn Taymiyah Masjid Mosque in Maiduguri. Several hundred members, including its leader Mohammed Yusuf, were detained. After the military questioned him and transferred him to the police, Yusuf passed away in police custody on July 30, 2009.⁹⁷

⁹² Walker, "What Is Boko Haram?," 3–4.

⁹³ The Enclosure of the Right and the Prohibition of the Reprehensible (trans.)

⁹⁴ Oftedal, *Boko Haram - an Overview*, 16–19.

⁹⁵ Manuel Reinert and Lou Garçon, "Boko Haram: A Chronology," in *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, ed. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, WAPOS Series (Ibadan: IFRA-Nigeria, 2021), 238, <http://books.openedition.org/ifra/1833>.

⁹⁶ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, "Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors]," 95–96.

⁹⁷ Reinert and Garçon, "Boko Haram," 238.

After the confrontations, the members and sympathizers of the organization continued to be hunted down by the security forces. The possessions of fugitives were seized, and suspects were immediately detained. Over 100 supposed members of the organization vanished at this time without a trace, and the police claimed no involvement in the disappearances.⁹⁸ Not much is known about the location of the members who fled in the years 2009 to 2010. There is mounting evidence that Nigerians were taking refuge in Algerian terrorist camps at the time. Other sources indicated that the camps of rebel groups in Mali, Somalia, and Cameroon served as temporary havens for the group.⁹⁹

The defeat of the insurgency in the middle of 2009 and the killing of its leader Mohammed Yusuf undoubtedly represented a turning point for Boko Haram. At the time, the organization was already considered defeated.¹⁰⁰ Given the initial founding and subsequent development of Boko Haram, however, the literature suggests that by the end of 2009, the group's capabilities were fully developed, the adoption of strategies and tactics of terrorism was manifested, and Boko Haram became fully operational.¹⁰¹ The increase in operational activity is reflected in the quantity of attacks, which can be seen in Figure 2.

⁹⁸ Oftedal, *Boko Haram - an Overview*, 17.

⁹⁹ Walker, "What Is Boko Haram?," 4.

¹⁰⁰ Christopher Bartolotta, "Terrorism in Nigeria: The Rise of Boko Haram," *The Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, September 23, 2011, <https://blogs.shu.edu/journalofdiplomacy/2011/09/terrorism-in-nigeria-the-rise-of-boko-haram/>.

¹⁰¹ Comolli, *Boko Haram*; Thurston, *Boko Haram*; Andrew Walker, *"Eat the Heart of the Infidel": The Harrowing of Nigeria and the Rise of Boko Haram* (Oxford: Hurst, 2018); Loimeier, "Boko Haram."

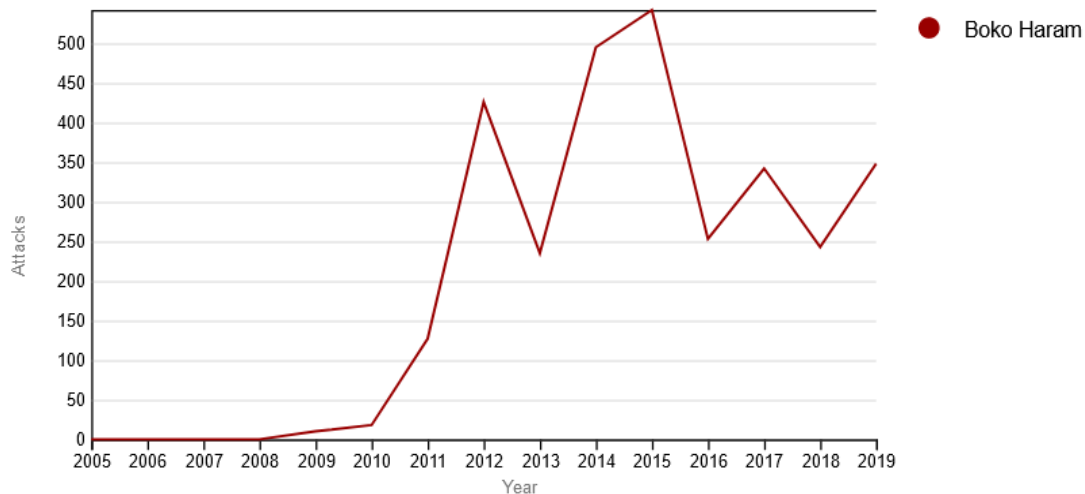


Figure 2. Attacks by Boko Haram, 2005–2019.¹⁰²

3. Change to War

In mid-2010, Abubakar Mohammad Shekau announced in a video message that he would assume leadership of the organization.¹⁰³ This leadership change would become one of the markers of the change between hierarchy and network.¹⁰⁴ The September 2010 attack on a prison and the subsequent liberation of more than 700 prisoners, among them 100 Boko Haram members, was the beginning of the group’s more violent course of action. Until 2009 the organization had carried out only a few smaller attacks per year with handguns and knives, but after this point, it began to commit large-scale assaults with the use of explosives and, later, suicide bombers, on an almost weekly basis.¹⁰⁵ Nigerian security forces, in particular, were the targets of these attacks, but so were civilian and religious organizations and public places. Additionally, targeted assassinations were

¹⁰² Source: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), “The Global Terrorism Database (GTD),” University of Maryland, The Global Terrorism Database (GTD), 2019, <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

¹⁰³ Oftedal, *Boko Haram - an Overview*, 17.

¹⁰⁴ Patrick Zimet, “Boko Haram’s Evolving Relationship With al-Qaeda,” Geneva Centre For Security Policy, September 13, 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Oftedal, *Boko Haram - an Overview*, 17–19.

conducted against politicians and moderate Muslim clerics.¹⁰⁶ Multiple assaults on Christian churches and worshippers at Christmas 2010 and 2011 resulted in hundreds of fatalities and aimed to fuel religious conflict between Christians and Muslims.¹⁰⁷ In the summer of 2011, suicide attacks on the police headquarters and the regional UN mission in Abuja illustrated dramatically the radical evolution of the organization. In Africa, for example, no Islamist group other than Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) had previously conducted suicide attacks. Presumably, other terrorist groups had supported the training of the attackers.¹⁰⁸ Boko Haram's links to Al-Qaeda are suggested by statements such as that of its spokesman Abul Qaqa: "It is true that we have links with Al-Qaeda. They assist us and we assist them."¹⁰⁹ But Al-Qaeda had avoided committing itself publicly to Boko Haram—despite the aforementioned unilateral oaths of allegiance from Boko Haram.¹¹⁰ Despite the claims that Boko Haram is part of a larger terrorist network in Africa, opposing scholarly voices mention these claims originated either from media outlets that conflate Boko Haram and *Ansaru* in their undifferentiated reporting or from members of the Nigerian government, who may well have an interest in Boko Haram being perceived as an international threat, so the government can attract financial and military aid.¹¹¹ While the attack on the police station was indeed in keeping with earlier attacks, the attack on the regional UN representation can be understood as a manifestation of an internal power struggle within Boko Haram. Shekau's internal opponent, Mamman Nur, was probably the man behind the organization's first suicide attacks. He was fueled in this by his efforts to avoid casualties among Nigerian Muslims and instead attack foreign targets and Christians. Shekau's many murders of Nigerian Muslims and the methods used

¹⁰⁶ David Cook, "The Rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria," *CTC Sentinel*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 4, no. 9 (April 2011): 4–5.

¹⁰⁷ Reinert and Garçon, "Boko Haram," 239.

¹⁰⁸ Cook, "The Rise of Boko Haram in Nigeria," 5.

¹⁰⁹ Daniel E. Agbiboa, "No Retreat, No Surrender: Understanding the Religious Terrorism of Boko Haram In Nigeria," *African Study Monographs* 34, no. 2 (August 2013): 67, <https://doi.org/10.14989/179136>.

¹¹⁰ Tim Lister, "Boko Haram: The Essence of Terror," News, CNN, October 22, 2014, <https://www.cnn.com/2014/05/06/world/africa/nigeria-boko-haram-analysis/index.html>.

¹¹¹ Walker, "What Is Boko Haram?," 8.

to execute terrorist attacks drew massive criticism from his own ranks and put the organization repeatedly at a breaking point.¹¹²

Scholars regard the period between 2010 and 2013 as one of the darkest in Boko Haram's history. Regarding Boko Haram's resurgence, Alexander Thurston has said, that it "was marked by the formulation of its doctrine into a wartime ideology. Abubakar Shekau, Yusuf's successor, invoked Yusuf's ideas, adapting them to the movement's new direction. Shekau fit Yusuf's death neatly into Boko Haram's presentation of itself as the victim of the state violence, rather than the aggressor."¹¹³ Starting in 2014, Boko Haram launched high-profile attacks. The abduction of more than 200 Christian schoolgirls in the town of Chibok, for example, gained media attention. During the night of April 14, 2014, the teenage girls were kidnapped in a raid on their school in northeastern Nigeria. The announcements of the sale and enslavement as well as forced marriage of the kidnapped girls sparked worldwide outrage. A campaign of solidarity developed on social media under the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls, which received high-profile support calling for the girls' release.¹¹⁴ In the Summer of 2014, Boko Haram seized an increasing number of rural areas and finally declared a caliphate in August. Thus, large parts of northeastern Nigeria were under the group's sphere of control, and the military was now only present in the cities. Boko Haram subsequently extended its area of operation to the border area with Cameroon by the end of 2014 and started attacking civilian and military objectives in the neighboring country.¹¹⁵ This demonstrated the risk that the neighboring countries could be drawn into the Nigerian conflict.¹¹⁶

Abubakar Shekau had already assured the caliph of the Islamic State (IS), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, of Boko Haram's support in 2014. During the course of the year, a

¹¹² Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, "Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors]," 98–99.

¹¹³ Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 142.

¹¹⁴ Aminu Abubakar, "As Many as 200 Girls Abducted by Boko Haram, Nigerian Officials Say," CNN, April 15, 2014, <https://www.cnn.com/2014/04/15/world/africa/nigeria-girls-abducted/index.html>.

¹¹⁵ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, "Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors]," 96.

¹¹⁶ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, 103.

convergence of the two groups was observed based on media publications. In March 2015, the Boko Haram leader publicly pledged allegiance to the IS and al-Baghdadi in a video message.¹¹⁷ This revealed that Boko Haram is much closer to the particularly violent IS than to the more moderate Al-Qaeda.¹¹⁸ As a jihadist and religious organization and political force, Boko Haram constitutes a growing threat to the Nigerian state. If the group were to succeed in spreading further beyond the areas it controls in northern Nigeria, it could pose a serious threat of regional civil war, which might have direct implications for the neighboring states of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Consequently, the internationalization of the organization would also be a possibility.¹¹⁹

4. Splintering

As indicated earlier, there have been breaking points in the history of Boko Haram. These essentially describe the two most significant split-offs of different factions from the main Boko Haram group. Both breakaways led to the founding of independent organizations that remain in existence today. In keeping with the focus on Boko Haram in this thesis, the splinter groups are not discussed further in subsequent sections. However, it is necessary to describe the context in which those factions splintered.

The first breaking point occurred in early 2012, when *Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad as-Sudan*,¹²⁰ commonly known as *Ansaru*, a group of former Boko Haram leaders, split from Boko Haram and Shekau, in opposition to the brutal actions of Boko Haram, which in *Ansaru* 's eyes kills innocent Muslim civilians.¹²¹ Thus, their motivation was to provide a "humane alternative to Boko Haram that would only target the Nigerian government and

¹¹⁷ Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 16–17; Steve Almasy and Hamdi Alkhshali, "ISIS Leader Purportedly Accepts Boko Haram's Pledge of Allegiance," News, CNN, March 12, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/2015/03/12/middleeast/isis-boko-haram/index.html>.

¹¹⁸ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, "Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors]," 96.

¹¹⁹ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, 106.

¹²⁰ Lit.: The Helpers of Muslims in Black Africa.

¹²¹ Jacob Zenn, "Leadership Analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria," *CTC Sentinel*, CTC Sentinel, 7, no. 2 (February 24, 2014): 24.

Christians in self-defense.”¹²² *Ansaru* leadership had close ties to Mali, had operated with Mokhtar Belmokhtar, and had been involved in kidnappings in the Sahara. Notwithstanding ideological disagreements, increased collaboration between the dissident offshoot and Boko Haram could be observed in 2013 and 2014.¹²³ However, the collaboration ended when *Ansaru* ceased its terrorist activities by the end of 2014 and subsequently switched to “survival mode,” and since then, it has focused mainly on the distribution of Islamist propaganda—only to resurface with small-scale operational activities at the end of 2019, but apparently remaining unconnected to Boko Haram.¹²⁴

The second rift occurred in 2016 and was of considerably greater consequence than the breakaway of the *Ansaru* group a few years earlier. This split in the leadership, resulting in almost 50 percent of Boko Haram breaking away to form the *Islamic State’s West Africa Province* (ISWAP). This split was rooted in differences between *Abubakar Shekau* and Shura council member *Abu Musab al-Barnawi*, which were essentially over ideological and tactical differences, but primarily over substantive criticism of Shekau’s vehemently *takfirist* approach to Islamic jihadism.¹²⁵ However, it was ultimately IS’s stunning turnaround in dropping Shekau, who had shortly before been confirmed as the recognized leader of Boko Haram, and in a renewed video message advocating Abu Musab as the newly recognized leader.¹²⁶ The Boko Haram expert Freedom Onuoha described IS’s motivation to abandon Shekau and turn to Abu Musab as follows: “Most of his [IS] members frown at the move to kill fellow Muslims. They [...] believe that any Muslims

¹²² Zenn, 26.

¹²³ Arielle Thédrel, “L’intervention française au Mali a déplacé la menace djihadiste vers le sud [French intervention in Mali has shifted the jihadist threat to the south],” News, LEFIGARO, November 18, 2013, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2013/11/18/01003-20131118ARTFIG00218-l-intervention-francaise-au-mali-a-deplace-la-menace-djihadiste-vers-le-sud.php>.

¹²⁴ Calibre Obscura, “Ansaru Resurfaces: Weapons of al Qaeda in Nigeria,” Calibre Obscura, December 20, 2021, <https://www.calibreobscura.com/ansaru-resurfaces-weapons-of-al-qaeda-in-nigeria/>.

¹²⁵ “Boko Haram,” Counter Extremism Project, accessed February 19, 2022, <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/boko-haram>.

¹²⁶ Emmanuel Braun, “Boko Haram and ISIS Are Not as Close as You Might Think, According to a U.S. General,” News, *Newsweek*, June 22, 2016, <https://www.newsweek.com/boko-haram-splinters-isis-over-child-suicide-bombers-us-general-473004>.

should not be targeted, unlike Shekau, who has never hidden that he is of the Takfir.”¹²⁷ Basically, Boko Haram—under the leadership of Shekau—had become “too extreme even by the Islamic State’s standards.”¹²⁸ The two organizations have since been in competition with each other and have repeatedly been involved in direct confrontations, yet they are said to cooperate occasionally at the lowest tactical level, presumably due to existing relationships of affiliation and on a local level only.¹²⁹

Apart from significant external factors, such as the recognition by the IS in the case of ISWAP, the success of these two spin-offs is presumably related to the large degree of decentralization at the operational levels, where local commanders enjoy a fairly large degree of autonomy. In addition, the internal wrangling at the management level, which has been going on for years, has been a decisive factor.¹³⁰ This in turn indicates that the organization’s leadership is more fluid than solid. Presumably, this is due in large part to the varying extremes of interpretation of *takfirism*, an issue developed in the next section.

B. COMMAND AND CONTROL AND GROUP STRUCTURE

This section examines the organizational structure of Boko Haram. As the discussion reveals, this organization is a hybrid form that can exhibit both hierarchical and network-like characteristics. Further, the discussion shows there is also a degree of decentralization to the group’s structure, which manifests itself in network-like structural elements.

¹²⁷ Ruth Maclean, “Isis Tries to Impose New Leader on Boko Haram in Nigeria,” News, The Guardian, August 4, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/05/isis-tries-to-impose-new-leader-on-boko-haram-in-nigeria>.

¹²⁸ Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, “The Defeat of Abu Bakr Shekau’s Group in Sambisa Forest,” News, Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, June 2021, <https://aymennjawad.org/2021/06/the-defeat-of-abu-bakr-shekau-group-in-sambisa>.

¹²⁹ Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, “The Islamic State West Africa Province vs. Abu Bakr Shekau: Full Text, Translation and Analysis,” News, Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, August 5, 2018, <https://aymennjawad.org/21467/the-islamic-state-west-africa-province-vs-abu>.

¹³⁰ Freedom C. Onuoha, “Split in ISIS-Aligned Boko Haram Group,” News, Aljazeera Centre For Studies, October 27, 2016, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2016/10/split-isis-aligned-boko-haram-group-161027113247008.html>.

The Organization: Boko Haram's organizational structure can be characterized as a combination of hierarchical and network-like features with cells as structural elements. The group appears to hover between a hierarchy and network at first glance. Mohammed Yusuf led Boko Haram until his death in July 2009. In his capacity as Emir, he was the spiritual as well as the secular head of the group. Beginning in July 2010, his deputy Abubakar Shekau then became the group's leader.¹³¹ The literature describes Shekau as lacking natural authority and portrays him as an inadequate replacement for the more respected Yusuf.¹³² This presumably explains his leadership style, which is described as decidedly authoritarian.¹³³

High-Level: Two deputy Emirs assist the Emir in fulfilling his duties.¹³⁴ Furthermore, he is supported in his decision making by an elders' council, the so-called Shura Council. The exact number and identity of the members of the Shura are not publicly known. Estimates count between six and thirty members.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, the Emir also makes some decisions without the council explicitly discussing them first.¹³⁶ The Shura, fundamentally, is regarded as the highest decision-making body of the organization, in which all entities of the leadership level are represented under the Emir's chairmanship.¹³⁷ As such, it represents one of the hierarchical features of Boko Haram's organizational structure, as a clearly defined governing body.¹³⁸ Each Shura member has responsibility

¹³¹ Freedom C. Onuoha, "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria," in *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, ed. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, WAPOS Series (Ibadan: IFRA-Nigeria, 2021), 161–62, <http://books.openedition.org/ifra/1813>.

¹³² Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, "Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors]," 98.

¹³³ Amy Pate, *Boko Haram: An Assessment of Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Policy Options*. College Park: University of Maryland, 2015. www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_%20SMA-AFRICOM_Boko%20Haram%20Deep%20Dive_Jan2015.pdf.

¹³⁴ Onuoha, "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria," 161.

¹³⁵ Thorbjörnsson and Jonsson, "Boko Haram," 25–26.

¹³⁶ Amy Pate, "Boko Haram: An Assessment of Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Policy Options," *Report to the Strategic Multilayer Assessment Office*, 2015, 15, www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_%20SMA-AFRICOM_Boko%20Haram%20Deep%20Dive_Jan2015.pdf.

¹³⁷ Onuoha, "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria," 162.

¹³⁸ Mayntz, "Hierarchie oder Netzwerk?," 255.

for a particular unit. Each unit is responsible for a specific task or a geographical area. The lower ranks of the various units do not know each other.¹³⁹ A regional commander is appointed for each Nigerian state in which Boko Haram operates, with a subregional commander for each municipality. There are also commanders appointed for other regions, such as the border region with Niger and Chad, to oversee activities there.¹⁴⁰

Operational Level: At the operational level of the organization, the group is highly decentralized, with its local commanders conducting day-to-day operations independently in their respective areas of control. In this context, the recognizable distinction between ranks and functions illustrates another hierarchical organization feature. The members of the Shura Council represent specialized units with their own areas of responsibility. Regional and subregional commanders maintain the link between the upper leadership and the executive units while having their own command authority.¹⁴¹ At the operational level, characteristic features of networks are evident. Specifically, there is no central control of the cells' operations by the top leadership. The organization at this level also has a relatively open and fluid framework. So, it appears as if these local cells go on with their independent operations without the knowledge of each other or the leadership's overarching strategies. In this regard, any direct communication between the leadership and the local cells is minimized as much as possible. As a result, the local commanders have a large degree of autonomy if they comply with the leadership's directives.¹⁴² Cells can dissolve, and new ones can be formed at any time. As a result, the organization can react very quickly to changing external conditions.¹⁴³

Beyond that, there are additional characteristics not typical of either a hierarchy or a network. However autonomous the local commanders may be, they are still centrally controlled by the Shura Council, which defines general goals and strategies. The individual cells are also characterized by a latency of vertical as well as horizontal relationships. In

¹³⁹ Walker, "What Is Boko Haram?," 8.

¹⁴⁰ Onuoha, "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria," 161.

¹⁴¹ Mayntz, "Hierarchie oder Netzwerk?," 255.

¹⁴² Thorbjörnsson and Jonsson, "Boko Haram," 26.

¹⁴³ Mayntz, "Hierarchie oder Netzwerk?," 255–56.

this way, they do not interact with each other continuously and appear isolated from one another, but their interrelationships may be activated when necessary. This is enabled through another supplementary characteristic, the members' socialized identification with the organization and its goals.¹⁴⁴

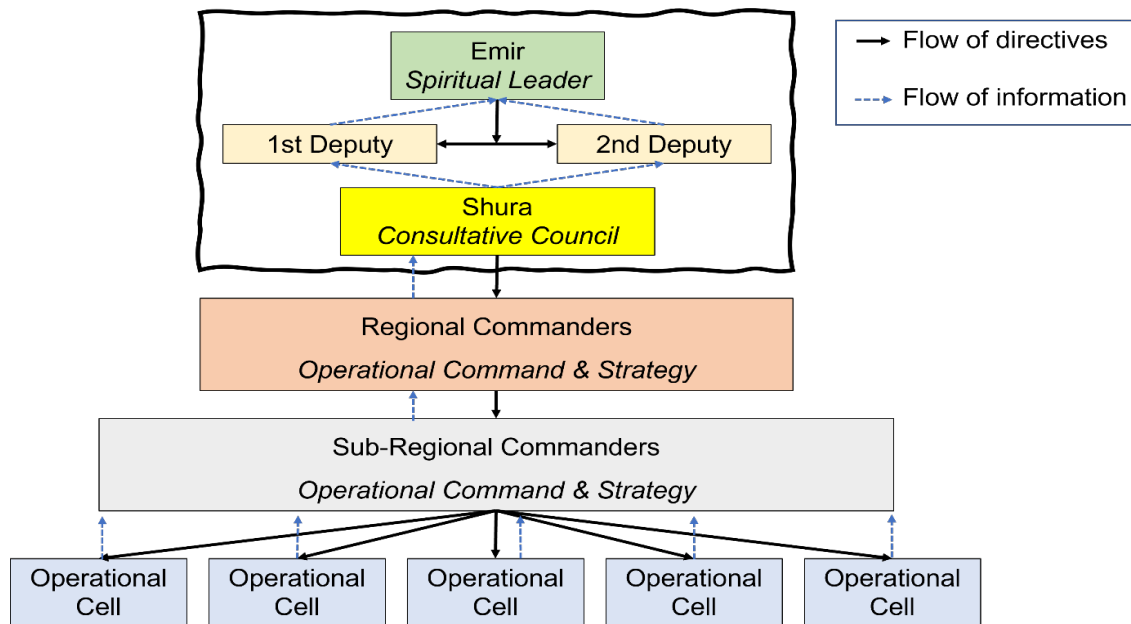


Figure 3. Hypothetical Organizational Structure of Boko Haram.¹⁴⁵

Structural Analysis: As predicted by the theories of Steven Zech and Michael Gabbay, this hybrid structure of Boko Haram creates opportunities and challenges for the organization.¹⁴⁶ The previously described decentralized organizational structure is characterized by limited contact between the higher-level leadership and the individual cells. For Boko Haram, this structure has both positive and negative effects. Combating the organization is made much more difficult. Although security forces could take out one of

¹⁴⁴ Mayntz, 256.

¹⁴⁵ Adapted from Freedom C. Onuoha, "The Costs of Boko Haram Attacks on Critical Telecommunication Infrastructure in Nigeria," Polics, *E-International Relations* (blog), November 3, 2013, 2, https://www.e-ir.info/2013/11/03/the-costs-of-boko-haram-attacks-on-critical-telecommunication-infrastructure-in-nigeria/#_edn8.

¹⁴⁶ Zech and Gabbay, "Social Network Analysis in the Study of Terrorism and Insurgency."

the local cells, it would still be almost impossible to reach the members of the superordinate leadership. The decentralization, nonetheless, generates challenges to planning larger operations and maintaining the loyalty of individual members. The leadership's lack of direct control over the individual cells, in turn, complicates conducting a larger operation that must involve several cooperating cells.¹⁴⁷

Boko Haram's decentralized organizational structure allows it to emphasize its survivability over operational effectiveness. The leadership's ability to coordinate and communicate centrally has been forfeited in favor of the leadership structure's greater obscurity. The autonomy of the cells places the group at a higher risk of becoming fragmented. Little inter-cell coordination negatively impacts the organization's performance in terms of combat capabilities, most notably in seizing and holding terrain. Structurally, the group appears more suited to terrorist attacks than to regular warfare.¹⁴⁸ This high degree of autonomy among the individual cells, which is conditioned by the structural fragmentation of the grouping, comes at a price; it has a deleterious effect on the ideological coherence of the organization as a whole.¹⁴⁹ On the positive side, a possible compromise of a single cell member subsequently leads to the unmasking of a single cell, but not to the destruction of the entire organization through a kind of domino effect.¹⁵⁰

In summarizing, the organizational structure of Boko Haram appears to incorporate both hierarchical and network characteristics, although it has a pronounced tendency toward decentralization. While the organization's high-level structure appears hierarchical, with the position of the Emir, the Shura, and its individual units, as well as the regional commanders, the low-level part of the organization has a network-like structure and hierarchical layers with a fluid number of cells. Boko Haram can consequently be seen as a decentralized organization with network characteristics, although the network characteristics seem to predominate.

¹⁴⁷ Thorbjörnsson and Jonsson, "Boko Haram," 26–27.

¹⁴⁸ Thorbjörnsson and Jonsson, 26–28.

¹⁴⁹ Weeraratne, "Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria," 627.

¹⁵⁰ Peter Neumann, *Old and New Terrorism* (Oxford: Polity, 2009), 1.

C. LOGISTICS, FINANCING, AND RECRUITING

This section explains how the organization combines legal sources of funding, such as membership fees, and illegal sources of funding, such as raiding and looting, to ensure its viability. Boko Haram finances its activities primarily through extortion of the local population and is independent of external financial support. In addition, Boko Haram manages to recruit several thousand active members, mainly composed of Nigerians and partly supplemented by fighters from the border region with Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. This organization not only has volunteer members in its own ranks, but also knows how to consolidate them through illegal practices, such as kidnapping.

1. Financing

Multiple sources assess Boko Haram's annual revenue in 2015 to have been in the range of \$10 million, and the group is largely self-funding through various sources of legal as well as illegal revenue.¹⁵¹ Initially, the group's financing was based on the legitimate payment of membership fees of its members. Until the death of Mohammed Yusuf, a daily fee of 100 nairas (approximately \$0.30) was charged. Over time other income sources have decreased the group's reliance on membership fees.¹⁵² Domestic and foreign financial donations are a further formal source of funding. Donations are made by businessmen, politicians, government officials, and private individuals.¹⁵³ Beyond that, donations from groups abroad seem to be on the rise, in particular from the British Al-Muntada Trust Fund and the Saudi Islamic World Society.¹⁵⁴ Boko Haram also reportedly received a contribution of a quarter of a million U.S. dollars made by an unnamed Algerian

¹⁵¹ Thorbjörnsson and Jonsson, "Boko Haram," 37.

¹⁵² Onuoha, "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria," 163–64.

¹⁵³ Onuoha, 164.

¹⁵⁴ Daniel E. Agbiboa, "Peace at Daggers Drawn? Boko Haram and the State of Emergency in Nigeria," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.853602>.

organization.¹⁵⁵ Supplementary payments appear to be made by foreign terrorist networks, such as Al-Qaeda.¹⁵⁶

Nigeria has the legal framework and the appropriate agencies to pursue identified sources of funding and the assets of Boko-Haram when they are discovered in Nigerian banks.¹⁵⁷ This has compelled the group to turn to more criminal actions as a means of securing its funding.¹⁵⁸ Onuoha, for instance, describes Boko Haram's participation in a series of heists in northeastern Nigeria, in which banks, cash transports, and wealthy businesses were robbed. He estimates as much as \$3 million was obtained through such robberies.¹⁵⁹ Boko Haram then divides the money among the various cells. In this way, the robbers themselves obtain their share and pass on a part of the money to the leadership, enabling it to fund the joint fight. The remainder then is given as *Zakat*, an Islamic alms tax, to the underprivileged as well as to widows of deceased Boko Haram fighters.¹⁶⁰

Amy Pate describes that Boko Haram is also involved with international arms smuggling and drug trafficking.¹⁶¹ She describes, in this context, that Nigeria is both an important transit zone and one of the most important markets in the region. She references reports that state Boko Haram is active in arms smuggling, while others see the group as merely a buyer in the Nigerian market. Overall, Boko Haram appears to be only marginally involved in arms smuggling outside of Nigeria. Pate argues that an involvement in regional drug trafficking is also considered less likely due to a lack of clear evidence.

Among the group's oldest criminal activities is systematic blackmail. For example, businesses are forced to make protection payments, while there are reports that the local

¹⁵⁵ Oftedal, Boko Haram - an Overview, 45.

¹⁵⁶ Onuoha, "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria," 165.

¹⁵⁷ Jason L. Rock, "The Funding of Boko Haram and Nigeria's Actions to Stop It - CORE" (Master's Thesis, Monterey, CA, Naval Postgraduate School, 2016), 15, https://core.ac.uk/display/81223377?utm_source=pdf&utm_medium=banner&utm_campaign=pdf-decoration-v1.

¹⁵⁸ Onuoha, "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria," 165.

¹⁵⁹ Onuoha, 164.

¹⁶⁰ Onuoha, 165.

¹⁶¹ Pate, "Boko Haram: An Assessment of Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Policy Options," 23.

population is occasionally threatened with physical violence if they do not provide the group with a contribution.¹⁶² In 2015, there were also reports of politicians paying to ensure that residents of their communities were not attacked by Boko Haram.¹⁶³ Boko Haram has also been observed to systematically pillage villages and towns during its attacks; the attackers would take anything of value with them. The group ultimately is alleged to have been involved in kidnappings with ransom demands. The *Ansaru* splinter group kidnapped Western hostages on multiple occasions and was able to obtain hefty ransoms in some cases while killing their hostages in other cases.¹⁶⁴ In contrast, Boko Haram regularly abducts local elders and businessmen in exchange for substantially smaller ransoms, which add up to higher amounts over time.¹⁶⁵

From a long-term perspective, Boko Haram's funding is likely to decline. This would be the case if Nigeria, in coordination with regional and international partners, were to take more military action against Boko Haram. The remaining financial inflow would then come from the kidnappings and the existing links to terrorist organizations abroad.¹⁶⁶

Considering the group's proximity to organized crime, it is worth asking what significance criminal activities have for the group. For one, there seems to be a systematic pattern behind these actions, and the group may only be serving as a religious smokescreen for this organized crime. On the other hand, the group appears to have gradually shifted to such activities over time, since increasing pressure has been applied by the security forces. Any such shift would also be consistent with the group's radicalization since 2009. Furthermore, the group's rather minor role in Nigerian arms and drug smuggling, as well as the Islamic allocation of the looted wealth, contradict a merely self-interested end for

¹⁶² Pate, 24.

¹⁶³ Oftedal, *Boko Haram - an Overview*, 45.

¹⁶⁴ "Nigerian Hostage Deaths: Ansaru Claims Backed," BBC News, March 10, 2013; "Why We Take Foreign Hostages - Ansaru," Vanguard News, April 25, 2013; "French Hostage Release by Ansaru Group Explained," RFI, November 17, 2013.

¹⁶⁵ Pate, "Boko Haram: An Assessment of Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Policy Options," 24–25.

¹⁶⁶ Yaya J. Fanusie and Alex Entz, "Boko Haram," Financial Assessment, The Terror Finance Briefing Book (Washington, DC: Center on Sanctions and Illicit Finance (CSIF), May 2017), <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2017/12/07/terror-finance-briefing-book/>.

the criminal activities. The possibility that some Boko Haram cells see criminal activities as an end in themselves certainly cannot be completely ruled out, but this motivation seems rather unlikely for the entire organization. For most of the group, criminal activities appear to be primarily about financing the joint jihad. This difference in emphasis on criminal activity versus joint jihad is another indicator of the rather permissive scope and autonomy of commanders at the tactical level. The organizational structure of Boko Haram thus seems to favor these different orientations with regard to the “core mission.”

2. Recruiting

Depending on the source, estimates regarding the actual numbers of Boko Haram supporters fluctuate significantly. In 2014, the Cameroonian Ministry of Defense claimed that the organization had between 15,000 and 20,000 members while journalists with longstanding contacts with Boko Haram estimated the strength of the organization to be as high as 50,000 members at that time. Overall, these aforementioned figures seem to reflect not only the jihadist fighters but also include the group’s followers and supporters.¹⁶⁷ According to a 2018 publication, some scholars believed the actual combatants to be considerably fewer in number—somewhere in the range of 6,000 to 8,000 men.¹⁶⁸

Boko Haram recruits its fighters through both voluntary methods and coercion. Some fighters join the organization voluntarily out of ideological as well as religious beliefs.¹⁶⁹ At times, the group simply uses monetary incentives to recruit new fighters, benefiting from the high level of joblessness and depression in Nigeria, as well as from the disempowerment of local authorities.¹⁷⁰ Meanwhile, others have become victimized by the Nigerian military in the past and are seeking revenge.¹⁷¹ In their battle with Boko

¹⁶⁷ Jacob Zenn, “Boko Haram: Recruitment, Financing, and Arms Trafficking in the Lake Chad Region,” *CTC Sentinel*, CTC Sentinel, 7, no. 10 (October 2014): 5.

¹⁶⁸ Jason Warner and Charlotte Hulme, “The Islamic State in Africa: Estimating Fighter Numbers in Cells Across the Continent,” *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 7 (August 8, 2018): 21–28.

¹⁶⁹ Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 191.

¹⁷⁰ Michael W. Baca and Lisa Inks, “Nigeria’s Window of Opportunity,” *Foreign Affairs*, May 5, 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/nigeria/2016-12-05/nigeria-s-window-opportunity>.

¹⁷¹ Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 192–93.

Haram, the Nigerian security forces have been accused of repeatedly violating human rights on a large scale.¹⁷² Furthermore, it is also reported that Boko Haram kidnaps people on a systematic basis during raids on towns and villages and subsequently forces them to either fight for them or provide support activities in other ways.¹⁷³ As such, the use of coercion and intimidation for recruitment purposes appears to have increased since 2013.¹⁷⁴

Boko Haram is gaining new members not just through various means but also from various sources. Most of the new blood are young men of the Kanuri ethnic group, most of whom come from the Nigerian states of Borno and Yobe.¹⁷⁵ Recruitment also occurs in neighboring countries to the north, i.e., Cameroon, Niger, and Chad.¹⁷⁶ In some cases, there have been reports of foreign fighters in the lines of the group, who can often be attributed to the Tuareg.¹⁷⁷

Recruiting primarily aims at illiterate, unemployed, and insufficiently school-educated individuals. As a result of their circumstances, they are most affected by deteriorating socioeconomic factors, such as soaring unemployment and a substantial rate of poverty. Hence, they are more vulnerable to both ideological radicalization and indoctrination.¹⁷⁸ Not all recruits lack an education. Pate states that for Boko Haram, the Almajiri, graduates of the numerous Koranic schools in the country represent a pool of potential members. These people often live in poor conditions and are therefore willing to be recruited for material as well as religious reasons.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² Claire Felter, "Nigeria's Battle With Boko Haram," Council on Foreign Relations, August 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/background/nigerias-battle-boko-haram>.

¹⁷³ Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 220–21.

¹⁷⁴ Pate, "Boko Haram: An Assessment of Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Policy Options," 16–17; Zenn, "Boko Haram," October 2014, 6–7.

¹⁷⁵ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, "Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors]," 100.

¹⁷⁶ Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 244–45.

¹⁷⁷ Pate, "Boko Haram: An Assessment of Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Policy Options," 17.

¹⁷⁸ Freedom C. Onuoha, "Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?," Special Report (US Institute of Peace, 2014), 5–8, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12548>.

¹⁷⁹ Pate, "Boko Haram: An Assessment of Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Policy Options," 17.

In this regard, the branching out at the tactical level into a multitude of small groupings under local commanders, as shown in Figure 3 also appears to have a positive impact on the freedom of commanders to recruit new members. An increased degree of social integration into the respective region, even to the point of becoming intertwined in local structures, appears to be helpful. In addition to the expectation of obtaining money directly, other motives also play a role. “I thought of joining Boko Haram so that I might be lucky to be granted amnesty—then I would enjoy the same things the Niger Delta militants enjoyed when they were granted amnesty” was stated by a northern Nigerian, for example.¹⁸⁰ So what this man was hoping for was an amnesty that leads to employment, a livelihood, a real future.

3. Logistics and Cooperation

While Boko Haram appears to be strongly focused on Nigeria and to be isolated, the organization nevertheless seems to have international connections as well as links to other jihadist groups. Although there is not yet much evidence that Boko Haram is directly supported by any state in the world, some indications suggest that the group has a nexus with Saudi Arabia and Qatar.¹⁸¹ The former Boko Haram leader Mohammed Yusuf, who fled state persecution in Nigeria to Saudi Arabia for a time in 2004, appears to have had contacts there. There are also reports that several other Boko Haram leadership members were there temporarily, for example, to meet with other jihadists. In 2012, the Saudi Arabian government also brokered talks between Boko Haram and the Nigerian government, which in turn suggests some form of diplomatic representation for the group in the Gulf state.¹⁸²

A variety of sources also indicate that Boko Haram cultivates relationships among other terrorist groups in Africa—reporting specifically contacts with groups in the Sahel

¹⁸⁰ Alexis Akwagiyiram, “Islamist Radicalism: Why Does It Lure Some Africans?,” News, BBC News, May 30, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22688781>.

¹⁸¹ Nwafor Sunday, “Saudi Arabia, Qatar Allegedly Funding Boko Haram Terrorist Organization,” Vanguard News, October 3, 2019; Shaun Snapp, “Where Is Boko Haram Getting Its Funding?,” Brightwork Research & Analysis, December 28, 2020.

¹⁸² Jacob Zenn, “Boko Haram’s International Connections,” *CTC Sentinel*, CTC Sentinel, 6, no. 10 (January 2013): 10–11.

region. After the death of Mohammed Yusuf in 2009, for example, Boko Haram members appear to have found temporary refuge with AQIM in the Sahel.¹⁸³ There were indications that members of the group were training with AQIM from as early as the summer of 2009. By 2010, AQIM leader Drukdal had provided support in the form of weapons and training to the Nigerian outfit. Corresponding public statements by the two groups support the theory of cooperation. Additionally, there are strong indications that the Boko Haram 2011 suicide attack on the regional UN office in Abuja was executed in line with AQIM's tactics.¹⁸⁴ It appears that the leadership of the Boko Haram splinter group Ansaru has also maintained close ties to AQIM in the Sahel, with its leader reportedly spending significant time in Mali where he received military training as part of AQIM's Belmokhtar group. Furthermore, the splinter group seemed to have partly modeled its operations after those of AQIM. For example, several kidnappings of Western hostages occurred, most were fatal.¹⁸⁵ From 2012 to 2013, on the other hand, Boko Haram focused on targets related to the French intervention in Mali. It appears that this support was supposed to relieve the pressure on the affiliated groups AQIM and MUJAO.¹⁸⁶ The mutual relations seem to have cooled off recently. For one, the groups' contact persons have either been killed or, like Belmokhtar, defected from their organizations. For another, AQIM is facing a changed situation in Mali and the aftermath of the French military intervention.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, there is also a possible nexus between Boko Haram and the Somali Al-Shabaab. It appears that Boko Haram militants have been training with Al-Shabaab militants, and the Abuja attack mastermind, Mamman Nur, was allegedly trained in Somalia in the use of explosives.¹⁸⁸ The implicit fact that Boko Haram is located in the Sahel gives the group a strategic advantage in that it provides geographically convenient access to other jihadist

¹⁸³ Walker, "What Is Boko Haram?," 4–5.

¹⁸⁴ Samuel L. Aronson, "AQIM's Threat to Western Interests in the Sahel," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, CTC Sentinel, 7, no. 4 (April 2014): 7.

¹⁸⁵ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, "Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors]," 105.

¹⁸⁶ Jacob Zenn, "Cooperation or Competition: Boko Haram and Ansaru After the Mali Intervention," *CTC Sentinel*, CTC Sentinel, 6, no. 3 (March 2013): 4–5.

¹⁸⁷ Pate, "Boko Haram: An Assessment of Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Policy Options," 22.

¹⁸⁸ Zenn, "Boko Haram," January 2013, 11–12.

networks—for example, the third parties’ assets and training capabilities located in Mali, East Africa, and Libya.¹⁸⁹ Yet these connections may be more of an individual nature than an organizational one.¹⁹⁰ It is therefore apparent that, while Boko Haram’s focus was on Nigeria, the organization maintained links with other groups abroad, albeit at a less intensive level.

D. STRATEGY

The following section focuses on the ideological basis of Boko Haram and the strategy it employs. Boko Haram represents a mixture of Islamist, Salafist, and strongly anti-Western positions ideologically. The organization pursues a strategy of provocation that consists of several individual aspects, but in its entirety primarily focuses on the three different goals of delegitimizing the government, making the population compliant, and strengthening the organization’s own position.

Ideology: In its ideology, Boko Haram combines Islamist, Salafist, and strongly anti-Western elements. This ideology is deeply rooted in the traditional movements of radical Islamism that originated in northern Nigeria. These currents can be traced back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Since the rise of the Islamic reform movement around Usman Dan Fodio, a deeply conservative practice of Islam continuously dominated the region.¹⁹¹ The majority of northern Nigeria was also part of the Caliphate of Sokoto and the Emirate of Borno, where Sharia law had been practiced until the colonial rule of the British in the early twentieth century.¹⁹²

In this context, this group identifies Western interference with the Muslim community as the root cause of the Islamic faith’s weakness. As a result, Boko Haram opposes Western achievements such as secular government, banking, and jurisprudence,

¹⁸⁹ Jennifer G. Cooke, “Now Comes the Hard Part: Five Priorities in the Continuing Fight against Boko Haram,” The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), February 5, 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/now-comes-hard-part-five-priorities-continuing-fight-against-boko-haram>.

¹⁹⁰ Pate, “Boko Haram: An Assessment of Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Policy Options,” 22.

¹⁹¹ Agbibo, “Peace at Daggers Drawn?,” 55–56.

¹⁹² Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, “Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors],” 91–92.

and the group especially strongly condemns Western education because it is not founded on moral teachings.¹⁹³ This Western education, along with the predominance of English, has threatened the Muslims' cultural identity. Furthermore, Boko Haram argues that southern Christians have been striving to suppress the Muslims of the north. Since 1999, this endeavor has been reflected in the successive administrations of Christian presidents in Nigeria. In the face of Christian aggression, Boko Haram has considered it essential to implement Sharia law throughout the country according to the Salafist interpretations, to eliminate rival legal systems and thereby accomplish a fundamental change in social and political conditions.¹⁹⁴

Most Boko Haram members belong to the nationalist school of thought of jihadist Salafism. The focus of these nationalists' activities is centered on their homeland, where they especially fight against the Nigerian government. In doing so, the group acts with the utmost violence, irrespective of fighting its enemies, the followers of other religions, or even other Sunni Muslims.¹⁹⁵ The group practices strict *takfirism*, viewing deviators from its Salafist interpretation of Islam as infidels (*kuffar*) and sinners (*fasiq*). The latter therefore represents a legitimate target for the organization's brutal attacks.¹⁹⁶ A minor part of the group seems to be anti-Western internationalists. For example, Mamman Nur attempted to take the group's fight to the international level with the suicide attack on the UN mission in Abuja in 2011.¹⁹⁷ *Ansaru*, the Boko Haram splinter group, had a stronger international focus and also had closer contacts with AQIM in the Sahel.¹⁹⁸ Generally, however, Boko Haram appears to be more focused on fighting its near enemy, the Nigerian state, than its far enemy in the form of the West and the United States.

¹⁹³ Onuoha, "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria," 160.

¹⁹⁴ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, "Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors]," 96–97.

¹⁹⁵ Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 247–50.

¹⁹⁶ Thurston, 169–70; Onuoha, "Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria," 160–61.

¹⁹⁷ "Mamman Nur," Counter Extremism Project, accessed January 14, 2022.

¹⁹⁸ Caleb Weiss, "Ansaru Reaffirms Its Allegiance to al Qaeda," Long War Journal, January 2, 2022.

Goals: Boko Haram's war declaration against the Nigerian state, published in August 2009, demanded the full implementation of Sharia law and the subsequent overthrow of Western civilization in Nigeria. The declaration stated that anyone who opposed Sharia law would be the target of violent attacks. At the same time, Muslims in the Nigerian north were called upon to join the fight for an Islamic society. But the organization has yet to develop a more far-reaching political concept of order.¹⁹⁹ The final objective of Boko Haram is to remove the Nigerian government, abolish democracy, and subsequently create an Islamic state.²⁰⁰

Being jihadist Salafists, Boko Haram's followers consider fighting in the form of jihad to be of central importance. Consequently, they attempt to accomplish their goals by using a great degree of violence. In doing so, the organization employs a strategy of violence that acts systematically in a planned manner against a political order, specifically, the Nigerian state. The Nigerian society and in particular the state representatives, the Christian minority, and any Muslims deviating from the Islamic interpretation of Boko Haram are to be terrified and panic-stricken. Sympathizers and supporters within the Muslim communities should be mobilized to eventually achieve the social and political transition necessary for the group's goals in the form of an Islamic state.

Strategy Shift: In the course of its development, the group's strategy shifted. At first, the focus after the summer of 2009 was on taking revenge for the destruction of the Yusufiya and the killing of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf.²⁰¹ Then came a series of terrorist attacks intended to destabilize Nigeria by weakening state structures in the north. They targeted government institutions, the military, and the police, as well as Muslim clerics and Christians.²⁰² In this context, the group shows characteristics of national terrorism. Most of the organization is based in its country of origin, Nigeria, from where it targets its

¹⁹⁹ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, "Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors]," 97.

²⁰⁰ Oftedal, *Boko Haram - an Overview*, 19.

²⁰¹ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, "Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors]," 97.

²⁰² David Cook, "Boko Haram: Reversals and Retrenchment," *CTC Sentinel*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 6, no. 4 (April 2013): 10–12.

population. The attacks on foreign targets, such as the attack on the regional UN representation in Abuja, represent isolated cases and seem more attributable to the *Ansaru* splinter group.

Objectives: Boko Haram's provocation strategy has three different objectives. First, it seeks to provoke the Nigerian authorities to overreact, thereby delegitimizing the state. Second, targeting Christian churches is aimed at inciting religious conflict between Christians and Muslims. Third, the local population is supposed to be intimidated and scared by attacks and kidnappings aimed at further weakening their confidence in the government. Especially publicity-seeking actions, such as the abduction of the Christian schoolgirls in 2014, are intended to attract national attention.²⁰³ Boko Haram's long-term goal appears to be the destabilization of the Nigerian state to the point where it can be ousted by Boko Haram and an Islamic state can be erected based on Sharia law according to the organization's views. Despite isolated events, like the rise of the more international *Ansaru* and some of Boko Haram's cross-border activities, Boko Haram has not yet internationalized its strategy and approach. On the contrary, the focus appears to be predominantly on Nigeria.

E. SUMMARY

The examination of Boko Haram demonstrates that it is an organization whose primary objective is to change the national order, although its terrorist activities are primarily carried out on a regional basis. Boko Haram has declared its commitment to global jihad, but this applies more exclusively to the splinter group *Ansaru*, which is not discussed in greater detail in this thesis.²⁰⁴ In terms of network-like organizational structures, this chapter illustrates that Boko Haram fundamentally has distinct and flexible network-like structures that extend into surrounding foreign countries. In terms of structure, it is clear that the splintering of the group over time has led to the evolution of diverse agendas. Along with this, various areas of operation have developed, as have

²⁰³ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, "Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors]," 101–3.

²⁰⁴ Weiss, "Ansaru Reaffirms Its Allegiance to al Qaeda"; "Why We Take Foreign Hostages - Ansaru"; Zenn, "Cooperation or Competition," 2–3.

strategies that deviate from those of the other entities. Autonomous execution of actions is promoted by the cell-like structure of the group. Still, the Emir's considerable power in Boko Haram, as expressed through spiritual as well as operational directive authority, is relativized by the various factions within the group.

Boko Haram does not have pronounced ties to other militant Islamist groups. Although individual members of the group have been trained and educated by other Islamist factions, the indiscriminate violence against civilians seems to prevent further approaches to third parties. In its use of terrorist violence, Boko Haram demonstrates a high degree of complexity in its military tactics, carrying out simultaneous terrorist attacks as well as attacks on well-protected targets such as military bases and police stations. The group's actions are destructive and brutal. In particular, suicide bombings and explosive attacks on civilian targets underscore this, as do seemingly indiscriminate mass executions in the villages of northeastern Nigeria. Therefore, Boko Haram's terrorist actions appear to be driven more by domestic Nigerian issues and are commonly directed against governmental institutions—mostly police and military—as well as Christian institutions. According to the group's narrative, these attacks are either in response to harsh actions by the security forces or atrocities committed by Christians against Muslims in Nigeria.²⁰⁵

Regarding the ideological orientation, Boko Haram is fundamentally following a jihadist-Salafist doctrine. The idea of “pure” Salafism plays an important role within the group but is not the most decisive one. While Boko Haram's leadership figures are almost cultically elevated, the organization overall displays a kind of political nihilism. It appears that Boko Haram has little ambition to turn its ideology into reality. Its radical interpretation of *takfirism*, the practice of declaring Muslims as infidels, erodes support among the northern Nigerian population. Administrative institutions are also not established in the areas controlled by the group. What becomes clear is that Boko Haram's recruitment has a strong regional focus in Nigeria and that foreigners are scarce to be found in the ranks of its members.

²⁰⁵ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, “Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors],” 100–103.

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III. AL-SHABAAB

One of the most important jihadist groups in the Horn of Africa, Somalia's *Harakat al Shabaab al Mujahideen*,²⁰⁶ is the incarnation of the troublesome outcomes of a failed state.²⁰⁷ Al-Shabaab is often referred to as a dangerous threat to peace and security in Somalia and the African continent and the world, but especially to neighboring countries—not without reason; Al-Shabaab is considered one of the most dangerous militant groups linked to Al-Qaeda.²⁰⁸ Al-Shabaab's activities have also adversely affected actors, such as the Somali government, Kenya, Uganda, and the African Union Mission Group in Somalia (AMISOM), who are instrumental in keeping the peace in Somalia.²⁰⁹ This chapter therefore takes a closer look at the origins of this organization, its structure and sustainment mechanisms and shed a light on the underlying strategy as driving factor for Al-Shabaab.

A. EVOLUTION AND HISTORY

This section aims to review the roots and evolution of Al-Shabaab over time, with attention to the individual context in which the organization emerged and its key formative events.

1. Genesis

Somalia was plunged into a civil war waged between rival warlords and clans following the toppling of dictator Siad Barre in 1991, causing a lasting destabilization of the region and the collapse of government structures. Severe famines, ethnic cleansing, large-scale poverty, and constant violent conflicts led to hundreds of thousands of deaths

²⁰⁶ Engl.: Movement of Mujahidin Youth; thereafter referred to by its commonly known name *Al-Shabaab*.

²⁰⁷ Jake Harrington and Jared Thompson, "Harakat al Shabaab al Mujahideen (al Shabaab)," Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), *Examining Extremism* (blog), September 23, 2021.

²⁰⁸ Abdulkarim Abdulle and Bulut Gurpinar, "The Future of Al-Shabaab: Opportunities and Challenges," in *International Congress on Afro - Eurasian Research V* (International Congress on Afro - Eurasian Research V, Lefkoşa TUR, 2019), 251–52; Afriyie, "Terrorism and Its Negative Effects on Sub-Saharan Africa," 74.

²⁰⁹ Afriyie, "Terrorism and Its Negative Effects on Sub-Saharan Africa," 74–75.

and the displacement of millions of Somalis from their homeland. Fourteen attempts have been made over the past two decades by the UN, the United States, and other local actors to initiate a peace process. These efforts, however, have failed to generate any significant and lasting success.²¹⁰

Not only “social mobility and dysfunctionality of social networks,” but also “fundamentalist religious education [...] promotes openness towards militant groups.”²¹¹ Guido Steinberg and Annette Weber argue that in Somalia, the resolution of governmental educational structures was compensated through an increase of private educational providers, most of whom taught religious content of Wahhabi provenance and whose schools were financed by Saudi Arabia.²¹² Before the Somali civil war, it was the Islamist organization Al-Ittihad al-Islamiyya (AIAI) that first gave rise to the Al-Shabaab group.²¹³ Formed in the 1980s, AIAI sought to replace the dictatorial regime of Siad Barre through a new Islamic state—which would simultaneously unite Somalia and parts of Kenya and Ethiopia to form Greater Somalia.²¹⁴ In 1989, the National Islamic Front’s rise to power in Sudan resulted in the expansion and strengthening of political Islam in the Horn of Africa. As a result, the country provided a safe haven to numerous Islamist and jihadist groups, among them one linked to Osama Bin Laden. This protection enabled Sunni Islamists and, in particular, the al-Qaeda offshoot in East Africa to extend their reach in the region well beyond Sudan. The radical practitioners of Wahhabism began to gain influence in Somalia, where their fundamentalist doctrine was in stark contrast to the Somali vernacular Islam of Sufism. For example, the Somali AIAI, like the National Islamic Front in Sudan, had been strongly influenced by the philosophy of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.²¹⁵ When the civil war began in 1991, the AIAI was no longer able

²¹⁰ Rob Wise, “Al Shabaab,” Case Study, AQAM Futures Project - Case Study Series (Center for Strategic & International Studies, July 2011), 2.

²¹¹ Steinberg and Weber, *Jihadismus in Afrika [Jihadism in Africa]*, 7/2015:9.

²¹² Steinberg and Weber, 7/2015:9.

²¹³ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012*, 27.

²¹⁴ Hansen, 16–18.

²¹⁵ Weber, “Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God],” 17.

to expand its influence. An intervention by Ethiopia in 1996 resulted in the loss of the AIAI's territory in the Somali-Ethiopian border region, forcing AIAI to pull back in a significantly weakened condition.²¹⁶

2. Nucleus and Expansion

A splinter group then developed within the AIAI in the early 2000s, focused on protecting al Qaeda in East Africa and attacking foreign targets in Somalia.²¹⁷ This group, led by the influential politician Sheikh Hasan Dahir Aweys, was mainly made up of Afghanistan veterans that had fought against the Soviet Union. Parts of the later leadership of Al-Shabaab were already involved in this splinter group of the AIAI.²¹⁸ Confronted with the escalating violence, Muslim cleric Sheikh Hassan Sheikh Mohammed Adde proclaimed that "Islamic law is the only thing that will save this country."²¹⁹ Subsequently, several Islamic courts merged into the Joint Islamic courts implementing Islamic Sharia law in the mid-1990s within Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, to guarantee at least a minimum of security and stability.²²⁰ In the absence of an executive authority, these courts established their own local militias to enforce their jurisdiction. Each court had its own ideological orientation, which varied widely. Some were composed of more moderate-minded individuals, such as businessmen, while others were radical Islamists aiming for strict implementation of the Sharia.²²¹

The various courts then joined forces in 2000 to establish the Islamic Courts Union (Ittihad al-Mahakim al-Islamiya, or ICU) led by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed. Along with

²¹⁶ 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): 218–19.

²¹⁷ Chris Harnisch and Katherine J. Zimmerman, "The Terror Threat from Somalia: The Internationalization of Al Shabaab," Critical Threats Project (American Enterprise Institute, February 2010), 11.

²¹⁸ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 20–23.

²¹⁹ Lara Santoro, "Islamic Clerics Combat Lawlessness in Somalia," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 13, 1999.

²²⁰ Santoro.

²²¹ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa," 221.

establishing secure and stable conditions, the ICU's main long-term goal was to establish an Islamic state of Greater Somalia in the region. Therefore, ideologically, the ICU and the AIAI were very close.²²² Subsequently, the AIAI splinter group joined the militias of the ICU in 2005, following its reorganization as the group Al-Shabaab. Achieving greater influence within the ICU, Aweys himself transferred Al-Shabaab leadership to his confidant Aden Hashi Ayro. By this time, Al-Shabaab already had several hundred well-trained fighters.²²³ Aweys represented a senior leader within the ICU, while Al-Shabaab formed a particularly strong militia within the group. While the ICU was Islamic nationalist in orientation, the jihadist-internationalist Al-Shabaab succeeded in taking a strong position within the Shura, the ICU's governing body.²²⁴

With the help of Al-Shabaab, the ICU succeeded in defeating the warlords based around Mogadishu and seizing the capital city in 2006. The ICU simultaneously began to broaden its sphere of control to include the rural regions of Somalia.²²⁵ This expansion ousted the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) from office. This alliance of the most important Somali clan leaders had been established in 2004 in exile in Kenya with international support.²²⁶ The TFG, however, had not succeeded in exercising authority outside its government headquarters in Baidoa, southwestern Somalia, even though it had been protected by the neighboring state of Ethiopia.²²⁷ The ICU courts, on the other hand, had strong support among the population, which was less ideological than purely practical. For the first time in years, the Sharia courts managed to restore security and order in the controlled areas, reduced crime, and reopened stores. The fundamentalist forces within the ICU had a different agenda. They took advantage of the opportunity to impose their radical interpretation of Islam on some of the controlled areas. Here, women were forced to wear

²²² Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, 220–21.

²²³ Wise, "Al Shabaab," 3.

²²⁴ Guido Steinberg, "Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.]," Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), November 21.

²²⁵ Wise, "Al Shabaab," 3.

²²⁶ Steinberg, "Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.]," 2.

²²⁷ Wise, "Al Shabaab," 2.

full veils, attending soccer matches was banned, and all violations of Sharia law were brutally punished.²²⁸

3. Ethiopian Invasion

In December 2006, in the face of ICU expansion and jihadist militias, Ethiopia, with U.S. support, launched an invasion of Somalia to restore the ousted TFG to power. Ethiopian forces then defeated the ICU's forces, whereupon it broke apart, and its followers fled abroad or to the south of the country.²²⁹ Meanwhile, despite heavy losses, Al-Shabaab regrouped after retreating to the south and rapidly emerged as the most powerful insurgent group. In early 2007, Al-Shabaab then split from the remaining remnant of the ICU outside the country. Al-Shabaab began a guerrilla war against Ethiopian forces, during which it gained strength rapidly. As of mid-2008, Al-Shabaab controlled the rural areas in the south and center of Somalia. By August 2008, they even managed to capture the strategically important port city of Kismayo.²³⁰ In doing so, Al-Shabaab managed to stop Ethiopian forces from advancing to the south through hit-and-run tactics, deployment of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), as well as targeted assassinations. The resistance to the Ethiopian invaders and the political call for an Islamic state in Somalia allowed Al-Shabaab to gain widespread support within the population.²³¹ One setback for the organization was the death of its leader Aden Hashi Ayro in a U.S. airstrike in 2008.²³² Ahmed Abdi Godane, his successor, immediately forced the group's alignment with Al-Qaeda in East Africa.²³³ This alignment revealed that two separate wings were present within Al-Shabaab. One group, in particular, was focused on nationalist goals, while the other group, which included Godane, was committed to global jihad.²³⁴ The new leader of Al-Shabaab swore

²²⁸ Wise, 3.

²²⁹ Harnisch and Zimmerman, "The Terror Threat from Somalia: The Internationalization of Al Shabaab," 11.

²³⁰ Steinberg, "Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.]," 2–3.

²³¹ Wise, "Al Shabaab," 3.

²³² Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, "Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa," 223.

²³³ Weber, "Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God]," 21.

²³⁴ Weber, 21.

allegiance to Osama Bin Laden on September 22, 2009, in a video and increased contacts with Al-Qaeda's leadership in Pakistan.²³⁵ The Ethiopian forces subsequently withdrew from Somalia in early 2009, leaving Al-Shabaab to capture large parts of the country and the capital, Mogadishu. The TFG has only been able to retain a foothold in a small area under the umbrella of the African Union Mission for Somalia (AMISOM).²³⁶

4. Governing

Beginning in 2009, Al-Shabaab took over the administration of the areas under its control as well as to implement the organization's own ideas of political order. After Ethiopia's withdrawal, however, the population saw Al-Shabaab as no longer having its *raison d'être*, which was to resist the Ethiopian occupiers. Additionally, Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, a moderate Islamist, had assumed the presidency of the TFG.²³⁷ Al-Shabaab consequently lost more and more support among the population. As a result, Al-Shabaab changed its strategy and propagated an international jihad and the establishment of an Islamic caliphate. In the conflict with AU troops, Al-Shabaab shifted from asymmetric guerrilla tactics to conventional warfare to target and destroy AMISOM resources and infrastructure. It also invested significantly more effort in planning its operations.²³⁸ On July 11, 2010, for instance, the organization launched its first large-scale attack outside of Somalia in the Ugandan capital, Kampala. Two suicide bombers killed at least seventy-six people from a variety of nations in the attack on a World Cup public viewing event.²³⁹ Local administrations were established in controlled areas between 2009 and 2011, introducing Islamic law. Al-Shabaab sought to violently impose its own interpretations of Sharia law, but it was considered extremely unpopular.²⁴⁰ Additionally, Al-Shabaab failed

²³⁵ Steinberg, "Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.]," 6.

²³⁶ Steinberg, 2.

²³⁷ Hütte, Steinberg, and Weber, "Boko Haram: Gefahr Für Nigeria Und Seine Nördlichen Nachbarn [Boko Haram: Danger for Nigeria and Its Northern Neighbors]," 20.

²³⁸ Cody Curran, "Global Ambitions: An Analysis of al Shabaab's Evolving Rhetoric," *American Enterprise Institute - AEI* (blog), accessed January 28, 2022.

²³⁹ Chris Harnisch, "Al Shabaab's First International Strike: Analysis of the July 11 Uganda Bombings," Critical Threats Project (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, July 2010).

²⁴⁰ Steinberg, "Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.]," 3.

to comprehensively contain the violence present in Somalia or improve the economic situation of the population sustainably.²⁴¹ A famine in 2010 and 2011, for example, claimed over 250,000 lives and was greatly worsened by Al-Shabaab mismanagement.²⁴² The deliberate banning of food shipments from abroad worsened the situation and resulted in protests. Many Somalis fled from Al-Shabaab and starvation to bordering states. In response, as Al-Shabaab came under increasing pressure, the group increased its efforts to help the population, which had become disappointed with them.²⁴³

AMISOM and TFG forces stepped up military pressure on Al-Shabaab in early 2011 and launched an offensive to free the occupied areas. Consequently, in the summer of 2011, Al-Shabaab had to withdraw from Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab did not promote this move as a defeat, but rather as a strategic retreat. Al-Shabaab changed its strategic approach again and returned to its tried-and-tested guerrilla tactics in the fight. Kenya then invaded Somalia from the south in October 2011. This intervention was motivated by Al-Shabaab's destabilization of the Somalia-Kenyan border area. In summer 2012, Al-Shabaab accordingly lost the strategically important port city of Kismayo, which Kenyan troops captured.²⁴⁴ What followed was a military stalemate among the parties. The TFG was thus able to seize control of Mogadishu but was not able to expand its presence in the countryside. Al-Shabaab, in contrast, controlled those southern and central Somali rural areas but was unable to conquer the urban areas.²⁴⁵ Losing fighters and territory caused Al-Shabaab to transition from a guerrilla movement to a lean terrorist group.²⁴⁶ To accomplish this not inconsiderable transformation and supplement the accompanying need

²⁴¹ Steinberg, 3.

²⁴² Rashid Abdi, Al-Shabaab and Somalia's Spreading Famine, Internet, August 10, 2011.

²⁴³ Steinberg, "Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.]," 3.

²⁴⁴ Crisis Group, "Al-Shabaab Five Years after Westgate: Still a Menace in East Africa," Crisis Group, September 21, 2018.

²⁴⁵ Steinberg, "Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.]," 3.

²⁴⁶ Steinberg, 4.

for recruits, Al-Shabaab has adjusted its propaganda strategy. A separate press format regularly published propaganda material and targeted the Internet to attract new recruits.²⁴⁷

5. World Stage

In 2012, Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda officially joined forces. There had been repeated discussions about Al-Shabaab's orientation and a possible merger. But it did not occur until February 2012, when the new Al-Qaeda chief, Ayman al-Zawahiri, accepted Al-Shabaab's pledge of allegiance.²⁴⁸ It should be noted, though, that the group is not a regional branch of Al-Qaeda, and as an independent organization, it does not follow directives from Al-Qaeda's leadership in Pakistan. Instead, Al-Shabaab operates in the spirit of Al-Qaeda in leading the jihad in Somalia, using the well-known brand "Al-Qaeda" to facilitate the recruiting of personnel and supporters.²⁴⁹ Beginning in 2013, Al-Shabaab began to regionalize its activities which became observable with the attack on the Westgate Shopping Center in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi.²⁵⁰ Multiple heavily armed attackers captured hostages on September 21, 2013, and engaged in several days of fighting with security forces. Al-Shabaab made comments on the events via Twitter, justifying the attack by referring to the ongoing military intervention by Kenyan forces in Somalia. Kenyan security forces managed to put an end to the hostage situation four days later. In total, 67 people had been killed. In the wake of the Westgate Shopping Center attack, additional attacks on government and civilian installations in Kenya occurred, killing hundreds of people. Al-Shabaab also targeted other countries in the Horn of Africa, including Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Uganda.²⁵¹ The uptick in attacks can be seen in Figure 4.

²⁴⁷ Adebawale Idowu Adeyeye, "Study of Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram Insurgent Strategies in Kenya and Nigeria" (thesis, North-West University, Vanderbijlpark, South Africa, 2017), 66.

²⁴⁸ European Scientific and Frederick Appiah Afriyie, "Terrorism and Its Negative Effects on Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Al-Shabaab," *European Scientific Journal ESJ* 15 (April 1, 2019): 68.

²⁴⁹ Adam Kahan, "Al Shabaab's Rise in the al Qaeda Network," American Enterprise Institute, August 9, 2011.

²⁵⁰ Afriyie, "Terrorism and Its Negative Effects on Sub-Saharan Africa," 65–66.

²⁵¹ Afriyie, 65.

On September 1, 2014, Al-Shabaab leader Godane was killed by a U.S. drone strike.²⁵² The newly appointed leader, Ahmed Omar, a close follower of Godane, likewise pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda directly after his appointment.²⁵³ Loss of more Al-Shabaab cadres to U.S. drone strikes, elimination of controlled areas in Somalia, along with rising attacks in the Somali-Kenyan cross-border region, demonstrate that Al-Shabaab's best future is in regionalizing its jihad rather than pursuing Somali nationalist interests.²⁵⁴

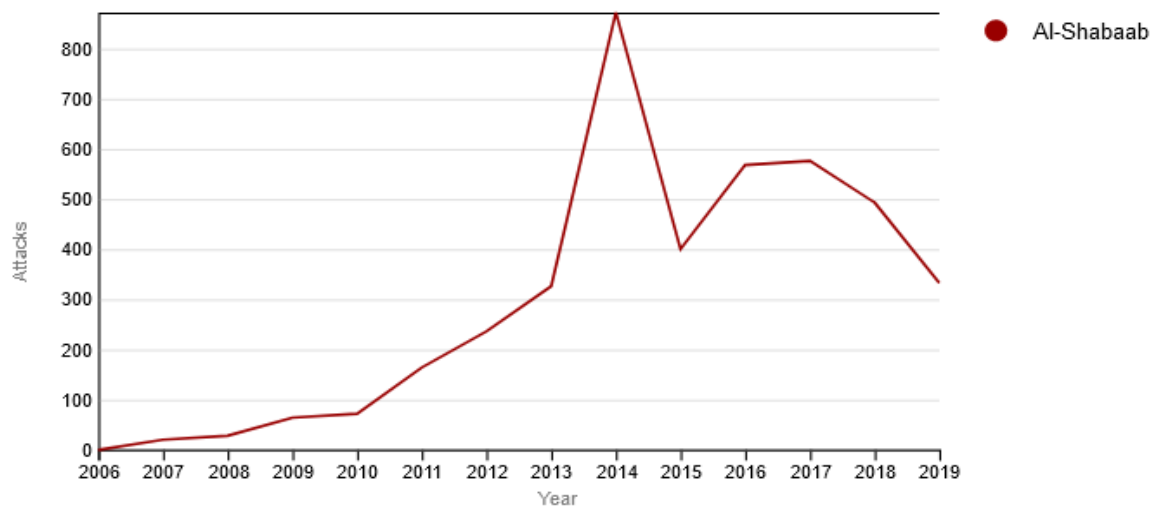


Figure 4. Attacks by Al-Shabaab, 2006–2019.²⁵⁵

B. COMMAND AND CONTROL, AND GROUP STRUCTURE

This section reviews the structure and command and control relationships within Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab's organizational structure as a combination of hierarchical and network elements. The group appears strictly hierarchical in structure at first glance, an understandable view considering its origins as a militia within the ICU and the temporary, quasi-governmental control of occupied territories. However, a closer look shows that the

²⁵² Harrington and Thompson, "Examining Extremism."

²⁵³ Hamza Mohamed, "Al-Shabab Names New Leader," Aljazeera, September 6, 2014, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2014/9/6/somalias-al-shabab-names-new-leader>.

²⁵⁴ Weber, "Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God]," 32.

²⁵⁵ Source: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), "The Global Terrorism Database (GTD)," <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

group's decentralized organizational structure has network-like characteristics and other characteristics not typical of a hierarchy or a network—which gives Al-Shabaab a rather hybrid structure.

High-Level: Al-Shabaab is led by a leader with the rank of Emir. Initially, Aden Hashi Ayro held this position until he was killed by a U.S. airstrike in 2008. Ahmed Abdi Godane, who succeeded him, may have lacked the charisma of his predecessor, but he had always been a close confidant of Ayro, which favored him for this position.²⁵⁶ Godane fostered an authoritarian style of leadership. He secured his position at the top of the group in the long term because of his international orientation, the appointment of foreigners to important posts, and the establishment of the Ministry of Security, which he controlled. Following his death in September 2014, Abu Ubaidah, one of his closest confidants, assumed the position of the Emir and the leadership of Al-Shabaab.²⁵⁷ A consultative council, called the Shura, reports to the Emir who acts as a chairman, and assists him in his decisions. As a result, strategically important decisions are considered within the Shura and then passed on to the individual regional commanders. The exact number of Shura members is not known and is estimated to be between eight and forty people.²⁵⁸ The Shura Council, as a clearly defined leadership body, represents one of Al-Shabaab's central hierarchical features.²⁵⁹ Key leaders of the organization are to be found in the Shura. Ibrahim Haji Jama Mead, for example, or Mukhtar Robow, who was previously Godane's deputy, but also Ali Mahmud Rage in his capacity as spokesman for Al-Shabaab.²⁶⁰ Somalis make up the majority of the organization's inner circle, but foreign members also play a role within the group. Foreigners have repeatedly occupied important positions in the Shura. Public relations and recruitment for the group were conducted by Arab-American Abu Mansur al-Amriki, while the position of the consultant to Godane was

²⁵⁶ Steinberg, "Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.]," 3.

²⁵⁷ Weber, "Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God]," 21–22.

²⁵⁸ Dr. Abdi Omar Shuriye, "Al-Shabaab's Leadership Hierarchy and Its Ideology," *Horn Affairs* (blog), January 2012.

²⁵⁹ Mayntz, "Hierarchie oder Netzwerk?" 255.

²⁶⁰ Steinberg, "Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.]," 3–4.

manned by a Yemeni, named Abu Suleiman al-Banadiri. The finances of the group were managed by Sheik Mohammed Abu Faïd of Saudi Arabia, and Abu Musa Mombasa of Pakistan served as security chief as well as being responsible for the training in the group. Mohamoud Mujajir, a Sudanese national, was successfully recruiting suicide bombers for Al-Shabaab.²⁶¹

Institutions: Several ministries (*Maktab*), each with specific areas of expertise, are under the authority of the Shura Council. They cover the subjects of defense, security, religion, interior, information, and finance. Within this context, the Ministry of Information operates Al-Shabaab's Twitter account, blogs, and other social media; in other words, it is in charge of the organization's public relations. In addition, there is a religious police force that closely monitors compliance with Sharia.²⁶² These specifics reflect further hierarchical features of the organizational structure and show the distinction between ranks and functions. The ministries represent specialized units below the organizational management. They are linked to the lower level via a matrix organization.²⁶³ The Ministry of Security (*Amniyat*) represents the most relevant element, and it is structured similar to a secret service and operates covertly, similar to a secret police.²⁶⁴ The procurement and evaluation of militarily relevant information as well as the planning and execution of assassinations of important opponents of the group are among the tasks of this institution. As one of the few elements of the organization, this ministry is directly controlled by the Emir. The main task of the *Amniyat* is to preserve the internal unity of the group.²⁶⁵

Operational Level: Al-Shabaab is divided into four regions in Somalia: the southern Somali regions of Bakool and Bay, central Somalia and Mogadishu, the northern Somali regions of Puntland and Somaliland, and the southern Somali Jubba Valley. Each

²⁶¹ Weber, "Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God]," 21–22.

²⁶² Weber, 22.

²⁶³ Shuriye, "Research."

²⁶⁴ Shmuel Yosef Agnon, "Al-Shabaab's Amniyat Head of Operations in Mogadishu, Muse Moallim (Mu'awiye) Resigns: NISA Reports – Strategic Intelligence Service," *Intelligence Briefs* (blog), February 13, 2020.

²⁶⁵ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012*.

of the four regions independently takes care of the local administration of its controlled area. They are each led by a regional commander, who leads their respective regions politically as well as militarily. There is a decentralized relationship between the supreme leadership and the regional commanders. Regional commanders are empowered to conduct operations in their regions independently of the leadership. Prior addressing the Shura is not necessary. This autonomy, manifested in a decentralized leadership style, complicates both observation and reconnaissance of the group through intelligence measures.²⁶⁶

Structural Analysis: Hierarchical features of the organizational structure can also be observed proportionately. This is primarily a differentiation according to ranks and functions. Regional commanders maintain contact between the leadership and the executing cells, as depicted in Figure 5, but have their own authority and autonomy. Characteristic features of networks are also present, such as the absence of central control of commanders by the Al-Shabaab leadership.²⁶⁷ The cells subordinate to the commanders also act with a high degree of autonomy—they conduct operations and attacks independently—and receive only rough instructions from their higher leadership.²⁶⁸

The fact that each region and cell can operate independently of other units and that the respective fighters on the ground are effectively led in a decentralized manner exemplifies the network-like structure and has significant advantages.²⁶⁹ Chains of command thereby remain short, cells that are discovered and destroyed by security forces can be jettisoned without harm to the overall organization, and exposing the upper leadership is made much more difficult. The overall organization thus remains sufficiently fluid and can respond flexibly to external change and influences.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁶ Shuriye, “Research.”

²⁶⁷ Mayntz, “Hierarchie oder Netzwerk?,” 255.

²⁶⁸ Shuriye, “Research.”

²⁶⁹ David Goldmann, “Exposing Al-Shabaab’s Leadership Structure and Precept Ideology – Strategic Intelligence Service,” Intelligence Briefs, *Bi-Weekly Counter-Terrorism Intelligence Brief for East Africa* (blog), July 31, 2018

²⁷⁰ Mayntz, “Hierarchie oder Netzwerk?,” 255.

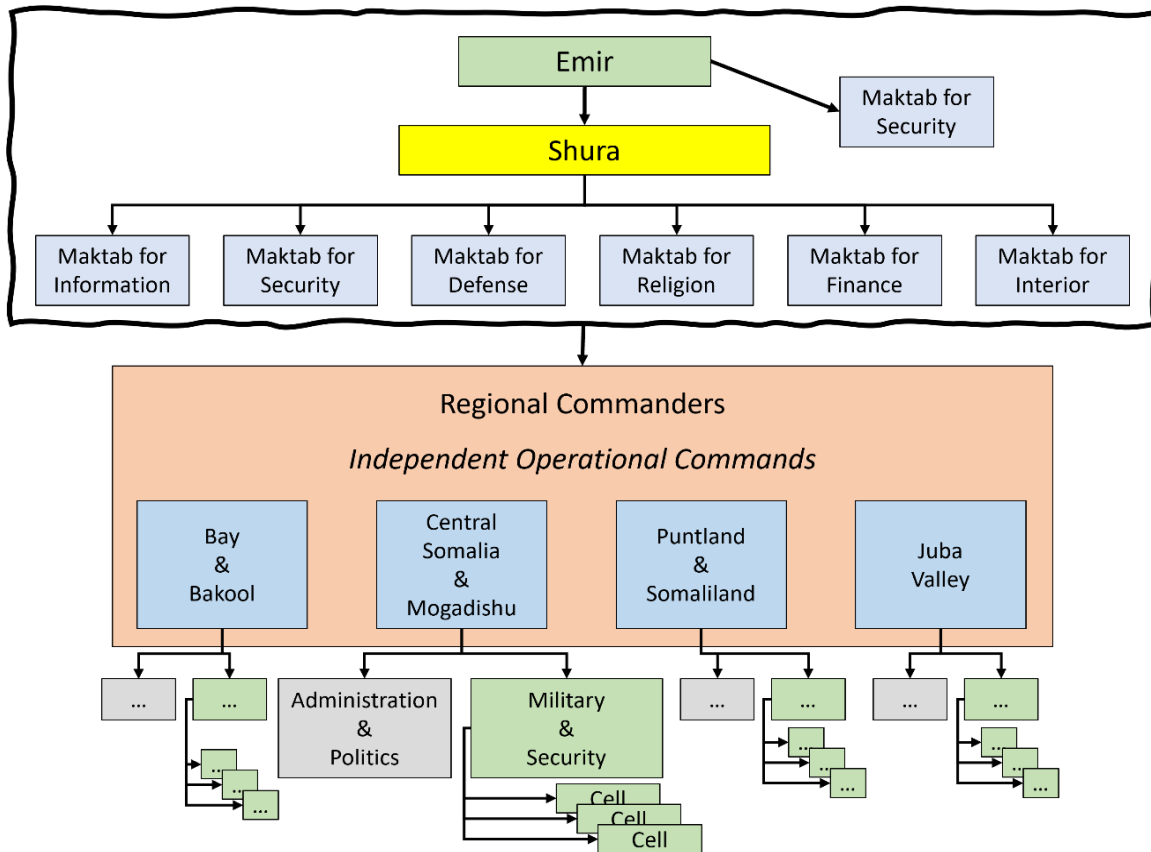


Figure 5. Hypothetical Organizational Structure of Al-Shabaab.²⁷¹

Centralized control by the upper leadership occurs in Al-Shabaab essentially through the specification of generally formulated goals and strategies. The individual cells are only loosely connected. However, this high degree of isolation can be overcome, if necessary, to generate larger elements by socialization-based identification (a higher degree of group cohesion beyond the cell level) of the members with the organization.²⁷² At times, Al-Shabaab has even set up its own regional administration, which was specifically intended to advance the implementation of Sharia law. Al-Shabaab maintains a fairly sturdy and effective bureaucracy.²⁷³ In the ongoing civil war, this administration

²⁷¹ Adapted from: Shuriye, "Research"; "IntelCenter Al-Shabaab Organizational Wall Chart v1.6," Intelligence, IntelCenter Store, April 6, 2015, <https://store.intelcenter.com/products/shabaab-org-44-36-wc>.

²⁷² Mayntz, "Hierarchie oder Netzwerk?," 256.

²⁷³ Joshua Meserve, "Al Shabab's Lessons for ISIS," *Foreign Affairs*, September 3, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ethiopia/2016-01-24/al-shababs-lessons-isis>.

additionally served military purposes.²⁷⁴ This regional administration established by Al-Shabaab also provided services to the local population that had originally been the responsibility of the collapsed Somali state. Al-Shabaab created a minimum of security and stability for the first time after two decades of civil war. This included rebuilding infrastructure, distributing aid from international organizations, and organizing welfare for the poor. Al-Shabaab thus gained some respectability in the eyes of the civilian population. However, Al-Shabaab also intended to influence the local population by introducing Sharia law and targeted propaganda.²⁷⁵ Al-Shabaab's administrative apparatus highly represents the hierarchical characteristics of its organizational structure.²⁷⁶

Al-Shabaab's hierarchical structure can also be found in the selection of personnel. The origin and status of the individuals are often decisive for reaching a certain position within the organization. The supreme leadership (*Qiyadah*) is placed at the top with foreign fighters and Somalis with foreign passports (*Muhajirun*) below them. Following them in the hierarchy are young Somali field commanders (*Qiyadatul Mayadin*), who are in charge of the operational cells. Ultimately, the lowest level is represented by the local Somali fighters (*Ansar*), who are trusted little by the leadership and are therefore almost completely cut off from the flow of information within the organization.²⁷⁷

Overall, it becomes apparent that Al-Shabaab has a hybrid organizational structure that exhibits both hierarchical and network characteristics. The upper organizational level, consisting of the Emir at the top, followed by the Shura and the various ministries, as well as the regional commanders below them, is hierarchical in structure. Al-Shabaab's lower levels, however, are network-like and, for the most part, structured entirely independently of one another. Al-Shabaab's administration appears decentralized, but it is structured hierarchically in terms of personnel. In the historical development of Al-Shabaab,

²⁷⁴ Steinberg, "Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.]," 4.

²⁷⁵ Wise, "Al Shabaab," 7–9.

²⁷⁶ Mayntz, "Hierarchie oder Netzwerk?," 255.

²⁷⁷ Chris Fenn, "A Threat to MENA and Western Interests: Al-Shabaab's Foreign Fighters," American Agora, May 19, 2019; Stanford University, "Al Shabaab," Center for International Security and Cooperation, accessed February 2, 2022; Robert Kluijver, "Al Shabaab Governance," The Zomia Center for the Study of Non-State Spaces, July 10, 2019.

hierarchical characteristics seem to have predominated at one time, although an evolutionary development toward network characteristics influenced the organization we see today.

C. LOGISTICS, FINANCING, AND RECRUITING

Al-Shabaab operates the most diversified and innovative funding method of any Al-Qaeda-affiliated organization and can generate annual revenues in the high tens of millions to the hundreds of millions of dollars. Al-Shabaab uses a variety of legal as well as illegal avenues and sources to generate funding. These can be differentiated as internal and external sources. Internal sources generate value inside Somalia and external sources generate value from outside Somalia. Beyond that, this section shows that Al-Shabaab's recruitment does stand out, not only in its extensive recruitment and payment of full-time fighters, but also, for example, in the attraction of foreign fighters, who—as already shown in the “Command and Control, and Group Structure” section—can even rise to the highest levels of leadership in the organization.

1. Financing

Al-Shabaab's primary sources of funding stem from donations, provided by a wide range of actors. These donations mostly originate either within the ranks of the Somali diaspora, come from foreign jihadists, or are composed of financial support from third countries.²⁷⁸ In 2007, Al-Shabaab drew increasing support from the Somali diaspora, by establishing itself as the strongest insurgent group against the invasion of Ethiopia, which led to an increase in donations—temporarily the group's main source of funding. When Ethiopia withdrew again in 2009, Al-Shabaab rather brutally took over the administration of the controlled areas, leading to a significant decrease in donations from the diaspora.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Richard Gardiner, “Funding African Terrorism: A Study Of Al-Shabaab's Finances,” *The South Story - African News and Current Affairs* (blog), June 14, 2020, <https://www.thesouthstory.com/funding-african-terrorism-a-study-of-al-shabaabs-finances/>.

²⁷⁹ AOAV, “Sources of Funding (Including Self-Funding) for the Major Groupings That Perpetrate IED Incidents - Al Shabaab,” Action on Armed Violence (AOAV), *AOAV - Understanding the Regional and Transnational Networks That Facilitate IED Use* (blog), May 25, 2017, <https://aoav.org.uk/2017/sources-funding-including-self-funding-major-groupings-perpetrate-ied-incidents-al-shabaab/>.

After the donations from abroad began to dwindle, the group had to look for alternative sources of funding. Over time, Al-Shabaab established a comprehensive tax system within Somalia, which has since become its main source of income.²⁸⁰ One of the key prerequisites for the implementation of this system was its control over large areas of the country, particularly the capital Mogadishu with its vast trade markets, as well as the port of Kismayo, which is the main hub for imports and exports. Al-Shabaab “was generating between \$35 million and \$50 million from the port alone, thanks to the thriving charcoal trade” plus additional taxation, which was one of its main sources of funding.²⁸¹ Also, Al-Shabaab was able to generate remarkable revenue from the sugar business with Kenya. The organization obtained a cut from the regular import taxation, but in addition derived illegal income from smuggling of sugar. The UN estimated the group’s annual profits at up to \$18 million from taxing shipments alone.²⁸² To the extent that AMISOM forces withdraw in the coming future, an increase in Al-Shabaab’s funding is likely, as profits from the terrorist group’s illicit trade and tax schemes will undoubtedly increase. A shift in current funding models, should Al-Shabaab’s continued internationalization occur, would be a possible consequence.²⁸³

Another source of revenue for Al-Shabaab is the collection of tolls as part of the dense and essential transportation network in southern Somalia. Here, the group controls the roads and collects tolls on passing cars and trucks. “Estimates have even shown that one single road checkpoint can gather as much as \$8 million in revenue per year.”²⁸⁴ Despite the current loss of exclusive control over Somalia’s capital and main transshipment point, Kismayo, Al-Shabaab continues to profit from trade in the region due to existing

²⁸⁰ Gardiner, “FUNDING AFRICAN TERRORISM.”

²⁸¹ Gardiner.

²⁸² AOAV, “Sources of Funding (Including Self-Funding) for the Major Groupings That Perpetrate IED Incidents - Al Shabaab.”

²⁸³ Yaya J. Fanusie and Alex Entz, “*Al-Shabaab*,” *Financial Assessment, The Terror Finance Briefing Book* (Washington, DC: Center on Sanctions and Illicit Finance (CSIF), June 2017), <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2017/12/07/terror-finance-briefing-book/>.

²⁸⁴ AOAV, “Sources of Funding (Including Self-Funding) for the Major Groupings That Perpetrate IED Incidents - Al Shabaab.”

criminal networks.²⁸⁵ Al-Shabaab, in the areas it controls, imposes general taxes on individuals and trades. In addition, it collects a portion of the population's *zakat*. Al-Shabaab also levies taxes on consumer goods, agricultural products, and home construction.²⁸⁶

Beyond the aforementioned “formally legal” sources of funding, Al-Shabaab continues to generate revenue through outright criminal activity. In this regard, the practice of kidnapping local Somalis and Western individuals to generate ransom occupies a relevant place. While millions are often obtained for Western hostages, ransoms for locals amount to considerably smaller sums. However, the frequency of local kidnappings is much higher than that of lucrative Westerners.²⁸⁷ These targeted Westerners include members of aid organizations who are sought after for kidnapping.²⁸⁸ Al-Shabaab also generates revenue from third parties by claiming a share of the profits from ransoms from various pirate groups in the Horn of Africa.²⁸⁹ Due to the lack of state authority to enforce order, piracy was able to develop along the Somali coasts from the very beginning of the civil war and receives both protection and support from Al-Shabaab.

Al-Shabaab also finances itself by systematically collecting protection money and through extortion. As part of its criminal activities, Al-Shabaab forces local businesses to pay protection money under the threat of violence and looting. The same applies to international aid organizations. Al-Shabaab allows them to carry out projects only if they

²⁸⁵ Weber, “Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God],” 29.

²⁸⁶ Wise, “Al Shabaab,” 2–9.

²⁸⁷ Nyambega Gisesa, “Inside Shabaab’s Gruesome Abduction Syndicate,” News, Hiiraan Online, April 14, 2019, http://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2019/apr/163344/inside_shabaab_s_gruesome_abduction_syndicate.aspx; Editorial Staff, “Al-Shabaab’s Kidnappings: Chronology of the Wait,” News, OnCubaNews, April 25, 2019, <https://oncubanews.com/en/cuba/al-shabaabs-kidnappings-chronology-of-the-wait/>.

²⁸⁸ Gabrielle Reid, “Aid Workers and Al Shabaab: The Persistent Kidnapping Threat in Somalia | GSI,” Intelligence, S-RM Intelligence and Risk Consulting, October 25, 2018, <https://gsi.s-rminform.com/articles/aid-workers-and-al-shabaab-the-persistent-kidnapping-threat-in-somalia>.

²⁸⁹ 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): 16–20.

comply with strict conditions and pay “registration fees.”²⁹⁰ In addition, Al-Shabaab taxes projects separately throughout their duration. Reports show amounts of tens of thousands of dollars per month paid by aid organizations to Al-Shabaab.²⁹¹

When considering Al-Shabaab’s criminal activities, the question arises as to whether their purpose is to generate funds to finance the group’s actual activities, or whether this criminally driven and systematized generating of finances has now developed into the *raison d’être* for the group. As described, Al-Shabaab’s funding was initially secured through donations from abroad, especially from the Somali diaspora. As these cash flows ebbed, financial generation shifted to the realm of tax collection. A relevant factor in the success observed in this regard, however, was Al-Shabaab’s established control over a large area of the country and its de facto position as a substitute for the lack of state structures. Apart from the excessive and sometimes violent nature of its actions, the collection of taxes and fees seems to be an obvious evolutionary step.

In the overall view, however, the financing focus was initially on “legal” sources and not on purely criminal sources of financing. It appears that the loss of areas of influence for tax collection as well as donation inflows necessitated compensation through criminal activities. This leads to the conclusion that Al-Shabaab does not operate exclusively as a front for organized crime activities. However, it certainly cannot be ruled out that individuals or even entire groups enrich themselves individually to a significant degree.

2. Recruiting

Recruiting new talent for the ranks of militants is made easy for Al-Shabaab in Somalia by the destruction of social networks stemming from long periods of state collapse and violent conflict.²⁹² Over time, Al-Shabaab generated a following of several thousand well-trained and battle-hardened members. In Somalia alone, the group currently “consists

²⁹⁰ Sam Kiley, “Funding Al-Shabaab: How Aid Money Ends up in Terrorists’ Hands,” News, CNN, February 12, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/02/12/africa/somalia-al-shabaab-foreign-aid-intl/index.html>.

²⁹¹ Kiley.

²⁹² Steinberg and Weber, *Jihadismus in Afrika [Jihadism in Africa]*, 7/2015:8.

of 5,000–10,000 fighters.”²⁹³ Al-Shabaab recruits its followers from three main entities, each of which joins the group for different reasons. The numerically largest entity in the ranks of Al-Shabaab’s fighters is young Somalis. This group is again divided into volunteers and those who are conscripted by force. The shortage of economic resources leaves locals prone to recruitment.²⁹⁴ So, the main motive of the young volunteers is mostly the opportunity to earn money and thus escape the high unemployment in the region.²⁹⁵ The monthly salary for these fighters is reported to range between \$30 and \$200.²⁹⁶ In addition, there is the possibility of additional income in the form of pocket money, which is paid for the performance of certain military services. These include bounties for killing enemy soldiers, which are rewarded with \$30. The successful use of a roadside IED is rewarded with an additional payment of \$100.²⁹⁷

In some areas, weak statehood promotes the development of complementary structures that are criminal or terrorist in nature. Conflicts over the distribution of goods and resources, such as access to education, health and political participation, enable jihadists to recruit new fighters.²⁹⁸ The prospect of exercising power and belonging to an elected community are two additional major attractions for the young men, beyond the monetary incentive. Notwithstanding the personal shortcomings and societal restrictions that prevailed before joining Al-Shabaab, jihadism lends the individual fighter a sense of heroism. The young members thus have the opportunity to violently rebel against the authorities that previously ruled over them, such as Sufi religious leaders, the Somali clans, and their own family heads. The acts of violence they commit as part of their activities for

²⁹³ Harrington and Thompson, “Examining Extremism.”

²⁹⁴ Scott Baldauf and Ali Muhamed, “Somalia’s Al Shabab Recruits ‘holy Warriors’ with \$400 Bonus,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 15, 2010, <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2010/0415/Somalia-s-Al-Shabab-recruits-holy-warriors-with-400-bonus>.

²⁹⁵ Steinberg, “Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.],” 4.

²⁹⁶ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 57–58; Mohamed Mubarak, “The AS Finance System” (Hiraal Institute, July 2018), <https://hiraalinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/AS-Finance-System.pdf>.

²⁹⁷ Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 58.

²⁹⁸ Steinberg and Weber, *Jihadismus in Afrika [Jihadism in Africa]*, 7/2015:9.

Al-Shabaab increasingly distance them from their social origins.²⁹⁹ Following this rationale, Al-Shabaab's propaganda and recruitment videos primarily feature a combination of brotherly camaraderie and brutal depictions of violence and place much less emphasis on the ideological content and themes of Islamic Salafism.³⁰⁰ Al-Shabaab's ability to survive military losses as an organization (which is discussed in more detail in a subsequent section) by employing insurgent tactics is appealing to potential new recruits.³⁰¹

Voluntary recruitment in the region peaked in 2006.³⁰² The invasion by neighboring Ethiopia was an external motivating factor that drove the most confident volunteers into the arms of Al-Shabaab. The volunteers who flocked to join at this time wanted to defend their homes and families against the foreign occupiers and actively fight them. This rather patriotic motivation was also reason enough for individuals from the Somali diaspora to join Al-Shabaab. However, greater numbers from the Somali diaspora joined due to failing social circumstances. David Axe describes this phenomenon of adverse socioeconomic conditions for the Somali diaspora settled in the U.S., with the statement that "American society has made it difficult for Muslim, African immigrants to find security, fun and a sense of belonging."³⁰³ Often, these members turned more intensely to Islam, subsequently became radicalized, and were recruited by Al-Shabaab.

In contrast, non-Somali foreign members are usually already convinced jihadists who seek affiliation with the group for ideological reasons.³⁰⁴ Al-Shabaab recruits foreign fighters, particularly because they are not interwoven into Somali clan structures and thus

²⁹⁹ Weber, "Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God]," 24.

³⁰⁰ Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Al-Shabab's Western Recruitment Strategy," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, CTC Sentinel, 5, no. 1 (January 18, 2012): 18–22.

³⁰¹ Meservey, "Al Shabab's Lessons for ISIS."

³⁰² Harrington and Thompson, "Examining Extremism."

³⁰³ David Axe, "How Americans Became Terrorists in Africa," *War Is Boring* (blog), November 28, 2016, <https://medium.com/war-is-boring/how-americans-became-terrorists-in-africa-6fde266824c7>.

³⁰⁴ Christian Jokinen, "'Deutsche Schabab': The Story of German Foreign Fighters in Somalia, 2010–2016," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* 11, no. 5 (May 24, 2018): 30–37.

are not expected to have any loyalty problems.³⁰⁵ Another bonus is that they often already have technical training with associated skills or knowledge of technical contexts and a good level of education.³⁰⁶ In addition, these members may even have a Western passport and bring their financial resources with them. They are often multilingual, making them suitable for propaganda purposes and for recruiting additional foreigners into Al-Shabaab.³⁰⁷

Within the group of foreigners, Al-Qaeda in East Africa forms the nucleus. This group was active in the region early on and had ties to Al-Shabaab. It was this group in particular that has gained increasing appeal among foreign jihadists, attracting members from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. The total number of fighters originating from outside Africa is in the low triple digits. In contrast, the number of foreign fighters from neighboring East African states is in the high three-digit range.³⁰⁸ Overall, “by early 2009, new recruits from the U.S., Britain, Kenya and Arab countries accounted for as much as a third of Shabaab.”³⁰⁹ As mentioned in a previous section, the foreigners recruited as members certainly play an important role within Al-Shabaab and in some cases occupy particularly relevant key positions. It is also worth noting that the majority of Al-Shabaab’s suicide bombers stem from the group of foreign fighters.³¹⁰

3. Logistics and Cooperation

Al-Shabaab is closely networked regionally and maintains relations with various other jihadist groups as well as supporting third countries—especially in neighboring East African countries, most notably Kenya. Here, efforts to intensify networking with existing

³⁰⁵ Steinberg, “Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.],” 4.

³⁰⁶ Daisy Muibu and Benjamin P. Nickels, “Foreign Technology or Local Expertise? Al-Shabaab’s IED Capability,” *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, CTC Sentinel, 10, no. 10 (November 27, 2017): 33–36.

³⁰⁷ Meleagrou-Hitchens, “Al-Shabab’s Western Recruitment Strategy.”

³⁰⁸ Steinberg, “Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.],” 4–5.

³⁰⁹ Axe, “How Americans Became Terrorists in Africa.”

³¹⁰ Muibu and Nickels, “Foreign Technology or Local Expertise?”

jihadist small groups appear exceptionally intense.³¹¹ For example, the group Al-Hijra, also known as the Muslim Youth Center (MYC), recruits new fighters for Al-Shabaab in Kenya. In addition, Al-Hajira, together with Al-Shabaab, repeatedly committed joint attacks on Kenyan security forces and government facilities.³¹²

As mentioned previously, Al-Shabaab already had ties to Al-Qaeda in East Africa at the time of its founding. After a lengthy phase of rapprochement, the two groups finally merged ideologically and institutionally. What makes Al-Shabaab special, however, is that it is not a regional offshoot of Al-Qaeda. Rather, it remains an independent organization that conducts a jihad in Somalia along the lines of Al-Qaeda's ideology.³¹³ Cooperation has advantages for both groups. For Al-Shabaab, it increases its visibility at the international level. This entails the possibility of accessing new sources of funding and recruitment. Al-Qaeda benefits by expanding its reach and acquiring additional retreat-zones in Somalia.³¹⁴

The regional Al-Qaeda offshoot in Yemen (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula - AQAP) appears to play a special role for Al-Shabaab. Sources explicitly report mutual training and weapons trafficking between the two organizations.³¹⁵ Yemen also appears to play a role as a possible retreat. In 2012, Al-Shabaab cadres reportedly temporarily fled to Yemen ahead of the AMISOM offensive.³¹⁶

The possibility of a link between Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, already highlighted in a previous chapter, has not been fully proven despite several pieces of circumstantial

³¹¹ Christopher Anzalone, "Kenya's Muslim Youth Center and Al-Shabab's East African Recruitment," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, CTC Sentinel, 5, no. 10 (October 29, 2012): 9–12.

³¹² Fredrick Nzes, "Al-Hijra: Al-Shabab's Affiliate in Kenya," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, CTC Sentinel, 7, no. 5 (May 29, 2014): 24–26.

³¹³ "Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War," International Crisis Group, June 26, 2014, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/somalia-al-shabaab-it-will-be-long-war>.

³¹⁴ Kahan, "Al Shabaab's Rise in the al Qaeda Network."

³¹⁵ Maseh Zarif, "Terror Partnership: AQAP and Shabaab," Critical Threats, July 2, 2011, <https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/terror-partnership-aqap-and-shabaab>.

³¹⁶ Weber, "Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God]," 30.

evidence. While Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram members are said to have undergone joint training, a deeper connection beyond that remains questionable.

The example of Eritrea shows that Al-Shabaab, in addition to its relations with other jihadist organizations, also has good connections to third countries. Eritrea's financial support has already been highlighted in a previous section. The connection to Al-Shabaab is essentially rooted in the simmering conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, from which Eritrea seceded in 1991.³¹⁷ Eritrea has provided both materiel and training to Al-Shabaab, to encourage the group to conduct operations against Ethiopia.³¹⁸ In addition, the Gulf state of Qatar is also reported to have provided financial support to Al-Shabaab, funneling it through Eritrea to conceal Qatari involvement.³¹⁹ However, these initiatives appear to have since ceased in the face of international pressure.³²⁰ Thus, despite close regional networking and relations with other jihadist groups abroad, Al-Shabaab must be regarded as an independent Somali group whose operational cooperation hardly extends beyond the East African region.

D. STRATEGY

The following pages provide a closer look at the underlying ideology and the applied strategy of Al-Shabaab. The discussion reveals that Al-Shabaab ideologically pursues a combination of Islamist, Salafist, and nationalist elements—although the latter aspect is far from uncontroversial within the organization and has led to factionalism.

³¹⁷ Vincent G. Heintz, "Eritrea and Al Shabaab: Realpolitik on the Horn of Africa," *Small Wars Journal*, August 29, 2010, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/eritrea-and-al-shabaab>.

³¹⁸ Mike Merlo Says, "2 Eritrean Officials Designated for Supporting Shabaab," FDD's Long War Journal, July 6, 2012, https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/07/two_eritrean_officia.php; Aaron Maasho, "Exclusive: Eritrea Reduces Support for al Shabaab - UN Report" (Addis Ababa: Reuters, July 16, 2012), http://www.genocide-watch.com/images/Eritrea_2012_07_16_Eritrea_reduces_support_for_al_Shabaab.pdf.

³¹⁹ Abuga Makori, "Somalia: Ex-NISA Boss Links Qatar to Financing of Al-Shabaab, Accuses Fahad Yasin of Being 'Middleman,'" News, Garowe Online, May 16, 2020; Ariel Ben Solomon, "In-Depth Report Reveals Qatar's Willful Blindness to Financing of Global Terrorist Groups," News, The Jerusalem Post, December 12, 2014.

³²⁰ Maasho, "Exclusive: Eritrea Reduces Support for al Shabaab - UN Report."

Ideology: The roots of Al-Shabaab's ideology can be found in the Islamist revivalist movement. This ideology emerged in Somalia during the 1960s and rapidly gained influence.³²¹ Additionally, Somalia became heavily influenced by Wahabism beginning in 1989, as a result of the National Islamic Front's seizure of power in neighboring Sudan. Al-Shabaab's predecessor organization, the AIAI, was furthermore significantly influenced by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In the past, some of the AIAI leaders studied in Cairo, Mecca, and Medina and came in contact there. It was already the AIAI's long-term goal to establish Greater Somalia based on Sharia.³²²

The idealization of the Muslim past is a key factor in shaping Al-Shabaab's worldview, which glorifies the lifetime of the Prophet Mohamed and the reign of the Sultan of Zanzibar as the golden age of Islam. The future is to be linked to this past greatness in an idealized way. In Al-Shabaab's ideology, achieving this goal is possible only through the implementation of an Islamic caliphate, given the ongoing interventions of foreign powers and the failure of the Somali elites.³²³

Within Islam, Al-Shabaab represents a Sunni Salafist movement and belongs to the jihadist Salafist type. Al-Shabaab sees Islam as threatened worldwide. Only armed jihad will enable the establishment of Islamic rule in the form of a caliphate.³²⁴ Ideologically, within jihadist Salafism, Al-Shabaab can be located between the nationalists and the anti-Western internationalists. Complementing this bipolarity is an ambivalent understanding of jihad. This is expressed, among other ways, in its division into two different main factions. One faction considers Somalia to be the starting point from where armed jihad is to be carried to other countries.³²⁵ Their central motive for action is to fight the distant enemy. Primary targets are the occupiers of Muslim countries, as well as the West in general and the United States in particular, which must be fought as part of global jihad. These strongly anti-American attitudes are rooted in both the ongoing U.S. intervention in

³²¹ Weber, "Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God]," 19.

³²² Weber, 17.

³²³ Weber, 22–23.

³²⁴ Shuriye, "Research," 280–81.

³²⁵ Weber, "Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God]," 20.

Somalia and Al-Shabaab's close contacts and alignment with Al-Qaeda. Furthermore, Al-Shabaab also recognizes enemies within Africa. As a Christian state, Ethiopia is particularly hated here. Because of their involvement in AMISOM, Al-Shabaab also fights Kenya, Uganda, and Burundi.³²⁶ This particular group within Al-Shabaab can be classified as internationalists. The second faction within Al-Shabaab has placed its primary focus on Somalia itself. Its goal is to take over the country and establish a strict Islamic regime under Al-Shabaab's rule.³²⁷ Thus, this part of the group can be classified under the nationalist school of jihadist Salafism. In this context, the organization's ideology is characterized by tension between the national political agenda and global jihad.³²⁸

Overall, Al-Shabaab follows *takfirism* and thus divides strictly into believers and unbelievers. However, the strict *takfirism* that Al-Shabaab follows also categorizes those Muslims who do not follow the group's Sunni-Salafist doctrine as infidels. In Al-Shabaab's ideology, these false believers represent a legitimate target and are thus to be annihilated.³²⁹ Al-Shabaab followed this ideological worldview and, in 2009 and 2010, destroyed all Sufi memorials in the Mogadishu area. Al-Shabaab thus demonstrated that it was not only the government and the infidels but also the popular Islam of the Sufis that it was relentlessly fighting.³³⁰

Goals: Al-Shabaab's overriding goal remains the establishment of an Islamic caliphate based on its interpretation of Islam with the accompanying introduction of Sharia law. However, there is no complete agreement within Al-Shabaab on the demarcation of the borders of the caliphate to be established. The nationalists want to limit the caliphate to Somalia and the territories of a future Greater Somalia. In contrast, the representatives

³²⁶ Afriyie, "Terrorism and Its Negative Effects on Sub-Saharan Africa," 74.

³²⁷ Daniel E. Agbiboa, "Terrorism without Borders: Somalia's Al-Shabaab and the Global Jihad Network," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5, no. 1 (February 1, 2014): 27–34, <https://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.826>.

³²⁸ Thomas Hegghammer, "Jihadi-Salafis or Revolutionaries? On Religion and Politics in the Study of Militant Islamism," *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement*, 2009, 244–66.

³²⁹ Weber, "Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God]," 23.

³³⁰ Abdi Sheikh, "Shabaab Rebels Destroy Grave and Mosque in Somalia," Reuters, October 19, 2009, sec. World News, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-conflict-idUSTRE59I1HQ20091019>.

of global jihad strive for a more comprehensive caliphate.³³¹ Their model of thought is the historically largest caliphate of the *Umayyads* from the early days of Islam, whose borders included not only the entire Arab and Islamic world but also large parts of Spain and the Balkans.³³² The common prerequisite of both ideas is the seizure of power in Somalia, which in turn requires regime change with prior expulsion of foreign troops from the country.

Approach: Al-Shabaab, as a jihadist Salafist group, intends to achieve its set goals through the systematic use of violence in the form of jihad. To this end, Al-Shabaab pursues a two-part strategy of violence. First, the toppling of the Somali government, the withdrawal of foreign troops, and the takeover of power in Somalia must be ensured. The regional jihad that Al-Shabaab employs includes terrorist attacks, the use of guerrilla tactics, and a proportionate amount of conventional warfare. Al-Shabaab is capable of adapting its approach depending on the situation and the means at hand. A historical example is a fight against Ethiopian superiority in 2007, in which Al-Shabaab switched from conventional warfare to guerrilla tactics, which were more successful in that situation, after suffering heavy losses. Raids on specially selected targets and targeted assassinations caused great difficulty for Ethiopian forces who were fighting conventionally and were inexperienced in guerrilla warfare.³³³

Strengthened over time, Al-Shabaab was powerful enough to succeed in direct combat against AU troops as of 2009.³³⁴ However, military pressure from the AU was once again too great from 2011 onward, forcing Al-Shabaab to return to its already proven guerrilla tactics. With casualties continuing to rise, Al-Shabaab shifted to a strategy of terrorist violence. Simultaneously, the armed jihad was now carried into those bordering countries that participated in AMISOM against Al-Shabaab.³³⁵

³³¹ Vidino, Pantucci, and Kohlmann, “Bringing Global Jihad to the Horn of Africa,” 221–22.

³³² Steinberg, “Regionaler Jihad in Ostafrika. [Regional Jihad in East Africa.]” 5.

³³³ Steinberg, 7.

³³⁴ Curran, “Global Ambitions.”

³³⁵ Funmi Abioye, “Terrorist Groups in Africa: Quo Vadis?,” *Afrique et Développement [Africa and Development]* 44, no. 3 (2019): 19–21.

This regionalization of Al-Shabaab's activities mentioned in this section is due—in particular—to growing military pressure from AU troops. The increasingly vehement calls of the supporters of a global jihad within Al-Shabaab, however, appear to have been at least partially met. The trend from national to international terrorism can certainly be recognized in this aforementioned step. Al-Shabaab is more and more turning against foreign targets in this phase of the jihad—both inside and outside Somalia. With the establishment of Greater Somalia, Al-Shabaab is pursuing at least a regional agenda and, with its Salafist interpretation of Islam, possesses a transnational ideology.³³⁶ Somalia, however, clearly forms the organization's national point of reference.

Objectives: Controlling the seized territory represents another step in Al-Shabaab's strategy. In so doing, the group violently enforces its own ideas of order and thus creates the conditions for the establishment of the Islamic caliphate. Al-Shabaab penalizes violators of Islamic legal norms with punishments, some of them drastic, which are carried out in a purposeful and public manner. With this, Al-Shabaab aims to intimidate and instill fear in the population on the one hand, while on the other, the group seeks to demonstrate its authoritarian control under public scrutiny.³³⁷ Sufficiently extreme examples of how Al-Shabaab imposes Sharia can be found. A highly drastic one is the stoning of a 13-year-old girl in Kismayo for alleged adultery in 2008. She was sentenced to death as an adulteress, although she was said to have been raped.³³⁸ Petty crimes were punished with just as draconian methods. The right hands of two young men were cut off because they were suspected of having committed a theft worth the equivalent of a bit less than \$12.³³⁹ There are also wide-ranging reports of punishments such as lashings or public executions on charges of *riddah*³⁴⁰ or suspected espionage. The Sharia-compliant conduct

³³⁶ Agbiboa, "Terrorism without Borders," 30–31.

³³⁷ Wise, "Al Shabaab," 3–5.

³³⁸ The Associated Press, "Militants Stone to Death Somali Rape Victim, 13," News, NBC News, November 1, 2008, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna27484976>.

³³⁹ Abdrisak Tuuryare, "Somalia's al Shabaab Cuts off Hands of Two Men in Sakow," News, Mareeg.com, February 7, 2019, <https://mareeg.com/somalias-al-shabaab-cuts-off-hands-of-two-men-in-sakow/>.

³⁴⁰ Eng.: Apostasy (Decisive renunciation of faith. In this case, secession from Islam).

of the population in Al-Shabaab's sphere of influence is monitored by a dedicated and extremely strict religious police force.³⁴¹

Strategy Shift: Through time, a shift in Al-Shabaab from their original effort to gain the consent of the local population has given way to governing by terror in some areas. The population seems to approve of Al-Shabaab's at times excessively brutal methods in light of the decline in crime and the guarantee of relative security and stability.³⁴² In conclusion, for Al-Shabaab, the goal of establishing the Grand Caliphate of Somalia will appear to have been achieved when, through the massive use of force, the foreign powers have been driven out of Somalia, Al-Shabaab has taken power in the country, and Sharia law has been introduced.

E. SUMMARY

The analysis of Al-Shabaab establishes that the organization's primary objective can be described as regional and only partially internationalized—because the motivations for the armed struggle that Al-Shabaab leads are primarily ethnic-nationalist. The primary goals of Al-Shabaab are to overthrow the TFG, oust AMISOM, and establish an Emirate on territory inhabited exclusively by ethnic Somalis—though it transcends Somalia's current national borders. Attacks carried out outside Somalia are mostly conducted in countries whose troops are involved in AMISOM. This is an indication of the leitmotif of revenge, which plays a relevant role in al-Shabaab's narrative. The well-developed contacts that Al-Shabaab maintains with numerous other Islamist organizations, some of which extend far beyond the region, fit into the group's organizational structure, which can be categorized as network-like. This network structure is supplemented by hierarchical elements, and the hierarchy makes it possible to control al-Shabaab's largely autonomous cells to a required degree. Al-Shabaab's membership in the much larger organization Al-Qaeda illustrates an additional, overarching, network level in which Al-Shabaab is integrated. The commitment to global jihad is emphasized only minimally and through a

³⁴¹ Oscar Gakuo Mwangi, "State Collapse, Al-Shabaab, Islamism, and Legitimacy in Somalia," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 13, no. 4 (December 1, 2012): 513–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2012.725659>; Afriyie, "Terrorism and Its Negative Effects on Sub-Saharan Africa," 68.

³⁴² Weber, "Al-Shabab: Jugend ohne Gott [Al-Shabab: Youth without God]," 26.

few attacks on Western interests—like the bombing of a UN building in 2013.³⁴³ This fundamental ideology of jihadist Salafism is very clearly used by Al-Shabaab. As a result, Al-Shabaab is fundamentally not limited to certain ethnic groups or narrowly defined national influxes, but rather includes all Muslims across nation-state borders. This broad inclusion results in a relevant proportion of multinational memberships, which makes Al-Shabaab's membership composition stand out.

Regarding al-Shabaab's financing, the analysis shows that their sources of funding are diversified. Al-Shabaab's sources of income span external support in the form of donations and individual contributions, membership dues, as well as extensive illicit sources of funding. A special feature that is difficult to classify is the annual tax, paid by the population in the areas controlled by Al-Shabaab. The organization's financial independence from individual sources of revenue allows a certain degree of independence and freedom of decision—a circumstance that proved very relevant after the temporary loss of one of the central sources of revenue from the taxation of the movement of goods through the port city of Kismayo, following the capture of the port city by AMISOM in late 2012. Thus, the risk of financial inflows drying up remains significantly minimized. These financial resources are needed to sustain Al-Shabaab's terrorist strategy of violence. Exemplary is the attack on the Westgate Shopping Center in Kenya. Here, Al-Shabaab proved that it can continue to carry out larger attacks, a capability that requires coordination and task sharing between different cells.

³⁴³ Abdi Sheikh, "Somali Islamist Rebels Attack U.N. Base, 22 Dead," Reuters, June 19, 2013, sec. Emerging Markets, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-blast-idUSBRE95I0AJ20130619>.

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IV. COMPARISON

The previous chapters examined and analyzed the two African terrorist organizations Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab in the various aspects of

1. evolution and history
2. command and control, and group structure
3. logistics, financing, and recruiting
4. strategy

The comparative analysis here will provide the structure needed to identify similarities, differences, and the implications that can be derived from those aspects. This chapter thus focuses on summarizing the most important findings from the previous two chapters and examining in greater detail the aspects of both groups that have been identified and the results achieved.

A. THE DIFFERENCES OF ORIGIN

Both Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram have different origins. Boko Haram emerged from the social conflict between the Christian south and the Muslim north, as well as the spread of Islamist and Salafist currents in Nigeria. The group's roots can be traced back to the Yusufiya, which was founded in 2002, and the Nigerian Taliban. The emergence of Boko Haram was characterized by a comparatively quiet phase, which came to an end with the death of Mohammed Yusuf in 2009. In contrast, Al-Shabaab emerged in the context of the collapsing Somali state and was strongly influenced by the accompanying civil war. The origins of the group predate the war—in the AIAI—and can be traced to the ICU in the aftermath of the war. Members of the AIAI were already resistant to the dictatorial regime of Siad Barre. They later fought against the Ethiopian state as well. Afghanistan veterans in the ranks of the AIAI were relevant in establishing initial contacts with Al-Qaeda. Al-Shabaab's emergence in the context of a civil war, left a lasting mark on the organization. Confrontation with resistance and state repression played a relevant role because Al-Shabaab's predecessors first fought the authoritarian regime of the time, then

the intervening Ethiopian troops, and subsequently became successful fighting in the civil war as a militia. Al-Shabaab additionally experienced the disintegration of all state structures in its country of origin.

Boko Haram was almost facing the opposite situation, since Boko Haram emerged in a far more peaceful context, characterized only by minor social and religious conflicts. Boko Haram furthermore lacks an early connection to Al-Qaeda, which Al-Shabaab had due to the Afghanistan veterans who socialized together and networked with each other. The emergence and development of both organizations, though, were favored by comparable conditions. Both organizations thrived on a similar combination of weak statehood, local conflicts, and societal problems such as hunger, poverty, and low economic development. In Boko Haram's case, the organization benefited from local conflicts between Christians and Muslims as well as from extensive poverty in Nigeria. In turn, the rise of Al-Shabaab was fueled by the disintegrating Somali state and the raging civil war.

The histories of both organizations' genesis, incorporate individual characteristics that are responsible for the creation and development of the respective organizations. Boko Haram particularly benefited from Nigeria's social division. It also profited from the repressive actions of the Nigerian state. Boko Haram repeatedly provoked Nigerian institutions and the government, intending to cause a violent overreaction by the state. Boko Haram intended to diminish public support for the state by exploiting these governmental overreactions. In the case of Al-Shabaab, its emergence and development were particularly furthered by state collapse, civil wars, and foreign intervention in Somalia. The lack of a central organizing force only enabled the group to assert itself as a fighting militia against other actors in the Somali civil war. The broad support of the local population for Al-Shabaab was won, at least temporarily, by its establishment of a minimum of security and stability within the framework of the ICU and resistance to foreign intervention.

B. DEVELOPMENTAL TRANSFORMATIONS

The trajectories of both groups include key events that resulted in a fundamental change in the respective group. In the case of Boko Haram, this change manifests in fissioning and is the result of weakening and subsequent radicalization. The organization was severely weakened after clashes with Nigerian security forces and the death of Mohammed Yusuf in the summer of 2009. It was practically defeated. From this position of weakness, Boko Haram underwent a fundamental transformation, shifting toward a militant orientation under its new leader, Shekau. He brought about a comprehensive radicalization, which manifested itself in a much more brutal approach and propagandistic alignment with the ideologically uncompromising IS. Boko Haram, however, was able to avoid internationalization because the group bifurcated, and while one wing (*Ansaru*) went international, the other (Boko Haram) focused domestically on Nigeria. Cross-border incidents involving Boko Haram do not alter this. Notwithstanding the contacts of some Boko Haram cadres with AQIM and Al-Shabaab, the lack of direct links to a transnational organization such as Al-Qaeda seems to preclude an internationalization of its activities.

Al-Shabaab's development is characterized by continuous change and is considerably more complex than that of Boko Haram. After Ethiopia intervened in 2006, Al-Shabaab transformed itself from a militia into an insurgent guerrilla movement. By 2009, Al-Shabaab had strengthened enough to wage conventional war against AU troops. In 2011, increasing military pressure from neighboring states was instrumental in transforming Al-Shabaab into a terrorist organization. Thus, Al-Shabaab not only experienced a phase of weakening and subsequent radicalization, as was the case with Boko Haram, but it repeatedly had to adapt to the new situation under pressure from foreign intervention. This makes Al-Shabaab appear particularly adaptable compared to Boko Haram, as the organization has always had to evolve to continue to exist successfully. During Al-Shabaab's development, it also merged with Al-Qaeda. However, the Somali group does not represent a regional offshoot of Al-Qaeda but remains an independent organization. At no time did Al-Shabaab submit to instructions from Pakistan. This also shows that Al-Shabaab's regionalization can only be indirectly attributed to its ties to Al-Qaeda. This is because Al-Shabaab committed its first attack abroad as early as 2010,

which can be interpreted as the first sign of regionalization. This regionalization of Al-Shabaab's terrorist activities then increasingly manifested itself in 2013 with the attack on the Westgate Shopping Center. The main reason for this is the increasing military pressure from neighboring states. The supporters' demands for a global jihad beyond Somalia's borders seem to have gained only limited acceptance within the group. This primary orientation toward its own regional goals shows a difference from Boko Haram, which is active with more of a national than a regional scope.

C. LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab are both organizations with network characteristics. They both combine hierarchical and network elements along with additional characteristics that go beyond the two categories of hierarchy and network. Also, both organizations are characterized by a pronounced decentralization of their structures. Yet the respective tendency toward hierarchical or network characteristics shows a clear divergence between the two groups.

A comparative analysis of the organizational structures reveals that Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab are fundamentally similar, but they have distinct structural differences. The two organizations possess a certain type of inner circle of "Leadership," which is characterized by analogous elements. Both Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram have a leader at the top of their organization, in either case in the rank of an Emir. This Emir, for his part, is supported in both cases by a Shura, which is supposed to assist him in decision making and leading the group and serves as a representative of the organization's leading members. In the case of Boko Haram, there are two deputy Emirs between the leader and the Shura. This intermediate-level is absent in Al-Shabaab's hierarchy. These subtle variations in the leadership structure seem to have an impact on leadership practices in the respective organizations. Within Boko Haram, the dualism between the Emir and the Shura is reduced by the intermediary deputies. On the other hand, the Emir seems to act more autonomously here, as he can make important decisions without involving the council. As for Al-Shabaab, the Emir appears to be much more powerful, which was especially true of Ahmed Abdi Godane. Additionally, the regional commanders make some of their decisions without

involving the Shura. Consequently, the Shura's position within Al-Shabaab appears to be somewhat weaker. The leadership of both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab appears fundamentally decentralized. However, the leadership culture of the respective leaders differs. Al-Shabaab leader Godane deliberately appointed foreigners to key positions and used the security ministry under his command to eliminate his opponents within the group, thus making himself unassailable internally. Shekau, as leader of Boko Haram, made brutal examples to maintain his position despite criticism from within his own ranks.

Both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have specific units below the top leadership level that cover special tasks and areas of expertise within the organization. The two organizations share some commonalities in various areas. For example, Al-Shabaab's structure includes ministries of defense, finance, religion, and information. In addition, this organization has a security ministry, an interior ministry, and a religious police force. The security ministry is a type of Al-Shabaab intelligence service directly controlled by the Emir and is thus a powerful tool for enforcing his claim to leadership. The Ministry of the Interior and the religious police, in turn, illustrate the group's claim to enforce its own ideas of order within the conquered territory. Both institutions specifically serve to implement Sharia law. In the case of Al-Shabaab, the regional commanders also have a broad sphere of responsibility, as they represent their region both militarily and politically on their own. Boko Haram also has units responsible for certain issues, like Al-Shabaab's committees or ministries. However, these are not specified in more detail and appear to be directly integrated into the Shura.

Below the top leadership layer, both Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram are basically regionally structured. However, the breakdown is based on different aspects. While Al-Shabaab divides its operational area into four regions based on the directions of the compass, Boko Haram chooses a division based on states and other areas in the border region around Lake Chad. Acknowledging this underscores Boko Haram's focus on Nigeria. It also reflects that Nigeria has a stable state with a well-defined federal system, while Somalia does not. In this regard, the virtually stateless environment in Somalia favors the structural development of Al-Shabaab, while the structural development of Boko Haram, which operates in a functioning Nigerian state environment, is subject to

significantly different influencing factors. These external influencing factors thus have a noticeable impact on the different organizational logics of the two terrorist organizations.

The two organizations have autonomously operating regional commanders, who in turn have local commanders under their command. A detailed examination, though, reveals some differences between the two organizations in this aspect as well. Boko Haram's individual cells are arranged below the local commanders, which lends the organizational structure network-like characteristics. In contrast, Al-Shabaab's breakdown in regional structure reflects the organization's two-part strategy. On the one hand, Al-Shabaab has a military section, within which local field commanders organize and lead the fight against the grouping's opponents. On the other hand, Al-Shabaab has an administration for each of the subdivided regions, which serves to control the conquered territories. The administration's main tasks include enforcing Sharia law, providing military support, and providing services to the local population. This makes it clear that Al-Shabaab's organizational structure reflects the characteristic dualism of conquest and control.

In contrast to the structural orientation of Al-Shabaab, the simpler regional structure of Boko Haram fits the organization's plainly terrorist strategy. This could well be due to Boko Haram's focus on increasing the organization's survivability to the detriment of its military effectiveness, which must be seen against the backdrop of the state's repression and its near dissolution in the summer of 2009. Consequently, in terms of organizational structure, Boko Haram specializes more in terrorist attacks than in conventional warfare. In summary, both groups can be understood as decentralized organizations with network characteristics. However, the tendency of their characteristics toward hierarchy or network varies. On the one hand, this variance is due to the respective strategies of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, and on the other hand, it also depends on the specific point in time in the respective course of development. As a result, Boko Haram tends to move toward the network, while Al-Shabaab tends toward the hierarchy.

D. PHASES OF EXPANSION

Both groups experienced phases of expansion. They also exercised varying degrees of control over conquered territories. In some cases, Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram tried to

impose their ideas of order. Two phases of expansion can be identified for Boko Haram. While the organization was able to expand comparatively peacefully in northern Nigeria between 2005 and 2008 and almost establish state structures, it succeeded in bringing large parts of northern Nigeria under its control once again from 2014 onward, following its weakening and subsequent radicalization, and proclaimed a caliphate. This expansion also included parts of neighboring states in the border region with Nigeria. However, it is worth pointing out that Boko Haram's focus is not regional but national. Thus, Nigeria is the focus of the group. Furthermore, control of the territory seized seems to be restricted more to the military than to administrative aspects. Al-Shabaab, on the other hand, expanded in multiple phases, restricting itself predominantly to Somali territory. Unlike Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab attempted to implement its own ideas of order by at times exercising state rule over the occupied territories. In addition, Al-Shabaab at times waged a conventional war against AU troops. In this way, it differs from Boko Haram, which usually fights asymmetrically. Only Al-Shabaab's rule had a state character, at least at times. As with Boko Haram, however, the organization's focus remained on its own country of origin and did not take on regional dimensions.

The course of development of Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram shows another parallel. Over time, both organizations had to deal with internal conflicts regarding their orientation and goals. However, these disputes were conducted with different intensities within both organizations, had different effects, and were resolved in different ways. In the case of Boko Haram, conflicts arose over time about the group's objectives and use of violence. Sections of the group around Mamman Nur were particularly critical of the numerous killings of Nigerian Muslims. The suicide attack on the regional UN mission in Abuja in 2011 illustrated the desire to increasingly attack foreign targets as well as Christians instead. This conflict appears ideologically motivated. Nevertheless, Shekau's intransigent stance led to a group, *Ansaru*, splitting off from Boko Haram. It is striking that this is only a splinter group, which means that the group did not fragment further. After several years of cooperation, the breakaway group appears to have reintegrated into Boko Haram. During Al-Shabaab's development, there were also disputes about its orientation and goals. Within the group, there has been a nationally and an internationally oriented wing. While one wing

has focused on national goals within Somalia, the other has focused on global jihad. Close contacts with Al-Qaeda also seem to be partly responsible for this conflict. The main difference, however, is that this internal conflict seems to have been far less intense than it was with Boko Haram. Despite the differences of opinion, the organization has not yet fragmented. A comparative analysis shows that the organizations have some similarities in terms of their origins, formation, and development, but that Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have distinctive characteristics.

E. FINANCING

Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab both have a combination of sources of funding, which are superficially similar. A clear difference emerges when looking at the amount of annual revenues of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. The latter has much greater financial reserves, especially at peak times.

Al-Shabaab has established a comprehensive tax system, which is the group's main source of income, that has temporarily allowed it to participate in almost all social and economic activities in Somalia. Al-Shabaab has been able to collect enormous sums in Somalia at times from the immensely profitable tax on coal. In the case of Boko Haram, one very specific source is membership fees, which have been collected since the organization's inception. Complementing this, Boko Haram appears to have a specialization in raiding as well as looting, which generates significant funds. Overall, it can be stated that both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab fund themselves rather intensely on the shoulders of the local population. The sources of funding of both organizations reveal their ability to finance their own activities independently of external support. Both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab draw varying degrees of funding from abroad—mostly in the form of donations—and while donations are quite profitable and represent a somewhat steady flow for the total annual budget of both Boko Haram and especially Al-Shabaab, such payments represent only a comparatively small portion of their total revenues. Ransoms from kidnappings also play a rather subordinate role for both organizations and are rather less profitable as an individual contribution to the organizations' total annual earnings.

A larger distinction between the two organizations can be seen when considering the sustainability of their financing sources. While both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab benefit from the weak state structures in their respective regions, the lack of an unrestricted state monopoly (including the use of force) makes it possible for both organizations to finance their various illicit activities. In turn, this makes the financing sources stemming from the lack of state structures sustainable and secure, since these structural problems on the government side are difficult to change and require a lengthy process. In more detail, this means that while Boko Haram has very broad-based funding from multiple sources, the group's illegal activities are difficult for a weak state to contain. In the case of Al-Shabaab, revenue from its tax system is heavily dependent on access to ports and markets, as well as control of territory. With AMISOM's territorial gains, the terrorist group thus initially appeared to lose revenue, which argues against the sustainability of this source of funding. Yet Al-Shabaab has managed, on the one hand, to continue to earn from ongoing trade in a secondary role through criminal networks and appropriate contacts. Beyond that, Al-Shabaab has the opportunity to expand and more intensively pursue pre-existing illicit sources of revenue. As a result, Al-Shabaab is also able to secure sustainable funding for its organization. Both groups seem to use criminal activities primarily to finance their operations, and not yet as the organization's main focus.

F. APPROACHES TO RECRUITING

The motivation for jihad causes as much a breakdown in society as it does the establishment of social ties and connections. It becomes apparent that both Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram are able to recruit new members to bolster their ranks and improve their attack capabilities. Youth in the core regions of both organizations are so desperate due to increasing poverty and unemployment that they become willing subjects and/or victims of both groups' recruitment efforts relatively easily. The success of these recruiting efforts is evident in the estimated number of militants; both Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram comprise thousands of fighters. The two groups predominantly recruit their members from among young men. The members' social origins are not a determinant factor in the overall consideration, as they have little variance. Boko Haram's high number of members may be attributable to Nigeria's high population density, which results in a higher number of

potential recruits. In contrast, in the case of Al-Shabaab, it appears that Somalia is less densely populated, but the organization has a different recruitment approach than Boko Haram. The necessity for large-scale recruiting lies in the fact that Al-Shabaab requires a larger number of men to capture and control territory and fight against AU troops.

The motivations of the recruits who join seem to be similar for Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. For the most part, their motivation is rooted in general social problems, hopelessness among young people, and the region's overall sluggish economy. In Somalia, it was the disintegration within society due to conflict and trauma that significantly debilitated the society and encouraged the mobilization of the population to armed struggle. The clans also lost their legitimacy because they were involved in conflicts and corruption. Al-Shabaab, on the other hand, propagates a community exceeding the subclan level and a rule which has a geographic range that corresponds to this.

The two organizations promise a supposed way out to frustrated young men and offer financial incentives in poverty-stricken regions. The recruitment of foreign fighters and their respective status within Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab is distinguishable. Boko Haram consists primarily of Nigerians, who are only partially complemented by fighters recruited from the border region with Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. In comparison to Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab shows almost the opposite characteristics. In this organization, although the majority of ordinary fighters are local Somalis, foreign fighters are a sought-after resource for personnel, who in turn play important roles in the organization. In some cases, these foreign fighters even assume important leadership positions within Al-Shabaab.

G. COOPERATION WITH OTHER GROUPS

While both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have links abroad and relationships with other jihadist groups, these ties have different characteristics and are of varying intensity. There are clear differences between Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram in terms of cooperation with other jihadist organizations. For instance, Boko Haram maintains a supportive relationship with AQIM, which demonstrates that the group is willing to establish a connection that goes against its particular ideological interpretation if this is considered

beneficial to the group's own cause. In contrast, Al-Shabaab is far more regionally oriented and is closely connected to this framework. These collaborations, on the other hand, are scarcely effective beyond the region of East Africa. To date, it has not been possible to prove beyond all doubt that there is a working relationship between Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. However, Al-Shabaab has close ties to both al-Hijra in Kenya and AQAP in Yemen. Boko Haram's relations abroad, on the other hand, are much more focused on the group's country of origin than is the case with Al-Shabaab. For example, the aforementioned relationships with other organizations such as AQIM are far less intensive and numerous than is the case with Al-Shabaab. Unlike Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab has close ties to Al-Qaeda, although it has maintained a clear autonomy from the parent organization despite their cooperation. Al-Shabaab is explicitly not a regional offshoot in Somalia but remains a completely separate organization. However, it enjoys the benefits of Al-Qaeda affiliation, such as increased international visibility and access to the parent organization's financial and recruitment sources.

Both terrorist organizations also have ties to supporting third countries, Al-Shabaab to a greater extent than Boko Haram. In the case of the latter, the connection to Saudi Arabia can only be suspected based on circumstantial evidence. In contrast, the effective support of Al-Shabaab by Qatar and especially Eritrea has been demonstrated evidentially on several occasions in the past. In this respect, Al-Shabaab's unique characteristic compared to Boko Haram is its cooperation with Eritrea, which has even extended to operational levels. The above-mentioned variations in the degree to which the groups have international ties and the recruitment of foreigners into their ranks point strongly to a difference between Boko Haram's and Al-Shabaab's scope of operations. While foreign fighters play a much larger role within Al-Shabaab and the organization is closely networked in other East African countries, Boko Haram has only sporadic foreigners in its own ranks and maintains fewer intensive relations abroad. This shows that Boko Haram has characteristics of national terrorism, while Al-Shabaab as an organization tends to move between national and international terrorism. Al-Shabaab also exhibits characteristics of transnational terrorism.

H. STRATEGY AND IDEOLOGY

The main distinction is Boko Haram's very brutal approach, which attempts to enforce its ideological sovereignty with a hard hand. In terms of their motivation, both organizations can be classified as dedicated to fundamentalism or religious terrorism. Both Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram represent a Sunni-Salafist current of Islam that belongs to the type of jihadist Salafists. Both organizations also fall somewhere between the two extremes of the nationalists and the anti-Western internationalists. Furthermore, in both terror organizations, the use of violence through armed jihad plays a key part. Gradual differences, though, appear to exist in terms of the individual trends between the two organizations when it comes to categorizing them into the various schools of thought on jihadist Salafism. Since Boko Haram focuses primarily on the fight in its homeland against its close enemy, the Nigerian government, this organization can largely be classified as belonging to the nationalist school of jihadist Salafism. Only the internationally oriented splinter group *Ansaru* can be classified more as anti-Western internationalists. In contrast, Al-Shabaab is much more difficult to categorize between the two poles of nationalists and anti-Western internationalists.

Al-Shabaab is shaped by an ambivalent tension between national and global jihad. It appears that these two different bearings are considerably less symmetrically distributed within the Somali organization than in the case of Boko Haram—which led to fissions in this group. One stream within Al-Shabaab is focused on Somalia and propagates the fight against the near enemy, while the other stream within the organization advocates a more regional or global jihad beyond Somalia against the far enemy. Both currents within Al-Shabaab assume a clear distinction between believers and infidels as part of their ideology. This *takfirism* is similar for both Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. Both Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram want to establish an Islamic state or caliphate based on their interpretation of Sharia law. However, the two organizations differ in terms of specific regional circumstances. Boko Haram intends to establish the Islamic state, through which the possibility of Muslim rule in Nigeria is to be guaranteed. Al-Shabaab, in contrast, seeks the unification of Somalia, which is to be incorporated into an Islamic caliphate.

Ideologically, both organizations are based on similar foundations, a combination of Islamism, Salafism, and a varying degree of nationalism. The roots of each organization's ideologies lie in the local historical context. In Boko Haram's case, the roots lie in the close ties to northern Nigeria's Islamic heritage. In Al-Shabaab's case, the ideology is based on the Islamic revival movements in Somalia. Despite the similarities, the respective organizations appear different in many ways. Al-Shabaab's imprint is based on the spread of Wahhabi movements in Somalia since the end of the 1980s and in the influence of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood on Al-Shabaab's predecessor organization, the AIAI. Al-Shabaab's objective is to link to a glorified history of the sultanate. In contrast, Boko Haram's reference to the past is more clearly evident in its strongly anti-Western attitude. This manifests itself in Boko Haram's strong criticism of Western influences and the dominance of English as a reference to British colonial rule in Nigeria.

I. TERRORIST STRATEGY OF VIOLENCE

For both terrorist organizations, the use of violence is an effective means of achieving their goals. This becomes apparent when examining the different strategies of Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. Fighting in the form of armed jihad is important for both groups, which can be categorized as jihadist-Salafist. The massive use of violence thus represents a central strategy for achieving their goals. Both Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram follow a terrorist strategy of violence. In its projection of violence, Boko Haram is considerably more focused on the civilian population than Al-Shabaab. Figure 6 illustrates the average target distribution against civilians, with a proportion of 37 percent for Boko Haram and merely 10 percent for Al-Shabaab. This highlights the point that Boko Haram is predominantly a representation of national terrorism.

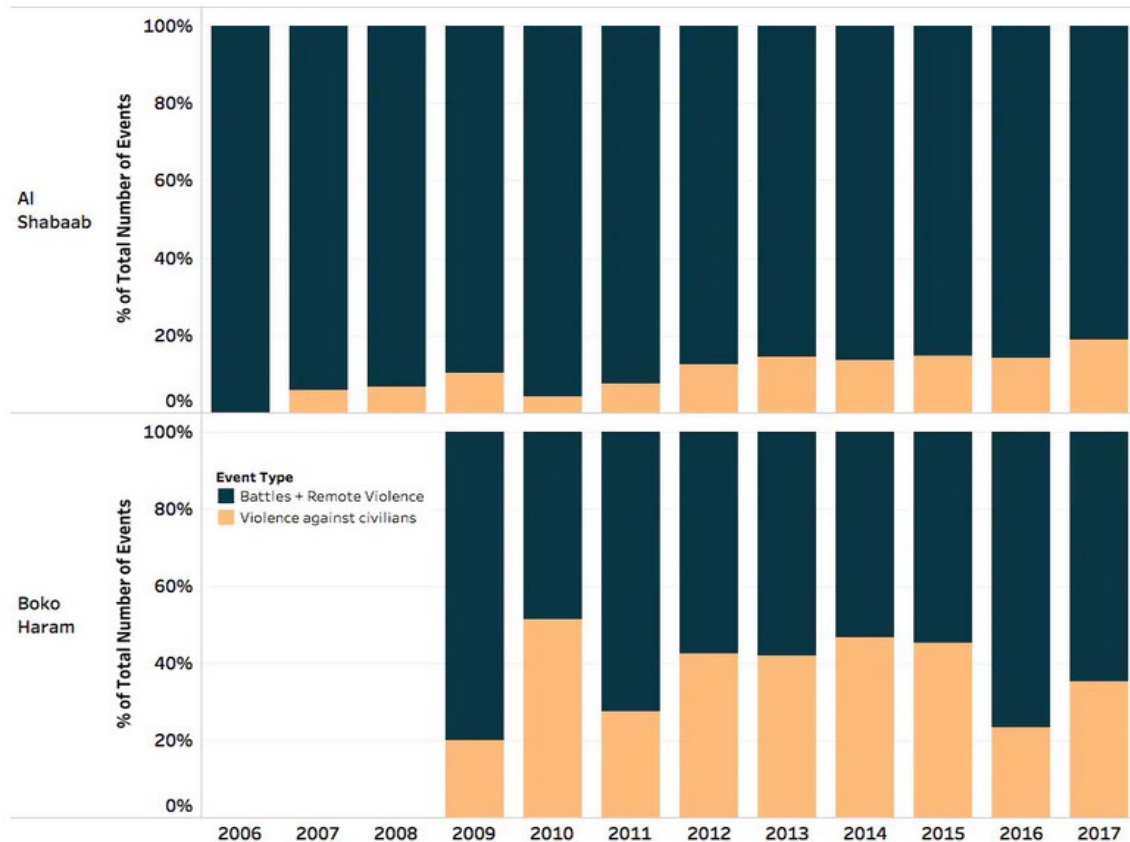


Figure 6. Proportions of Conflict Activity by Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram Directed against Civilians, August 2006 to August 2017.³⁴⁴

Al-Shabaab also makes use of the terrorist strategy of violence, but its strategy has been more multilayered from the very beginning. Unlike Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab operates within a two-part strategy, the first part of which represents the waging of armed jihad in a variety of forms. The second part of the group’s strategy encompasses the control of conquered territories and the implementation of its concept of order. The first part of the strategy employs Al-Shabaab’s full range of use of force from terrorist attacks to guerrilla tactics to conventional warfare. Unlike Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab’s strategy of terrorist violence is only one part of its approach.

³⁴⁴ Source: Clionadh Raleigh et al., “Boko Haram vs. al-Shabab: What Do We Know about Their Patterns of Violence?,” *Washington Post*, October 2, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/10/02/boko-haram-vs-al-shabaab-what-do-we-know-about-their-patterns-of-violence/>.

The second part of the strategy is that Al-Shabaab has proceeded in a focused, persistent, and extensive way. Al-Shabaab's control took on a near-state character, and Sharia law has been enforced through the systematic use of violence and punishment within the population. Al-Shabaab's clear intention here is to create a state to compete with the TFG. The terrorist group's attempt to establish a caliphate is aimed at replacing or ousting the civilian government, a move supported by international entities. This highlights that Al-Shabaab has partially evolved from purely national terrorism. What was initially clearly a national character has become more international under increasing foreign pressure. Nonetheless, Somalia remains the group's clear center of gravity. Al-Shabaab's strategy may appear to be more complex than that of Boko Haram, but Al-Shabaab has remarkably returned to the classic terrorist strategy of violence in its subsequent course. This bolsters the proposition that the classic terrorist violence strategy is particularly employed by weaker actors. Both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have repeatedly reverted to this strategy when military pressure on their respective organizations increased, and they found themselves in positions of weakness.

J. CREATION OF STATE STRUCTURES

Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram are pursuing the creation of state structures of different proportions. Boko Haram focuses largely on Nigeria, whereas Al-Shabaab appears to be claiming regional territory to establish a Greater Somalia, a state structure that goes beyond Somalia's current borders. The internationalists within the Somali organization even aspire to the creation of a much more encompassing caliphate. The *Umayyad* dynasty of the eighth century serves as a model for them. Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab both seek to overthrow the current governments in their spheres of influence to facilitate the establishment of the Islamic states envisioned by them. In contrast to Boko Haram, which primarily aims to eliminate the Nigerian government, Al-Shabaab's goal is not only to abolish the Somali government but also to remove all foreign troops from the country. For Al-Shabaab, controlling the conquered territories and enforcing its concept of order is a central factor of their overall strategy and is not seen as just an end-state, but is already vigorously implemented in the areas under their control in the form of shadow government. Both organizations share the goal of eliminating all foreign influence in their

home countries. A core goal of Boko Haram is to eliminate all traces of Western civilization in Nigeria. It is clear from the open-source literature that, so far, no further-reaching political concepts of order have been publicly published beyond the outlined specifics of the goals of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. Neither of the two organizations appears to have detailed its respective objectives or to have disseminated more specific propaganda concerning the form of state structures to be established.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COMBATTING TERRORISM IN AFRICA

This thesis has aimed to answer to the following two-fold research question: *What determines the strengths and weaknesses of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, respectively, and how do these factors contribute to each group's vulnerabilities? Furthermore, can identifying common or distinct patterns and characteristics of the organizations help combat them?*

My hypothesis was that the comparison of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab would reveal commonalities and organizational differences between both, which in turn influenced how the two organizations operate. By tying the observable results of the comparison to the available literature on terrorist organizational structures, I discovered the dichotomy between centralized and decentralized organizations only partially applying to both case studies.

A. FINDINGS

Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab both seem to be generally representative of terrorist organizations in Africa in terms of their underlying philosophy, ideology, and modus operandi. A closer look at Boko Haram's and Al-Shabaab's respective organizational structures revealed the relevance of flexibility. The potential to change, to adapt to different external influences and local conditions—and thus evolve—proves to be a fundamental prerequisite for successful existence as a terrorist group. This ability to adapt enables the organization to successfully evade prosecution, sanctions, and, if necessary, observation, making them much harder to combat. Furthermore, the ability to adapt and change enables the organization to maintain an influx of funds, recruitments, and even change strategy (if required). Both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have demonstrated over time that they are capable of operating in different regions and countries. They both have shown their adaptability and, occasionally, they both blatantly changed their capabilities, strategies, and tactics.

The comparative examination of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab provides a nuanced picture of both African terror organizations and demonstrates that, despite regional differences, commonalities can be identified between them. Notwithstanding their different origins and the specific contexts in which they emerged; the evolution of both groups was fueled by structural conditions that were very similar. In their respective countries of origin, the two groups were able to benefit from a combination of weak statehood, local conflicts, and social problems such as hunger, poverty, and low economic development.

A closer look at the emergence, development, and strategies of the two Islamist terrorist organizations from two different parts of Africa illustrated that the religious agenda embraced by Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab represents merely a part of their actual motives. It became clear during the analysis that the spread of both groups and the terrorism they propagate must be considered in close connection with other factors. In the broadest terms, these factors include the political and economic conditions in the regions. In addition, there is a sense of relative disadvantage to which potential supporters of the organizations feel exposed. Further driving factors for group members seem to be a low level of trust in state authorities and the frustration of marginalized groups. Thus, it is by no means coincidental that the birthplaces of both organizations are located in precisely those areas where high unemployment and limited access to education significantly diminish any prospects for young people. Moreover, it is in these very regions that people join a terrorist organization as a means of social advancement and improved living standards, of escaping the effects of failed and corrupt states, and no longer being a victim of injustice, deprivation, and despair. Both organizations' chosen Salafist agenda and anti-Western mindset serves as a useful instrument to mobilize society. Equally, the endgame of each of the terrorist organizations discussed is entirely political and not religious, despite their claims. Their underlying goal is to overthrow the existing political systems and implement their own idea of social order.

The discussion of Islamist terrorism in Africa shows that it is an integral phenomenon. A look at the two terrorist organizations, Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, reveals the two entities use different strategies and take different organizational forms to achieve their respective ideological and political goals. Although their outward aspects

appear similar, they can be categorized differently based on their motives and their spatial radius of action. Moreover, the terrorist approach of both groups can be differentiated from the strategies of other non-state armed groups by essential characteristics. This thesis shows that categorizations and distinctions can only be regarded as ideal-typical.

The terrorist groups under consideration in this study seek to violently transform society, the state, politics, and culture based on values and norms considered to be Islamic. This is reflected in their demands for the implementation of Sharia law and a revival of the idealized early days of Islam. Ultimately, fundamentalist or religious terrorism aims to violently take over the prevailing secular state and social order and fundamentally change it in line with its own ideals.

Rather specific factors led to the expansion of Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab. For example, Boko Haram capitalized on religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims and government oppression in Nigeria, while Al-Shabaab took advantage of the civil war, the breakdown of the state, and foreign interventions in Somalia. Following episodes of weakening, both organizations underwent radical transformations, each with significant consequences for the condition of the individual organizations, as well as their aims and approaches. As time passed, the groups each began to extend their operational territories to different degrees—and to control conquered areas in different ways. As Boko Haram spread to the northern borderlands of Nigeria, Al-Shabaab assumed control of vast swaths of Somalia and exercised quasi-state authority for a time. Within this context, the two organizations underwent various internal conflicts regarding their orientation and objectives, which had varying effects on internal cohesion as well as on the further development of the groups. While Boko Haram spawned an international splinter group, *Ansaru*, Al-Shabaab managed to resolve its internal conflicts over a strictly national or global objective while avoiding factionalism.

Both organizations' ideologies have similar foundations and can be described as a combination of Islamist, Salafist, and specifically nationalist elements. The roots of these ideologies stem from the regional contexts of the individual groups. Both Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram belong to the jihadist Salafist categories and can be classified between the nationalist and the anti-Western internationalist schools of thought. The organizations

differ, however, in terms of their classification within the spectrum of jihadist Salafism. For example, Boko Haram tends strongly toward the nationalists, whereas Al-Shabaab occupies an ambivalent position between a nationalist agenda and global jihad.

The two organizations in this study seek to install an Islamic state or caliphate based on their own interpretation of Sharia law and to overthrow regional governments to achieve this goal. Both organizations have different objectives in terms of the boundaries of the state to be established and the range of governments to be overthrown. To accomplish these goals, both organizations employ the terrorist strategy of violence in varying degrees. While Boko Haram acts according to the characteristics of nationalist terrorism and uses a provocation strategy, Al-Shabaab adds further strategic elements. To varying degrees, Al-Shabaab developed in a manner typical of international terrorism and exhibits the characteristics of transnational terrorism. Nonetheless, Al-Shabaab seems to have a distinct regional point of reference in its country of origin, Somalia.

Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab can both be seen as decentralized organizations with network characteristics. Concerning their structures, a somewhat similar setup can be discerned. Both organizations have very similar components that perform identical functions. The subtle differences in structure that have been identified, however, certainly appear to have some impact. One example is the leadership practices of the different organizations. The respective organizations' structural tendencies toward hierarchy or network do vary. Boko Haram adopts a simpler, more terrorist strategy and tends more toward a network structure, while Al-Shabaab, in line with its continued efforts to seize and control more territory, has tended more toward a hierarchy over time.

Independent of external support, both organizations are funded from various legal and illegal sources. These sources are often similar, however, of funding regional characteristics and the groups' different strategies result in the use of specific sources of revenue in each case. As these sources are predominantly driven by difficult-to-change structural problems in the respective region, the organizations' funding is likely sustainable. This sustainability is additionally ensured by the organizations' capability to exploit alternative financing channels and find more creative solutions. Criminal activities are only one means of financing the organizations. Although neither group appears to have

reached a state where they are more criminal than terrorist or political in nature—even though the possibility that individuals within the groups seek mainly to profit financially from such activities cannot be ruled out.

Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram both profit in their efforts to recruit from social problems, lack of prospects, and weak economic development. They also use violent coercion to recruit new members. Additionally, the groups attract foreign jihadists who join out of ideological conviction. Essentially, both organizations have connections abroad as well as ties to other jihadist groups. The character and intensity of these relationships differ, however, between the two organizations. While Al-Shabaab has a strong regional focus, Boko Haram remains nationally oriented, which is why its relations are less intensive compared to those of Al-Shabaab. Meanwhile, Al-Shabaab's relations with Al-Qaeda vary in their autonomy from the parent organization. Both Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab have ties to third countries, and the latter has indeed received verifiable state support.

The findings of this thesis show that Islamist terrorism in Africa is not so much a case of a sudden spread of transnational terrorism in the region, but rather one of national terrorism that has existed in each case for a longer period. Over time it has undergone an international evolution and thus has also taken on some of the characteristics of the transnational terrorism variant. Al-Shabaab's antecedent organizations were already in existence in the 1990s; in the case of Boko Haram, they emerged around the turn of the millennium. During the 2000s, the further development of each group was fostered by a similar combination of structural conditions and specific circumstances. In Al-Shabaab's case, the contacts with the transnational Al-Qaeda probably also played a role to some extent. By the end of the 2000s at the latest, this gradual development led to the groups being able to spread strongly and gain influence in their respective regions. Both the quantity and the quality of terrorist activities in the region significantly increased as part of this process and attracted increased international attention. This led to the perception of a phenomenon encompassing all African crises, an impression that was intensified by the groups' mutual ties. Ultimately, however, despite their occasionally transnational connections, the groups predominantly remained within their regional borders and thus represented a local phenomenon.

Consequently, both groups constitute a threat to security, especially to their home countries and neighboring states in the region. Fragile states in particular can be put at risk in terms of their stability. They will be weakened either by persistent sting tactics and progressively lose legitimacy within the population as a result of their own counterattacks or be unable to withstand the terrorist groups themselves and may even be driven out by them, as in vast parts of Mali and Somalia. By contrast, the civilian population in the affected regions is subject to increasing violence and lives in constant fear of the terrorist threat. Simultaneously, as stability declines, economic development in the region becomes increasingly difficult.

At present, Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram pose a rather indirect danger to the Western world. Europe, however, is still dealing with the significant impact of the destabilization of the regions in the African crisis areas. As the refugee crisis of 2015 showed, Africa's governmental and societal problems can also become an important topic for European domestic policy. Without a doubt, the threat of Islamist terrorism is one of the different causes of people fleeing a region. There are also economic ramifications, such as the threat posed by Somali pirates to the trade route in the Gulf of Aden. Additionally, as the spheres of influence of regional organizations grow, possible areas of retreat for transnational terrorism once again open. Eventually, this creates the opportunity for the threat of attacks in Europe as well as the United States to increase again. Islamist terrorism in this region does not yet pose an immediate threat to the West, but it is a worrisome phenomenon requiring the attention of Western governments.

Islamist terrorism in Africa is a phenomenon with many facets and comprises far more organizations than the two analyzed in this thesis. The selected cases have allowed a more detailed examination of important manifestations of the phenomenon, but there is certainly a great amount of further research that needs to be carried out to achieve a more holistic picture. For example, Islamist terrorism in Africa is developing at a very dynamic pace, and in this regard, the IS's role, which has only briefly been mentioned in this thesis, is likely to be of even greater significance in the future.

B. IMPLICATIONS FOR COMBATING TERRORISM IN AFRICA

Extremist groups, especially those with ties to IS and the Al-Qaeda organizations, have become a major problem in various areas of the African continent—not least due to their wide geographical presence and cross-border operations.³⁴⁵ This underlines the truism that terrorism respects neither political nor geographic boundaries. And while statistics show that the number of terrorist attacks on the African continent has leveled off a bit since an all-time high in 2014/15, there has been a noticeable stop with an upward curve again since 2017, as depicted in Figure 7. This curve shows the reversal of a short-term downward trend, which leads to the conclusion that terrorist activities deserve increased attention and call for action.

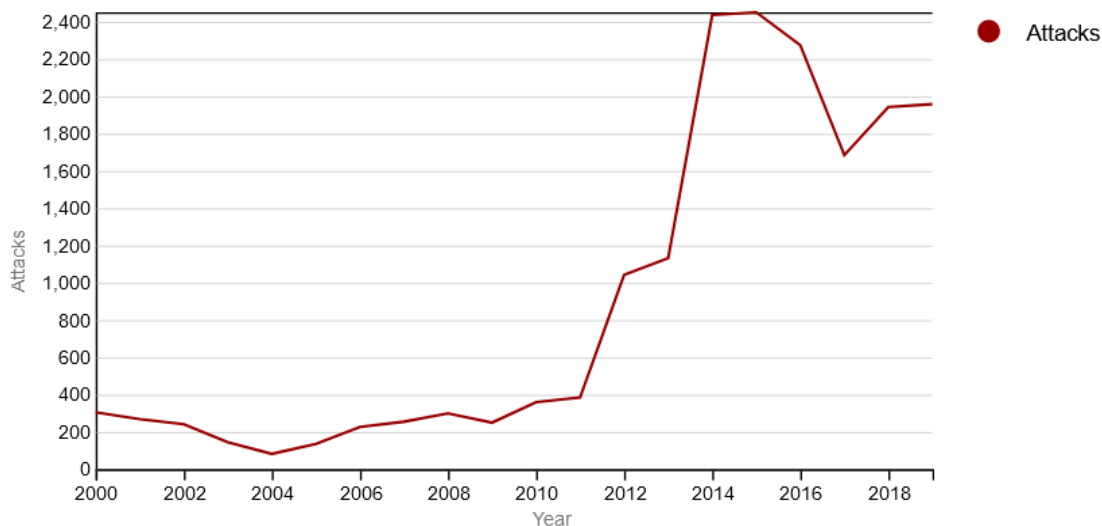


Figure 7. Terrorist Attacks in Africa, 2000–2019.³⁴⁶

It is clear that a promising counterterrorism effort requires pronounced multidimensionality to successfully counter the proliferation of terrorism on the African

³⁴⁵ “African Militant Islamist Groups Set Record for Violent Activity,” *Africa Center for Strategic Studies* (blog), July 21, 2020, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-militant-islamist-groups-new-record-violent-activity/>.

³⁴⁶ Source: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), “The Global Terrorism Database (GTD).”, Total of incidents reported in timeframe: 17,857.

continent.³⁴⁷ International voices, such as U.S. professor Bruce Hoffman, Peter Neumann of London's renowned King's College, and former CIA analyst Bruce Riedel of the Washington-based think tank Brookings, also see the purely military fight against terrorism as having failed. They and other strategists from international institutions, including the UN as well as various intelligence agencies, are rethinking how to successfully combat terrorist organizations.³⁴⁸ Other researchers emphasize that the phenomena of terrorism eclipse the underlying problem of African insecurities. They emphasize that the current measures against radicalization and terrorism do not sufficiently reflect the interests of the African population, but rather the strategic interests "of African incumbents of power and their international collaborators."³⁴⁹ The critique of mostly kinetic approaches to counterterrorism and the failure to adequately incorporate local- and region-specific African needs and circumstances is discussed in the following section.

1. Cross-Border

Currently, nearly half a dozen relevant terrorist organizations, including Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, are active on the African continent, plus a multitude of splinter groups and non-affiliated small groups.³⁵⁰ It is important to look closely at the prevailing local conditions in each case, as there is no "global monolith" of jihadist terror in particular.³⁵¹ The previous chapters have demonstrated that although both Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram were initially active exclusively in their countries of origin, they have spread (with varying intensity) across borders. Islamic extremist groups tend to operate alongside other active terror organizations such as ethnic separatists, criminal entities, and communal militia gangs. Some of the most affected nations include Burkina Faso and Mali, where

³⁴⁷ Forest, "Crime-Terror Interactions in Sub-Saharan Africa," 16.

³⁴⁸ Georg Mascolo, "Mit Soft Power gegen den Terror [With soft power against terror]," News, Süddeutsche.de, February 14, 2016, <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/terrorismus-was-wirklich-gegen-terror-hilft-1.2856926>.

³⁴⁹ Olawale Ismail, "Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in West Africa: Implications for African and International Security," *Conflict, Security & Development* 13, no. 2 (2013): 228–29.

³⁵⁰ National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), "The Global Terrorism Database (GTD)."

³⁵¹ John C. Amble and Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Jihadist Radicalization in East Africa: Two Case Studies," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 37, no. 6 (2014): 538.

most of the terrorist activities have been taking place.³⁵² This phenomenon was the driving factor for the governments concerned to decide to cooperate with each other to counter the cross-border generation of money, the exchange of information and weapons between the groups, and the exchange of know-how. This highlights the need for cross-border, supra-state, and multi-organizational counterterrorism cooperation.

The porousness of border areas favors the conduct of operations of a cross-border nature. It enables fighters to evade the grip of the institution fighting or pursuing them—who have no means of action on the other side of the border—by evasion or flight. The same principle essentially applies to the establishment and operation of recruitment and training bases, as well as to the conduct of arms smuggling.³⁵³ This circumstance requires a cross-border law enforcement capability for authorities fighting terrorism. However, this must go beyond mere paperwork and must be able to manifest itself in the real world, even in the short term. An example of this approach is the G5 Sahel Joint Force troops, which have the possibility of cross-border activity.³⁵⁴

Meanwhile, African scholars regard the most promising means of intensifying and improving the quality of regional cooperation—which is regarded as an essential prerequisite for effective counterterrorism—in the purposeful pursuit of the idea of Pan-Africanism.³⁵⁵ As one step towards this overarching goal, regional cooperation is recognized throughout Africa as one of the most promising and effective mechanisms for combating terrorism. As early as 1999, under the impact of the attacks in Kenya and Tanzania in the spring and summer of the previous year, the OAU adopted the “OAU

³⁵² Arieff, U.S. Counterterrorism Priorities and Challenges in Africa, 3.

³⁵³ Weeraratne, “Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria,” 628.

³⁵⁴ Jennifer G. Cooke, “Understanding the G5 Sahel Joint Force: Fighting Terror, Building Regional Security?,” November 15, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/understanding-g5-sahel-joint-force-fighting-terror-building-regional-security>.

³⁵⁵ Gertrude Ansaaku, “Towards a More Effective Regional Counter-Terrorism Cooperation in Africa,” Policy Brief, Fox International Fellowship (Accra: University of Ghana, June 30, 2017), 3, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.25990.57928>.

Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism.”³⁵⁶ Furthermore, subregional organizations in Africa have also been relevant to the continent in peace and security efforts. For example, at the time, it was the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that spearheaded peace initiatives in West Africa when the AU was unsuccessful. Currently, however, the role of ECOWAS has been reduced to that of a contributor (in the form of monitoring units) to the AU’s Continental Early Warning System (CEWS). This role as a sensor gives the various African subregional organizations a relevant role as partners in the fight against terrorism.³⁵⁷ In the case of Boko Haram, for example, its stronger tie to regional Islamists has particular relevance for its expansion. Weeraratne even speaks of it as holding crucial importance. In his opinion, the symbiotic character of mutual benefit between the linked jihadist groups is incentive enough here to leave the subregional level.³⁵⁸ However, these transnational activities of terrorist organizations such as Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram, and their interconnections with other terrorist groups on the African continent and beyond, require measures that clearly transcend the subregional framework in terms of counterterrorism. In these cases, to counter the terrorist threat, interregional strategies are required.³⁵⁹ Such strategies could possibly be culminating in the promotion of the Pan-Africanism that scholars consider to be the most appropriate means for achieving peace, security, and sustainable development in Africa.³⁶⁰

2. Supranational

There have been successful operations against terrorist organizations, such as the deployment of AMISOM, where the African troops succeeded in restricting Al-Shabaab’s sphere of influence in Somalia through the use of military force to such an extent that a

³⁵⁶ African Union (AU), “OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism” (The African Union Commission, July 1, 1999), <https://au.int/en/treaties/oau-convention-prevention-and-combating-terrorism>.

³⁵⁷ Ansaaku, “Towards a More Effective Regional Counter-Terrorism Cooperation in Africa,” 2.

³⁵⁸ Weeraratne, “Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria,” 628.

³⁵⁹ Ansaaku, “Towards a More Effective Regional Counter-Terrorism Cooperation in Africa,” 3.

³⁶⁰ Ansaaku, 3.

large number of Al-Shabaab fighters were killed and one of the terrorist organization's main sources of income was cut off by denying access to Port Kismaiyu.³⁶¹ Nevertheless, African scholars articulate strong criticisms of this approach, pointing out that African responses to terrorism failed to address immediate and ongoing realities.³⁶² Scholars Botha and Graham assess that while there are superregional and supranational activities, these do not sufficiently address essential elements such as internally displaced persons, “gender, or the importance of non-state actors in CT and CVE affairs.” Rather, they conclude that in Africa, the use of military means remains the first choice in counterterrorism. And although the AU has now succeeded in committing itself to the fight against terrorism, with implementation measures already in place, this joint fight is hampered by several factors. The “over-reliance on external support” and “a habit of blaming political will (or lack thereof)” for faltering multilateral reactions to terrorism are regarded as the most significant factors.³⁶³ According to Botha and Graham, the shortage of domestic state capacity is compounding the problem. Other scholars agree and voice the need to move away from a purely military-centric approach to counterterrorism.³⁶⁴ They see instead a need for people-centered measures—that must be based on democratically proven procedures, follow the principles of the rule of law, and guarantee the observance of human rights. Thus, it is up to the international community to support the AU, as it already has the basic prerequisites for counterterrorism on the African continent. The existing capabilities, opportunities, and authorizations must be consistently implemented with the support of the international community.³⁶⁵ There is a need to cut funding directed towards the sole use of military power and channel the same to helping the nations solve the political problems

³⁶¹ Joseph Kivunzi and M. Nzau, “An Evaluation of the Effectiveness and Challenges of Counterterrorism Strategies in Kenya,” *International Journal of Social and Development Concerns* 2, Social and development concerns in Africa (March 2018): 17–18.

³⁶² Botha and Graham, “(Counter-) Terrorism in Africa: Reflections for a New Decade,” 138–39.

³⁶³ Botha and Graham, 139.

³⁶⁴ Eugene Eji, “Mapping the Contours of Terrorism and Counterterrorism in Africa,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Africa* (Routledge, 2021), 45–46.

³⁶⁵ Eji, 47.

they face.³⁶⁶ This is particularly true in those areas where illegitimate African governments—who may have sub-state terrorism problems—are propped up by the external subsidy of the War on Terror.³⁶⁷

Bruno Charbonneau uses the example of Mali to examine the impact of UN peacekeeping and international counterterrorism in Africa.³⁶⁸ Two activities are heavily supported through U.S. counterterrorism activities—which include intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) operations. The United States supports its ISR operations in the region by deploying military personnel and establishing Air Force facilities, for example, in Cameroon and Niger.³⁶⁹ And although voices are proclaiming that “U.S. interventions have led to more extremist violence on the continent, not less,” it becomes apparent that those assets are much needed.³⁷⁰ Notable is the U.S. backing of French counterterrorism activities in Africa by offering logistical support. Further U.S. intervention strategies include actions such as targeted sanctions to limit the movements of IS and Al-Qaeda-aligned groups. It also supports the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which is not directly involved in counterterrorism but whose involvement in the region is part of a wider plan to limit the activities of terrorist groups.³⁷¹ This U.S.-provided dual support of counterterrorism and U.N. peacekeeping is also consistent with the approach articulated by Charbonneau, who concludes with reference to Mali that a clear distinction between classic peacekeeping (such as MINUSMA) and counterterrorism (Operations *Serval* and *Takuba*) is no longer

³⁶⁶ A. Trevor Thrall and Jane K. Cramer, eds., *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear: Threat Inflation since 9/11*, Routledge Global Security Studies (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 13.

³⁶⁷ Solomon, “The African State and the Failure of U.S. Counter-Terrorism Initiatives in Africa: The Cases of Nigeria and Mali,” 427.

³⁶⁸ Charbonneau, “Intervention in Mali: Building Peace between Peacekeeping and Counterterrorism,” 415.

³⁶⁹ 9–11.

³⁷⁰ William Minter and Elizabeth Schmidt, “U.S. ‘Counterterrorism’ in Africa Has Failed. What’s the Alternative?,” *Foreign Policy In Focus*, April 15, 2021, <https://fpif.org/u-s-counterterrorism-in-africa-has-failed-whats-the-alternative/>.

³⁷¹ 9–11.

possible.³⁷² With the clear distinction between peacekeeping and counter terrorist operations fading, it will also become increasingly difficult in the future to distinguish sharply between adversaries with whom one is negotiating peace and those with whom one is actively fighting.³⁷³

Regarding the U.S. counterterrorism activities in the region, especially the fight against Boko Haram, the United States has been indirectly involved by aiding the Nigerian government with intelligence support.³⁷⁴ This includes ISR operations. The United States supports its ISR operations in Africa by deploying military personnel and establishing Air Force facilities in the affected countries, including Cameroon and Niger. Washington also backs the aforementioned French counterterrorism activities by offering logistical support to such efforts. Other U.S. intervention strategies include actions such as targeted sanctions to limit the movements of IS and Al-Qaeda-aligned groups. It also supports MINUSMA, which is not directly involved in counterterrorism but whose involvement in the region is part of a wider plan to limit the activities of terrorist groups.³⁷⁵ The weakening of terrorists' leadership structures is a major step toward minimizing their activities. Thus, the United States believes that its continued military operations have helped it reduce the extent of threats it once faced from these terrorist groups.³⁷⁶

3. Governance

As mentioned at the outset, these military and intelligence measures can only be partial elements in the fight against terror. Another element, for example, is the fight against corruption in state institutions and against political connections of terrorist

³⁷² Charbonneau, "Intervention in Mali: Building Peace between Peacekeeping and Counterterrorism," 427–28.

³⁷³ Charbonneau, 427–28.

³⁷⁴ Landry Signé, "Why Obama's Military Deployment against Boko Haram Is Too Little, Too Late," *Washington Post*, October 28, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/10/28/why-obamas-military-deployment-against-boko-haram-is-too-little-too-late/>.

³⁷⁵ 9–11.

³⁷⁶ Jessica R. Piombo, "Terrorism and U.S. Counter-Terrorism Programs in Africa: An Overview" (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, Center for Contemporary Conflict, January 1, 2007), 94, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA520353>.

organizations. This interconnectedness of terrorist organizations and political actors is a challenge and must be addressed with appropriate measures.³⁷⁷ Two such examples are the “taxation” on charcoal and sugar trading in Somalia and the illegal smuggling in the south of the country over the border to neighboring Kenya.³⁷⁸ The taxation of the raw goods import and export is providing Al-Shabaab with significant funds, simultaneously making the organization’s illicit activities a prime target for the Somali border police who could choke their money flow and thereby hurt the organization significantly, through more thorough controls of shipments.³⁷⁹ Meanwhile putting a stop to the smuggling into Kenya would have a comparable financial effect but would require the Kenyan government to take action against their own forces’ involvement in the smuggling, but it would eventually disrupt a significant financial resource of Al-Shabaab.³⁸⁰ The example of Kenya shows that the security situation is not insignificantly linked to the history of past “state violence and [the] marginalization of certain regions and populations.”³⁸¹ In Boko Haram’s case, the bad governance in Nigeria—mainly corruption and power abuse—causes a level of discontent and anger amongst the population that literally drives people into the ranks of the terrorist organization.³⁸² A significant improvement to Nigerian governance, paired with an improvement in the economic climate, could have the potential to alleviate the high levels of joblessness and hopelessness to subsequently create a counterbalance to the

³⁷⁷ Charbonneau, “Intervention in Mali: Building Peace between Peacekeeping and Counterterrorism,” 425.

³⁷⁸ Elsa Buchanan, “UN Report Finds Kenya Still Funding Al-Shabaab Terror Group through Illegal Sugar and Charcoal Trade,” News, International Business Times UK, November 8, 2016, <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/un-report-finds-kenya-still-funding-al-shabaab-terror-group-through-illegal-sugar-charcoal-trade-1590462>; “Exactly What Are Kenyan Forces Doing in Somalia?,” not-for-profit foundation, *JFJ - Journalists for Justice* (blog), November 11, 2015, <https://jffjustice.net/exactly-what-are-kenyan-forces-doing-in-somalia/>.

³⁷⁹ Buchanan, “UN Report Finds Kenya Still Funding Al-Shabaab Terror Group through Illegal Sugar and Charcoal Trade.”

³⁸⁰ “Exactly What Are Kenyan Forces Doing in Somalia?”

³⁸¹ Lind, Mutahi, and Oosterom, “‘Killing a Mosquito with a Hammer’: Al-Shabaab Violence and State Security Responses in Kenya,” 133.

³⁸² Corinna Robbins, “Gifts and Graft: How Boko Haram Uses Financial Services for Recruitment and Support,” Mercy Corps (Portland: September, 2016), 4, https://ap9.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/Gifts_and_Graft_Mercy_Corps_Sept_2016.pdf.

attraction of Boko Haram.³⁸³ But even when there is effective governance in a country, governments must still direct efforts toward eradicating all the causes of terrorist activities. If the population still faces economic and social problems, challenges will continue to arise and eventually lead some people to join terrorist organizations. Scholars point out that domestic squabbles emanating from unresolved political conflicts and the feeling of being disenfranchised can be addressed by adopting policies that seek to eradicate poverty, inequality, and social exclusion.³⁸⁴

4. Finance

In order to tackle Al-Shabaab's financing strands, it is necessary to focus on the issue of corruption. Strengthening the already existing financial intelligence units within Somalia would appear to be necessary in order to achieve this. The aim should be a significance improvement in "anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism [...] systems in the Somali finance sector."³⁸⁵ Inside of Somalia, institutions that are robust, supportive of both economic development and effective government must be established. Furthermore, strong, and inclusive national and social identities that discourage radical rhetoric are required—also in adjacent countries. One measure that could be implemented with outside international assistance would be the prohibition on the sale and export of Somali charcoal. Ideally, this should be accompanied by sanctions against financiers of the terrorist organization.³⁸⁶ Al-Shabaab's set of experiences support that the group will keep on adjusting, changing its structure and sources of financial support depending on the situation to endure pressure, and thus, Al-Shabaab is likely to stay a security danger in Somalia and Kenya for a long time to come.³⁸⁷

³⁸³ Baca and Inks, "Nigeria's Window of Opportunity."

³⁸⁴ Isaac Kfir, "Organized Criminal-Terrorist Groups in the Sahel: How Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency Approaches Ignore the Roots of the Problem," *International Studies Perspectives* 19, no. 4 (November 1, 2018): 344–59, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/eky003>; Cyril Obi, "Terrorism in West Africa: Real, Emerging or Imagined Threats," *African Security Review* 15, no. 3 (January 1, 2006): 87–101, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2006.9627609>.

³⁸⁵ Fanusie and Entz, "Al-Shabaab," 6.

³⁸⁶ Fanusie and Entz, 4, 7.

³⁸⁷ Fanusie and Entz, "Al-Shabaab."

Nigeria, the most crowded country in Africa and its biggest economy, is probably going to assume a significant part in the battle against Boko Haram. The United States and other partners must invest in “anti-corruption efforts, counterterrorism training, and appropriate kinetic action” throughout the region to destroy Boko Haram and the general appeal of jihadism in sub-Saharan Africa.³⁸⁸ By concentrating on creating strategies to assemble foundations for anti-corruption and counterterrorism preparation, the strategy would be a superior complement to counterterrorism endeavors, as it would reinforce these networks instead of fueling these nations perpetual reliance on the West’s largesse.

5. Soft Power

Researchers have argued that violent counterterrorism contributes to the promotion of terrorism, so alternatives to violent action have been sought.³⁸⁹ Using the example of Boko Haram, Oluwaseun Tella argues that the Nigerian government has arguably tried a wide variety of approaches to combat this terrorist organization, but a soft power has not been undertaken—either consciously or in detail—as part of the government’s counterterrorism efforts.³⁹⁰ This led an increasing number of studies and scholars to ascribe considerable significance to the soft power option with respect to terrorism and counterterrorism, turning away from the focus on the violent manifestations of this phenomenon.³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ Fanusie and Entz, “Boko Haram,” 11.

³⁸⁹ Kamau, “Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive? A Case Study of Kenya’s Response to Terrorism, 1998–2020,” 221–22.

³⁹⁰ Oluwaseun Tella, “Boko Haram Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: The Soft Power Context,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 53, no. 6 (September 1, 2018): 816, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909617739326>.

³⁹¹ Syed Mohammed Ad’ha Aljunied, “Countering Terrorism in Maritime Southeast Asia: Soft and Hard Power Approaches,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 47, no. 6 (2012): 652–65; Michele Grossman, “Combating Terrorism: Soft Power Approaches,” Policy Institute, *The Strategist* (blog), July 20, 2015, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/combating-terrorism-soft-power-approaches/>; Jason Rineheart, “Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Terrorism Research Initiative, 4, no. 5 (2010): 31–47.

At its core, the term soft power describes the use of means without force by an actor (non-state or state) to achieve its goals.³⁹² Scholars who studied and assessed the consequences of military intervention recommend a soft power approach to combat terrorism.³⁹³ One of the elements Marisha Ramdeen refers to, is the “increased use of mediation.” This describes a form of political participation of all involved entities in a possible conflict resolution, which includes all sectors of society. It is an inclusive process in which all parties have the opportunity to disclose the degree and extent to which they have been affected. Victims and perpetrators can explore and explain the causes, i.e., convey the points and motivations from which terrorist activity arises. Potentially problematic is that the state may come to be perceived as compliant and weak through the initial participation of armed groups in this process with impunity. However, immediate prosecution is not the goal of mediation. Nor is a final resolution of a conflict a mandatory mediation outcome. A ceasefire that curbs further escalations of the armed conflict may constitute a mediation outcome.³⁹⁴ Like mediation, linking development and peace processes seeks to advance the political, social, and economic pillars of society.³⁹⁵ This includes rehabilitation and reintegration programs for terrorist combatants, with the goal of enabling them to rejoin civil society. Their participation in the cycle of violence can only be broken if these measures make real livelihood alternatives accessible to them.

Another element is “sharing information and research to counter terrorism and violent extremism.”³⁹⁶ Analysis and understanding of terrorism currently suffer from insufficient research, hampered by a lack of key intelligence. Marc Sageman sums it up when he says that it is important “to make non-sensitive data available to academia and to structure more effective discourse between the academic and intelligence communities,”

³⁹² Joseph S. Nye Jr, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), X.

³⁹³ Ramdeen, “Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa.”

³⁹⁴ Ramdeen.

³⁹⁵ Michele Grossman, “Tough Is Not Enough: Ten Smarter Ways to Counter Violent Extremism,” News, The Conversation, October 22, 2014, <http://theconversation.com/tough-is-not-enough-ten-smarter-ways-to-counter-violent-extremism-32690>.

³⁹⁶ Ramdeen, “Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa.”

because the civilian side has the methodological skills, while the military side has vast amounts of information.³⁹⁷ Crucial to resolving this problem are the “tools and resources to promote research and information sharing” about terrorism.³⁹⁸

An aspect that seems occasionally overlooked is the lack of involvement of African scholars in addressing terrorism in Africa. A large number of African scholars have conducted research on various aspects of African terrorism over the decades, but their findings and proposals are insufficiently represented in the contemporary treatment of the topic.³⁹⁹ The voices of African-based researchers must no longer be silenced by the “gatekeepers on terrorism research” [Western scholars] since they are needed to implement new approaches—critical and aimed at developing new research issues, and new designs and concepts—in research on terrorism.⁴⁰⁰ With regard to the diversification of various lines of intervention within the framework of soft power campaigns, the findings obtained on the ground by members of their own cultural background may be of considerable relevance. This includes not only referring to African scholars, but also taking note of local African needs—especially community involvement has a relevant role to play.⁴⁰¹ The target audience is not only selected leaders, but young people. The necessary cooperation with the young part of the community to prevent radicalization can only be achieved by activating the young.

Intensifying the use of humanitarian diplomacy is also part of the soft power approach. This provides an opportunity to address humanitarian needs and offer assistance.⁴⁰² This accomplishes several things: Providing outreach to people in need of

³⁹⁷ Marc Sageman, “The Stagnation in Terrorism Research,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 4 (2014): 565, 572–74.

³⁹⁸ Ramdeen, “Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Africa.”

³⁹⁹ Emeka Thaddeus Njoku, “The State of Terrorism Research in Africa,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 14, no. 4 (2021): 502.

⁴⁰⁰ Njoku, 503–4.

⁴⁰¹ Grossman, “Combatting Terrorism.”

⁴⁰² ACCORD, “Silencing the Guns: Mediation Practices and Contemporary Wars,” in *African Union Commission* (7th African Union High-level Retreat of Special Envoys and Mediators on the Promotion of Peace, Security and Stability in Africa, Sharm El Sheikh: African Union Commission, 2017), 28–30, <https://www.accord.org.za/publication/silencing-the-guns/>.

humanitarian assistance where the conflict makes it urgent while using this occasion to generate thoughts for dialogue and offer a point of entry for mediation.

With regard to the application of soft approach measures in the context of counterterrorism, however, there are no blueprints. The transferability of successful measures from case A to case B is not guaranteed, as the underlying conditions usually differ significantly.⁴⁰³ Moreover, the soft approach still has significant acceptance problems within the ranks of many state actors.⁴⁰⁴ They lack confidence in the effectiveness of these measures, which are non-lethal and non-military. This mistrust is described as humanly understandable because it is mostly the result of the personal (violent) experiences of the participants from the past in their fight against terrorism. Unless these key individuals at the state level can be brought on board, the soft approach will remain difficult.

Overall, it becomes apparent within the publicly available literature that multiple studies on counterterrorism criticize the overemphasis of military means and point out the relevance of addressing the root causes of terrorism.⁴⁰⁵ The high number of influencing factors⁴⁰⁶ lets scholars conclude that a one-dimensional or singular treatment of the factors will at best lead to limited, but ineffective results in the larger context.⁴⁰⁷ Martha Crenshaw expresses these basic requirements very clearly and succinctly when she states: “Terrorists cannot be considered in isolation from their social and political context.”⁴⁰⁸ Responses to

⁴⁰³ Gabriel Hoelt, “‘Soft’ Approaches to Counter-Terrorism: An Exploration of the Benefits of Deradicalization Programs” (International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, February 27, 2016), 57, <https://www.ict.org.il/Article/1620/Soft-Approaches-to-Counter-Terrorism#gsc.tab=0>.

⁴⁰⁴ Kamau, “Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive? A Case Study of Kenya’s Response to Terrorism, 1998–2020,” 222.

⁴⁰⁵ Forest, “Crime-Terror Interactions in Sub-Saharan Africa”; Botha and Graham, “(Counter-) Terrorism in Africa: Reflections for a New Decade”; Ismail, “Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in West Africa: Implications for African and International Security”; Kamau, “Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive? A Case Study of Kenya’s Response to Terrorism, 1998–2020.”

⁴⁰⁶ In his work “Crime-Terror Interactions in Sub-Saharan Africa” James JF Forest refers to five main contextual factors: 1. Global and local economic forces, 2. Endemic corruption, 3. Political and legal system deficiencies, 4. Critical infrastructure improvements, 5. Evolution of knowledge and capabilities

⁴⁰⁷ Forest, “Crime-Terror Interactions in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 16.

⁴⁰⁸ Martha Crenshaw, “The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century,” *Political Psychology* 21, no. 2 (2000): 418, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0162-895X.00195>.

an insurgency that are essentially limited to the use of military force will always lead terrorist groups to adapt. At the same time, the radicalization of members and sympathizers is reinforced by military excesses of force rather than serving to ease tensions or turn them away.⁴⁰⁹ Therefore, measures other than military violence have to be pursued.

6. Like Criminals

Treating terrorist groups in Africa as organized criminal entities on the territory of their states, incorporating cross-border measures, and adopting appropriate measures to address them is a prerequisite for cross-institutional countering. This perspective will help to focus on empowerment programs and development issues, as well as local policing to help deal with terrorist organizations. The shift from a singular view on a terrorist organization will allow a greater focus on strategies to ensure better governance, resilience, and security. This could be achieved through enhanced border controls, improvements in investigation and prosecution of cases, and the increased use of evidence to more effective prosecution. Although such approaches are already underway, they currently remain insufficient and require strengthening to achieve better results.⁴¹⁰

7. Narrative of Radical Islam

Counter-narrative initiatives have the advantage of being directed against the wrongdoings of extremists. They are directed against their behavior and ideology but leave out the misconduct of governments toward the population.⁴¹¹ Thus, counter-narratives provide a promising focus and strengthen those credible voices that are needed so badly. Currently a coalition of eighty-three partners have focused on “countering Daesh’s propaganda” with the aim “to oppose Daesh’s narrative and to undermine the appeal of its ideology... [furthermore] to assist credible and authentic voices from the region.”⁴¹² Countering violent extremism, defined as “the employment of non-coercive means to

⁴⁰⁹ Weeraratne, “Theorizing the Expansion of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria,” 628.

⁴¹⁰ Thrall and Cramer, *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear*, 15.

⁴¹¹ Mascolo, “Mit Soft Power gegen den Terror [With soft power against terror].”

⁴¹² “Countering Daesh’s Propaganda,” The Global Coalition Against Daesh, May 16, 2018, <https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/mission/countering-daeshs-propaganda/>.

delegitimize violent extremist ideologies and thus reduce the number of terrorist group supporters and recruits” plays an essential role.⁴¹³ Such existing projects, which involve Muslim clerics and various civil society organizations, aim at reducing the number of people susceptible to radicalization by terrorist groups (and thus potential recruits for their own organization). These efforts should continue to be promoted and supported; an expansion of these projects is to be encouraged.

Christopher Clapham noted in 2003 that “Much of Africa is not, and is unlikely to become, a location for radical Islam, [...] but is nonetheless increasingly providing the conditions to which terrorism has historically been one response. It would be foolish to rule it out.”⁴¹⁴ Although not all forms of African terrorism are Islamist-motivated, they currently account for a significant share of the total. Thus, the aspect of Islamism must be included in the consideration of counterterrorism.

8. Media

The use of modern media, especially with the youth—called the “cheetah generation”—is of major importance, as they incorporate social media extensively into their everyday behavior. Daniel P. Aldrich’s research results make it clear that a successful influence of people via media is a time-consuming affair. This results in medium- and long-term commitments that require corresponding financial and human resources backing, which tend to run counter to the short-lived nature of politics and the associated legislative pressure. Recurrent scientific data collection, for example by AFRICOM, USAID, or the U.S. State Department, would seem essential to constantly monitor the effectiveness of ongoing programs.⁴¹⁵ Likewise, it is suggested that further funding be made available for the underlying field studies.

⁴¹³ Kamau, “Is Counter-Terrorism Counterproductive? A Case Study of Kenya’s Response to Terrorism, 1998–2020,” 218.

⁴¹⁴ Christopher Clapham, “Terrorism in Africa: Problems of Definition, History and Development,” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 10, no. 2 (2003): 28.

⁴¹⁵ Daniel P. Aldrich, “First Steps towards Hearts and Minds? USAID’s Countering Violent Extremism Policies in Africa,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 3 (2014): 540.

9. Quo Vadis

The failure of military approaches to achieve a longer-term resolution of conflicts caused by political problems and societal fractures is illustrated by Sergei Boeke and Bart Schuurman using the example of the French ‘Operation Serval’ in Mali.⁴¹⁶ Both conclude that military means alone are not sufficient. In their opinion, these can at most reduce threats in the short term, but cannot “solve complex political, social, ethnic and economic problems” underlying conflicts—thereby voicing the need for a multilayered, holistic approach. Given that the situation on the ground is pressing and difficult, military strikes and counter-insurgency actions remain a valid (but not finally problem-solving) course of action for the time being. From a long-term perspective, however, governments must be systematically supported to represent the interests of their people and not just those of a clan, a party, or a religious group. As the research of Matthias Basedau et al. shows, the connection between religious-based armed conflicts and ethnic conflicts is obvious. The latter can be prevented by eliminating the possibility of mobilization through “ethnic channels,” but this requires overcoming ethnic boundaries.⁴¹⁷ It is imperative to deepen and intensify coordination among security actors, development actors, institutions (municipal and regional), and civil society. When pursuing the soft power strategy together with sustained military action in the fight against terrorism, the application of a mix of different soft power approaches will be required. The motivations and context of terrorist organizations must always be understood. That means examining the roots of terrorism at the political, social, and cultural levels. On the African continent, this also includes a critical and constructive examination of colonial history. Peace and conflict researchers could provide more clarity about the interrelationships, the possibility of a holistic view beyond the level of the usual terrorism expert industry.

When states are unwilling or unable to provide security for the population, administer justice and distribute public goods, smaller entities often take over. Ethnic groups, tribes, clans, rebel movements, smuggling networks or

⁴¹⁶ Sergei Boeke and Bart Schuurman, “Operation ‘Serval’: A Strategic Analysis of the French Intervention in Mali, 2013–2014,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 6 (2015): 821–22.

⁴¹⁷ Matthias Basedau et al., “Do Religious Factors Impact Armed Conflict? Empirical Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 5 (2011): 767.

jihadist groups take over the tasks of the state where it is not present and has left a vacuum.⁴¹⁸

The preceding quote by Steinberg and Weber probably sums up one of the most important and at the same time most complicated prerequisites to achieve: good governance. Military measures alone undermine other processes such as diplomacy, negotiations, poverty reduction or education. Ban Ki Moon describes it very strikingly when he says that “Missiles may kill terrorists. But good governance kills terrorism.”⁴¹⁹ When governments do not offer their people democracy, education, and economic participation, it is not surprising that people turn to armed insurgency and join jihadist movements.

⁴¹⁸ Steinberg and Weber, *Jihadismus in Afrika [Jihadism in Africa]*, 7/2015:8.

⁴¹⁹ Kimberly Curtis, “Missiles May Kill Terrorists. But Good Governance Kills Terrorism.,” UN Dispatch, February 20, 2015, <https://www.undispatch.com/missiles-may-kill-terrorists-good-governance-kills-terrorism/>.

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