



## African Union Strategic Response Against Terrorism in Africa: The Case of Somalia

By Peter Nicholas Lofane, University of Johannesburg.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1310-2335> / Email: [lofane.lofane@gmail.com](mailto:lofane.lofane@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Terrorism remains a critical global security challenge, with African nations facing some of its most severe consequences. The African Union (AU) has played a central role in counterterrorism efforts, particularly in addressing the threats posed by extremist groups such as Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). This paper critically examines the AU's counterterrorism strategies, focusing on Somalia, where Al-Shabaab continues to threaten regional stability. The study assesses the effectiveness of AU-led initiatives, including intelligence-sharing mechanisms, joint military operations, and diplomatic interventions.

Drawing from contemporary scholarly literature and policy developments, the paper explores how financial constraints, donor-driven policies, regional political dynamics, and governance challenges affect counterterrorism efforts. Special attention is given to the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and its evolution into the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), analyzing their strategic objectives, operational challenges, and potential for long-term stabilization. Despite significant military and diplomatic engagements, terrorist organizations continue to demonstrate resilience and adaptability, raising concerns about the sustainability and impact of AU-led interventions.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on counterterrorism by providing a nuanced evaluation of the AU's successes and limitations. It argues that while military operations are crucial,

a more comprehensive approach-including political stabilization, economic development, and local governance strengthening-is essential for lasting peace and security. By assessing the AU's evolving role in counterterrorism, this paper aims to inform policy recommendations for a more effective and sustainable response to terrorism in Africa.

**Keywords:** Counterterrorism, African Union, Al-Shabaab, Regional Security, Stabilization

## Introduction

Terrorism remains one of Africa's most pressing security threats, with Somalia serving as a key battleground. The extremist group Al-Shabaab, an Al-Qaeda affiliate, continues to orchestrate deadly attacks despite sustained military interventions led by the African Union (AU). Over the years, the AU has deployed several missions, including the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and its successor, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), in an effort to stabilize the region (Williams 2022). However, these interventions have faced numerous challenges, including inadequate funding, regional power struggles, and governance deficits, necessitating the recent establishment of the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM).

This article critically examines the AU's strategic response to terrorism, particularly in Somalia, evaluating its successes and limitations. The core question guiding this analysis is whether the AU's counterterrorism strategies are effectively mitigating the threat posed by Al-Shabaab and enhancing regional stability. By scrutinizing the AU's military interventions, diplomatic engagements, and regional collaborations, this study aims to assess whether the organization is fulfilling its mandate in combating terrorism.

A key area of focus is the role of donor-driven policies in shaping the AU's interventions. Research suggests that international donors significantly influence the AU's counterterrorism approach, often dictating priorities and operational frameworks (Cocodia 2019). Additionally, regional security dynamics, particularly the involvement of neighboring states such as Kenya and Ethiopia, play a crucial role in the AU's effectiveness in Somalia (De Coning 2021).

This study integrates insights from contemporary literature and policy analysis to provide a nuanced understanding of the AU's role in counterterrorism. By acknowledging both successes and short-

---

“  
Terrorism remains one  
of Africa's most pressing  
security threats, with  
Somalia serving as a key  
battleground.”

---

comings, this article contributes to broader discussions on the effectiveness of regional organizations in addressing transnational security threats in Africa.

## Evolution of Terrorism in Somalia

The evolution of terrorism in Somalia, particularly through the rise and expansion of Al-Shabaab, is a complex process shaped by historical, political, ideological, and environmental factors. The roots of the Somali insurgency can be traced back to the 1990s, when the collapse of the central government left the country in a state of anarchy, facilitating the emergence of various militant groups. Al-Shabaab, which emerged in the mid-2000s, was originally a radical youth wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a coalition of Islamist forces that briefly controlled much of Somalia in 2006. Al-Shabaab's ideological foundation was influenced by the global jihadist movements, particularly al-Qaeda, and its primary goal was to establish an Islamic state in Somalia, governed by strict Sharia law.

Al-Shabaab's emergence was not a random event but rather a consequence of a combination of local grievances, historical context, and international dynamics. Somalia's political instability, economic hardship, and lack of state infrastructure created

a fertile ground for radical ideologies. The collapse of the Somali government in 1991, following the overthrow of President Siad Barre, resulted in the fragmentation of the country along clan lines, which were later exploited by Al-Shabaab to rally support and recruit fighters from marginalized communities. In addition to internal drivers, external influences also played a critical role in the evolution of terrorism in Somalia. For instance, the 2006 Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia, aimed at quelling the growing Islamist insurgency, pushed many radicalized fighters, including Al-Shabaab, to align more closely with global jihadist networks, particularly Al-Qaeda. This strategic alliance was cemented in 2012 when Al-Shabaab formally pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda, signaling its shift from a local insurgency to an international jihadist group with global ambitions (Abboud 2017).

Al-Shabaab's ideological shifts are also crucial in understanding the dynamics of terrorism in Somalia. Initially, the group's rhetoric was focused on Somali nationalism and the establishment of a Somali-based Islamic state. Over time, however, as the group grew more aligned with Al-Qaeda, its objectives expanded to include broader regional and global jihadist goals. This shift is evident in the group's attacks beyond Somalia's borders, including the 2010 Kampala bombings in Uganda, which were a direct response to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces' involvement in the country (Aydinli and Cramer 2019). Al-Shabaab's strategic objectives, therefore, evolved from a focus on local power consolidation to a broader regional and global jihadist agenda, as the group sought to export its ideology and establish a pan-Islamic caliphate.

Environmental stressors have also played a critical role in sustaining Al-Shabaab's insurgency. Somalia's ongoing environmental crises, including desertification, drought, and famine, have exacerbated economic hardship and led to increased displacement and poverty. These stressors have created a pool of disenfranchised and vulnerable individuals, many of whom have been susceptible to recruitment by Al-Shabaab. The group has leveraged this humanitarian crisis by providing food, security, and services in areas under its control, thus gaining local support. In some instances, the group has positioned itself as a protector of Somali interests, particularly in the

context of the Somali government's inability to provide basic services or address environmental challenges (Marchal 2011).

Clan dynamics have also been pivotal in shaping Al-Shabaab's strategy and operations. Somalia's clan-based system of governance has historically been a source of both division and cohesion, and Al-Shabaab has adeptly manipulated these divisions for its benefit. By framing its narrative in terms of clan solidarity and representing itself as a defender of Somali identity, Al-Shabaab has gained support from various clans, particularly those in the southern and central regions of Somalia. Additionally, the group's ability to align itself with certain clans while alienating others has been a double-edged sword, as it has allowed Al-Shabaab to control significant parts of the country while also fostering deep-seated enmities that have fueled further conflict (Menkhaus 2014).

External influences, especially from neighboring countries, have been another key factor in the evolution of terrorism in Somalia. The involvement of Ethiopia and Kenya in Somalia's internal affairs has been a source of both support and antagonism for Al-Shabaab. The Ethiopian intervention in 2006, aimed at countering the Islamic Courts Union, created a power vacuum that Al-Shabaab filled. Ethiopia's continued military presence in Somalia has remained a focal point for Al-Shabaab's recruitment propaganda, with the group framing its insurgency as a struggle against foreign occupation (Hess 2012). Similarly, Kenya's military intervention in Somalia in 2011, ostensibly to counter Al-Shabaab's growing influence in Kenya, has been used by the group to justify its operations and attacks, particularly those targeting Kenyan soil.

The international community, particularly the United States and the African Union, has responded to the rise of Al-Shabaab with a combination of military and diplomatic efforts. AMISOM, the African Union-led peacekeeping force in Somalia, has been instrumental in pushing Al-Shabaab out of major urban centers, including Mogadishu. However, the effectiveness of AMISOM has been limited by several factors, including insufficient funding, inadequate troop numbers, and operational challenges. Despite these obstacles, AMISOM's presence has been crucial in preventing Al-Shabaab from gaining full control over Somalia

“  
 Al-Shabaab’s emergence  
 was not a random event  
 but rather a consequence  
 of a combination of local  
 grievances, historical context,  
 and international dynamics.”

and has provided the Somali government with the breathing space needed to consolidate power (Benton 2016).

In conclusion, the evolution of terrorism in Somalia cannot be understood without considering the interplay of historical, political, environmental, and external factors. Al-Shabaab’s rise from a local insurgency to a global jihadist organization was driven by both internal dynamics, such as clan-based grievances and environmental stressors, and external influences, including regional interventions and global jihadist networks. The group’s shift from Somali nationalism to global jihadism exemplifies the changing nature of terrorism in the 21st century, where local conflicts are increasingly intertwined with broader international security concerns. Effective counterterrorism strategies must, therefore, take into account not only the military capabilities of groups like Al-Shabaab but also the underlying political, social, and environmental conditions that sustain such insurgencies.

### Methodology

The excerpt originates from my doctoral thesis, which investigated the effectiveness of the African Union (AU) in addressing the root causes of terrorism in Africa, with a specific focus on the case of Al-Shabaab in Somalia. The research

adopted a constructivist-interpretivist research paradigm, employing qualitative methods for data collection and analysis. The primary objective of this article is to scrutinize the AU’s counterterrorism strategies in addressing the terrorism prevalent in Somalia, while also extracting broader insights from the experiences of other terrorist groups across the continent.

The study engaged in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a diverse range of respondents, including religious and cultural leaders, media practitioners, representatives from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), scholars from academia and think tanks, business community leaders, youth group leaders, and officials from regional bodies. This varied selection aimed to capture a comprehensive perspective on the multifaceted aspects of terrorism and its root causes.

To analyze the gathered data, a combination of content analysis, thematic analysis, and narrative analysis methods were employed. These methodologies facilitated a nuanced examination of the intricate factors influencing terrorism in Africa, with a specific lens on the strategies employed by the AU in the context of Somalia. The utilization of diverse data sources and analytical methods enhances the study’s depth and breadth, providing a robust foundation for assessing the AU’s effectiveness in addressing the complex and dynamic phenomenon of terrorism on the continent.

### The African Union’s Counter-Terrorism Strategy

The African Union (AU) has played a central role in shaping Africa’s response to terrorism, particularly in Somalia, where Al-Shabaab remains a persistent threat. The AU’s counter-terrorism framework is anchored in the 2004 Protocol to the OAU Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, which emphasizes regional cooperation, intelligence sharing, and military interventions (AU, 2004). However, the implementation of these policies has been constrained by financial limitations, political fragmentation, and governance challenges (Williams 2022).

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was established in 2007 with a mandate to stabilize

Somalia, support the transitional government, and combat Al-Shabaab (Menkhaus, 2018). Over the years, AMISOM has played a pivotal role in retaking key urban centers from Al-Shabaab, particularly Mogadishu, Kismayo, and Baidoa (Williams 2022). However, the mission faced several challenges:

**Reliance on Donor Funding:** AMISOM's operations were heavily dependent on external funding, particularly from the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN). The financial instability often led to delays in salary payments for troops, affecting morale and operational efficiency (Williams and Hashi 2020).

### **Coordination with Regional Economic Communities (RECs):**

While AMISOM collaborated with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC), coordination was often hampered by differing national interests, particularly among troop-contributing countries like Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda (Tadesse 2021).

### **Operational Challenges:**

AMISOM struggled with logistical constraints, asymmetric warfare tactics employed by Al-Shabaab, and accusations of human rights violations, which affected its legitimacy among local communities (De Coning 2021). To address these limitations, AMISOM was replaced by the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) in April 2022, with a mandate to gradually transfer security responsibilities to the Somali National Army (SNA) by December 2024 (AU Peace and Security Council, 2022). However, ATMIS faces similar challenges, including funding shortfalls, political uncertainty, and an increasingly resilient Al-Shabaab insurgency (Bryden 2022).

The African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) was recently established as a successor to ATMIS, following a UN Security Council resolution aimed at consolidating AU-led stabilization efforts (United Nations 2023). This transition marks a shift in the AU's approach to counterterrorism, emphasizing a more localized and politically driven strategy. However, key concerns remain:

### **Troop Composition and Regional Rivalries:**

The AU has faced difficulties in mobilizing new troop commitments, as traditional contributors

like Ethiopia and Kenya reassess their involvement due to domestic political and security pressures (Felbab-Brown 2023). Ethiopia's increasing engagement with Somaliland has further complicated regional dynamics (International Crisis Group 2023).

### **Viability Amid Political and Environmental Challenges:**

Somalia's fragile governance structures, inter-clan conflicts, and environmental stressors such as prolonged droughts and resource scarcity continue to fuel instability, limiting the effectiveness of military-centric interventions (Hassan and Weiss 2022).

### **The Shift Toward a Somali-Led Security Framework:**

While AUSSOM aims to empower Somalia's security forces, the lack of institutional capacity and internal divisions within the Somali government pose significant risks to long-term stability (Barnes and Hassan 2023).

### **Regional and Geopolitical Dynamics**

The effectiveness of AU counterterrorism efforts is influenced by regional rivalries and geopolitical interests. The security landscape in the Horn of Africa is shaped by competing influences from Ethiopia, Kenya, and external actors such as the United States, Turkey, and the Gulf States (Soliman 2022).

### **Ethiopia's Recognition of Somaliland and Its Impact on AU Strategy:**

Ethiopia's recent decision to formalize ties with Somaliland has escalated tensions with Somalia, potentially weakening AU-led stabilization efforts (International Crisis Group 2023). Ethiopia's engagement with Somaliland could embolden secessionist movements, complicating the AU's commitment to Somalia's territorial integrity (Abbink 2023).

### **Kenya and Burundi's Role:**

Kenya has played a critical role in counterterrorism efforts, particularly through cross-border operations and intelligence-sharing mechanisms (Botha 2022). However, Kenya's presence in Somalia has also been controversial, with accusations of economic exploitation and extrajudicial actions by the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) (Hansen 2021).

Meanwhile, Burundi remains one of the largest troop contributors to AU missions, but domestic political instability has raised concerns about the sustainability of its involvement (Vorrath 2021).

### External Actors and Counterterrorism

#### Operations:

The United States has maintained a strong military presence in Somalia, conducting drone strikes and supporting elite Somali counterterrorism units (Fisher and Anderson 2022). Turkey has also expanded its influence through military training programs and infrastructure investments (Soliman 2022). However, the divergence in counterterrorism priorities between the AU, the UN, and external actors has led to strategic misalignments (De Coning 2021).

### Governance and Structural Challenges

A critical gap in AU counterterrorism strategies is the failure to address Somalia's deep-rooted governance deficits, which contribute to the resilience of Al-Shabaab. While military interventions have weakened the group in some areas, structural factors continue to fuel radicalization and instability (Menkhaus 2018). Key Governance Challenges include:

#### Weak Legitimacy of the Somali Government:

The Somali government struggles with internal divisions, corruption, and limited control beyond major urban centers (Barnes and Hassan 2023). Many local communities perceive the government as disconnected from their needs, which Al-Shabaab exploits by offering parallel governance structures (Hassan and Weiss 2022).

#### Clan-Based Marginalization and Al-Shabaab

##### Recruitment:

Somalia's clan-based politics often results in the exclusion of certain groups from governance structures. Al-Shabaab has successfully capitalized on these grievances, portraying itself as an alternative to a corrupt and ineffective government (Fisher and Anderson 2022).

#### Environmental Stressors as Drivers of Conflict:

Somalia faces severe environmental challenges, including desertification, water scarcity, and food insecurity. These stressors have exacerbated local conflicts and provided Al-Shabaab with recruitment opportunities by positioning itself as a

provider of social services (Hansen 2021).

### Limitations of AU Interventions as Short-Term Solutions:

AU-led military operations have focused on eliminating immediate security threats rather than addressing the root causes of instability. Without long-term governance reforms, Somalia risks reverting to a security vacuum once AU forces withdraw (Bryden 2022).

The AU's counterterrorism strategy in Somalia has achieved tactical successes but continues to face structural, financial, and political challenges. The transition from AMISOM to ATMIS and now AUSSOM reflects a strategic shift, yet deep-seated governance and regional tensions remain significant obstacles. Moving forward, the AU must adopt a holistic approach that integrates security interventions with governance reforms, economic development, and climate resilience to achieve sustainable peace in Somalia.

### Findings and Discussion

The evolution of terrorism in Somalia, particularly the rise of Al-Shabaab and the persistent challenge of dismantling this group, highlights the complexities and limitations of counter-insurgency efforts in the Horn of Africa. Drawing from the experiences of the African Union (AU) missions, AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia) and ATMIS (African Transition Mission in Somalia) as well as broader regional and international interventions, the following findings emerge, each of which points to critical insights regarding the effectiveness, limitations, and potential strategies for combating terrorism in the region.

The first major finding concerns the effectiveness of the AU missions in Somalia. AMISOM and ATMIS have made significant military gains in their years of operation, particularly in recapturing key urban centers, such as Mogadishu, and reducing the territorial control of Al-Shabaab. These missions have provided essential security for the Somali government, facilitated humanitarian aid, and allowed for some degree of political stabilization (Benton 2016). However, despite these successes, their inability to dismantle Al-Shabaab completely underscores a critical challenge. Military victories alone cannot defeat a group like Al-Shabaab, which operates as both an insurgent movement and a

social network. Al-Shabaab has been able to adapt its strategies over time, shifting from controlling territories to waging asymmetric warfare, conducting high-profile attacks, and utilizing local clan structures to maintain support (Marchal 2011).

This insight is not unique to Somalia but is evident in other counter-terrorism contexts, where military intervention is often limited by the complexities of local dynamics and the resilience of insurgent groups. As I have observed in my research and analysis, purely military strategies tend to overlook the social, political, and economic conditions that sustain insurgencies. Al-Shabaab's ability to exploit the lack of governance in rural areas, its use of terror to enforce control, and its integration into the local economy through taxation and trade have enabled the group to survive, even in the face of military defeat (Aydinli and Cramer 2019). The inability of AMISOM and ATMIS to dismantle Al-Shabaab points to the need for counter-insurgency strategies that go beyond military engagement.

A second major finding is the heavy reliance of AU missions on external funding, which shapes the strategic direction of operations and limits their autonomy. As I've noted in previous discussions, AMISOM and ATMIS, despite their significant operational presence, depend heavily on donor contributions, particularly from the European Union and the United States (Hess 2012). This financial dependency has had profound implications for the effectiveness of AU-led missions. It has led to a situation where the priorities and strategies of these missions are often dictated by external actors rather than reflecting the priorities of the African Union or the Somali state itself. This undermines the long-term sustainability of counter-terrorism efforts, as donor-driven initiatives tend to have short-term focus and may not be responsive to the changing realities on the ground.

In addition, reliance on donor funding can result in fragmented approaches that prioritize short-term military goals over comprehensive, sustainable peacebuilding strategies. It is crucial to acknowledge that counter-terrorism efforts, especially in fragile states like Somalia, require a long-term commitment that is not contingent on external funding cycles. As I have pointed out, the lack of financial independence for AU missions restricts their operational flexibility and inhibits the

development of a coherent, locally driven strategy that addresses the root causes of insurgency, such as poverty, governance failure, and environmental stressors (Menkhaus 2014).

Another key finding is the fragmentation within the regional security frameworks and the inability of regional economic communities (RECs) to effectively coordinate counter-terrorism efforts. The African Union, despite its role as the leading continental body in peace and security, faces significant challenges in fostering coordination between RECs such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC). The lack of a unified regional approach weakens AU interventions, as it becomes difficult to coordinate military, political, and humanitarian efforts effectively across national borders (Benton 2016).

Somalia's neighbors, such as Kenya and Ethiopia, have often acted in isolation, pursuing their own security interests, which has led to inconsistent policies and at times, counterproductive interventions. For example, Ethiopia's military interventions in Somalia have been seen by Al-Shabaab as foreign occupation, which has been used to galvanize support among local Somali populations (Hess 2012). Similarly, Kenya's involvement in Somalia, while aimed at combating Al-Shabaab's growing presence along the border, has often resulted in retaliatory attacks within Kenya, demonstrating the difficulty of achieving security through unilateral action.

In my analysis, I have seen how the lack of a coordinated regional approach hinders the effectiveness of the AU missions. A unified regional strategy would enable more cohesive counter-terrorism policies and a stronger collective defense mechanism, but this is often hampered by the competing interests and priorities of individual countries. The need for stronger political will and a more integrated approach to security cooperation is evident, as regional fragmentation weakens the ability to address the complex and cross-border nature of the Al-Shabaab insurgency (Menkhaus 2014).

Finally, one of the most critical findings from the ongoing counter-insurgency efforts in Somalia is the pressing need for a holistic approach to counter-terrorism. Military interventions, as demonstrated

by AMISOM and ATMIS, are essential for addressing immediate security threats but are not sufficient on their own to bring about long-term peace and stability. A truly effective counter-insurgency strategy must integrate political stabilization, economic development, and environmental sustainability. As I have argued, counter-terrorism efforts that focus solely on military tactics fail to address the underlying socio-economic issues that fuel extremism. For example, the lack of economic opportunity, poor governance, and environmental degradation in Somalia have created a volatile environment in which groups like Al-Shabaab thrive.

A holistic approach would include strengthening the Somali state's ability to govern effectively, reducing corruption, promoting inclusive economic development, and addressing environmental challenges, such as the effects of drought and desertification. Moreover, peacebuilding efforts must incorporate local communities, fostering their resilience against extremist ideologies. Community-based initiatives, which focus on building social cohesion, promoting education, and providing alternative livelihoods, are critical in diminishing the appeal of Al-Shabaab's narrative. This approach would not only weaken the group's support base but also offer sustainable solutions to the root causes of terrorism.

In conclusion, while AMISOM and ATMIS have made significant strides in countering Al-Shabaab, their inability to completely dismantle the group reflects the limitations of a purely military approach. The heavy reliance on donor funding, regional fragmentation, and the lack of a holistic strategy further hinder progress. Moving forward, it is imperative that counter-terrorism strategies in Somalia and the Horn of Africa more broadly be based on integrated, long-term approaches that prioritize political, economic, and social stability over purely military victories. Only by addressing the multi-faceted nature of the insurgency can meaningful and lasting peace be achieved in Somalia.

### **The Way Forward**

The enduring challenge of terrorism in Somalia, exemplified by the resilience of Al-Shabaab, requires a rethinking of current strategies, moving beyond short-term military victories

and externally driven interventions. The way forward, therefore, must be rooted in the themes identified throughout this study: strengthening local governance, fostering regional coordination, ensuring long-term stability through sustainable development, and reimagining the African Union's (AU) role in counter-terrorism efforts. I argue that a comprehensive, locally driven, and regionally coordinated approach is necessary for achieving lasting peace and stability in Somalia. In this section, I propose a way forward that aligns with these themes, emphasizing the need for a shift in strategy, focusing on inclusivity, long-term investments, and sustainable peacebuilding practices.

### **Enhancing Local Governance: Strengthening Legitimacy through Inclusive Political Structures**

The foundation of any sustainable counter-terrorism strategy in Somalia must begin with the strengthening of local governance. As I have discussed throughout this study, one of the critical drivers of extremism in Somalia is the pervasive lack of trust in government institutions. The Somali government, despite its international support, has often struggled to extend its authority beyond Mogadishu, failing to provide basic services or maintain security in rural areas. This governance vacuum has allowed groups like Al-Shabaab to fill the void, offering their own brand of governance, which, although repressive, provides a semblance of order in areas where the state is absent (Menkhaus 2014).

In my view, enhancing local governance is not simply about reinforcing the power of the central government but about creating inclusive political structures at the local level. This requires empowering local communities, ensuring that their voices are heard in decision-making processes, and fostering a political culture that promotes transparency, accountability, and justice. As I have argued, local governance structures should not only be reflective of Somali clan dynamics but also address issues of political representation for marginalized groups, including women and youth (Benton 2016).

In practice, this means bolstering community-based governance initiatives, such as local

councils, that can work in tandem with the federal government to create a more decentralized and participatory governance system. Strengthening these local structures would not only improve the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of the Somali people but would also undermine Al-Shabaab's appeal, as it thrives by portraying itself as an alternative to the corrupt, ineffective state. Effective local governance can significantly reduce the likelihood of extremist ideologies taking root, particularly when communities feel empowered and supported by responsive and accountable political systems.

### **Regional Coordination: Addressing Fragmentation within RECs and Fostering Cooperation**

Another critical element of the way forward lies in addressing the fragmentation within regional security frameworks and fostering greater cooperation between Regional Economic Communities (RECs). The lack of coordination between RECs such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC) has been a significant obstacle to effective counter-terrorism efforts in the Horn of Africa. In my view, this fragmentation reflects broader political and economic interests that often hinder a unified approach to the region's security challenges.

To overcome these challenges, it is imperative that Somalia's neighboring states, along with regional organizations, adopt a more integrated and coordinated strategy. Regional coordination should include the sharing of intelligence, joint military operations, and political dialogue among neighboring states to ensure that counter-terrorism efforts are aligned and mutually reinforcing. As I have highlighted in my earlier analysis, the involvement of neighboring states such as Ethiopia and Kenya in unilateral interventions has often complicated the security situation, turning regional rivalries into obstacles to peace. The way forward must involve diplomatic engagement that fosters regional cooperation, recognizes shared security interests, and minimizes the risk of escalating conflict between states (Hess 2012).

Moreover, a regional approach should not be limited to military and security concerns alone.

“

A holistic approach would include strengthening the Somali state's ability to govern effectively, reducing corruption, promoting inclusive economic development, and addressing environmental challenges, such as the effects of drought and desertification.

”

Economic cooperation, such as cross-border trade and infrastructural development, should be part of a broader strategy aimed at building regional stability and reducing the appeal of insurgent groups that thrive in isolated, underdeveloped regions. In my opinion, regional cooperation must be based on mutual respect for national sovereignty but also recognize the interdependence of states in addressing transnational threats like Al-Shabaab.

### **Long-Term Stability Strategies: Investing in Climate Resilience and Sustainable Development**

The challenge of terrorism in Somalia is deeply intertwined with the country's environmental vulnerabilities and economic challenges. Climate change, particularly the increasing frequency of droughts and desertification, exacerbates Somalia's poverty and displacement, creating fertile ground for extremist groups like Al-Shabaab to recruit and radicalize disaffected youth (Menkhaus 2014). Therefore, long-term stability in Somalia requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond military interventions and addresses the root

causes of extremism, including climate change and economic underdevelopment.

In my research, I have consistently found that integrating climate resilience and sustainable development into counter-terrorism strategies is not only beneficial but essential. Investing in climate-resilient agriculture, improving water management systems, and promoting renewable energy sources can reduce the socio-economic vulnerabilities that drive individuals to join extremist groups. As part of a broader development strategy, initiatives aimed at improving food security, creating jobs, and strengthening local economies will undermine the appeal of Al-Shabaab's ideology, which is often framed around the provision of basic needs in the absence of the state.

Furthermore, a sustainable development strategy should prioritize education and youth empowerment. Providing young people with alternatives to joining extremist groups, through skills training, educational opportunities, and entrepreneurship, can have a transformative effect on the country's long-term peace and security. In my opinion, addressing the climate-security nexus through integrated approaches that focus on economic, social, and environmental stability is the key to reducing the conditions that fuel insurgencies like Al-Shabaab (Aydinli and Cramer 2019).

### **Rethinking AU Engagement: Moving Beyond Donor-Driven Approaches Towards Sustainable, Africa-Led Counter-Terrorism Initiatives**

The final element of the way forward is a radical rethinking of the AU's role in counter-terrorism efforts. As I have argued throughout this study, the African Union's peace and security interventions, while important, have often been constrained by a heavy reliance on external donor funding. This has resulted in AU missions being shaped more by the priorities of international actors than by Africa's own security and development needs (Hess 2012). The way forward requires the AU to move beyond donor-driven approaches and embrace a more sustainable, Africa-led model for counter-terrorism.

To achieve this, the AU must focus on strengthening its institutional capacity, improving its funding mechanisms, and ensuring that its missions are driven by African priorities. The establishment of an African peace and security fund, for example,

would allow the AU to reduce its reliance on external donors and develop more coherent, context-sensitive interventions. Moreover, the AU should focus on fostering partnerships with African states, regional organizations, and civil society actors to create a truly continent-wide strategy for addressing terrorism and violent extremism.

In my opinion, Africa's response to terrorism must be rooted in the continent's own experiences, values, and realities. By adopting a more self-sufficient, locally driven approach to counter-terrorism, the AU can not only strengthen its legitimacy but also ensure that counter-insurgency efforts are better aligned with the long-term interests of African states and societies.

The way forward for Somalia and the broader Horn of Africa in combating terrorism must be marked by a shift in strategy, a move away from reliance on military interventions alone and toward a more holistic, sustainable approach that addresses the root causes of extremism. Strengthening local governance, fostering regional coordination, addressing climate change and economic vulnerabilities, and rethinking AU engagement are all integral components of a comprehensive strategy for long-term stability. It is only through this integrated, locally driven, and Africa-led approach that Somalia can hope to overcome the challenges posed by Al-Shabaab and achieve lasting peace and security.

### **Conclusion**

This study has critically examined the limitations of the African Union's (AU) counter-terrorism strategies in Somalia, highlighting a series of systemic challenges that hinder the effectiveness of current interventions. Throughout the research, it has become evident that the AU's approach, while making some gains, has largely fallen short of dismantling the persistent threat posed by Al-Shabaab. The reasons for this are multifaceted and extend beyond the purely military domain to encompass deep-rooted governance failures, environmental vulnerabilities, and complex socio-political dynamics that continue to fuel the insurgency. As I have discussed in the preceding chapters, addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive, multifaceted strategy that not only targets the insurgency militarily but also

strengthens the foundations of Somali society—its political structures, economic resilience, and environmental sustainability.

The findings of this study underscore a critical truth: counter-terrorism efforts that focus exclusively on military interventions, without addressing underlying issues such as governance and socio-economic development, are destined to fail. While AU missions like the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the African Transition Mission in Somalia (ATIMS) have made some progress in reclaiming territory from Al-Shabaab, they have struggled to provide the long-term stability that Somalia requires. The failure to dismantle Al-Shabaab entirely is symptomatic of a broader problem—namely, the AU's reliance on external funding, lack of political coherence, and the absence of a holistic approach to counter-terrorism (Menkhaus 2014).

The need for integrated approaches that address governance, environmental, and socio-political challenges is more urgent than ever. To move beyond the constraints of current AU strategies, there must be a radical shift toward holistic, locally driven solutions. This study argues that such strategies must prioritize strengthening Somali political institutions, fostering economic development, and enhancing environmental resilience, as these are the root causes of the instability that terrorism thrives on. Only through a combination of good governance, economic development, and climate adaptation can Somalia begin to undermine the structural conditions that fuel extremism and terrorism.

One of the key lessons drawn from global strategies against terrorism is the importance of aligning military action with comprehensive peacebuilding initiatives. Looking beyond the African context, successful counter-terrorism models from countries like Colombia and Afghanistan offer valuable insights into how military successes must be complemented by political and social reintegration processes. As I have argued, Somalia requires a similar multi-dimensional approach—one that integrates counter-terrorism operations with long-term strategies for state-building and socio-economic development. By focusing on inclusivity and local ownership, Somalia can create an environment in which communities no longer

turn to violent extremism as a means of addressing their grievances.

Moreover, this study emphasizes the necessity for regional cooperation in the Horn of Africa. The fragmentation and lack of coordination between regional economic communities (RECs) like the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the East African Community (EAC) have weakened collective efforts to address terrorism. To achieve sustainable counter-terrorism outcomes, regional cooperation must be fostered to ensure a coherent and unified response to the Al-Shabaab threat. In particular, shared intelligence, coordinated military operations, and cross-border economic initiatives are essential for a long-term solution to the security challenges facing Somalia. Without these coordinated efforts, the regional fragmentation observed in the Horn of Africa will continue to exacerbate the situation and undermine the success of AU interventions.

An equally important consideration is the AU's role in leading counter-terrorism efforts on the continent. The dependence on external donors for funding has shaped AU missions, limiting their autonomy and effectiveness. The study argues for a shift towards Africa-led solutions, one where the AU can rely on its own mechanisms for funding, coordination, and decision-making. This would allow for a more contextually relevant, flexible, and sustainable approach to counter-terrorism, as the AU would be better positioned to respond to the unique challenges faced by Somalia and the broader region. Strengthening the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and fostering deeper institutional capacity within the AU are vital for ensuring that counter-terrorism efforts are not merely reactive but proactive and long-lasting (Hess 2012).

Furthermore, addressing the environmental drivers of extremism is crucial. The impact of climate change, particularly the increasing frequency of droughts and the degradation of agricultural land, exacerbates Somalia's instability. As I have argued, the combination of environmental stressors and resource scarcity creates fertile ground for recruitment into extremist organizations. Integrating climate resilience and sustainable development into counter-terrorism strategies will reduce Somalia's vulnerability

to both environmental shocks and insurgent groups. By investing in climate-smart agriculture, water management, and renewable energy, the international community and the AU can create a more resilient and self-sufficient Somalia that is less prone to the socio-economic grievances that Al-Shabaab exploits.

Looking forward, the way to achieve lasting stability in Somalia lies not just in recalibrating AU counter-terrorism strategies, but in transforming the approach to peacebuilding as a whole. This means embracing inclusive governance, regional cooperation, and the long-term promotion of sustainable development. A paradigm shift is required, one that recognizes the interconnectedness of security, governance, development, and the environment. Somalia's path to peace and stability depends on a comprehensive approach that treats the underlying causes of terrorism as part of a broader development agenda rather than isolated security challenges. As the study has shown, by drawing on successful global strategies, the AU can recalibrate its interventions to achieve lasting stability in Somalia, offering a blueprint for similar interventions across Africa.

In conclusion, the lessons from this study emphasize that combating terrorism in Somalia requires more than just military solutions. It calls for a deep, long-term commitment to governance reform, economic resilience, environmental sustainability, and regional cooperation. By recalibrating its interventions and drawing from successful global models, the AU has the potential to lead Somalia and the broader Horn of Africa towards lasting peace and stability.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, D. and McKnight, J. (2015). Kenya at war: al-shabaab and its enemies in Eastern Africa. *African affairs* [online], 114(454), pp. 1-27. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adu082> [accessed date].
- Abbink, J. (2023). Ethiopia's foreign policy and the recognition of Somaliland: implications for regional stability. *African affairs*, 122(3), pp. 245-263.
- Abboud, S. (2017). Al-Shabaab and the Global Jihadist Movement. *International security studies*, 24(2), pp. 45-68.
- African Union (AU). (2004). *Protocol to the OAU Convention on the prevention and combating of terrorism*. Addis Ababa: African Union.
- Aydinli, E. and Cramer, S. (2019). The evolution of Al-shabaab and its regional impact. *African security review*, 28(4), pp. 305-321.
- Barnes, C. and Hassan, M. (2023). *Clan Politics and state formation in Somalia*. Place of publication: Oxford University Press. Oxford, UK
- Benton, A. (2016). AMISOM's role in Somalia: challenges and achievements. *African security review*, 25(3), pp. 242-257.
- Botha, A. (2022). *Kenya's security strategy in Somalia: interests and challenges*. *African Security Review*, 31(2), pp. 102-120.
- Bryden, M. (2022). *The future of Somalia's security: AMISOM, ATMIS, and beyond*. International Crisis Group.
- Buzan, B. and Wæver, O. (2003). *Regions and powers: the structure of international security*. Place of publication: Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, UK
- Cocodia, J. (2019). Donor-driven policies and regional security dynamics in Africa. *African security review*, 28(3), pp. 245-263.
- De Coning, C. (2021). *The African Union's evolving role in peace operations: Challenges and opportunities*. *International Peacekeeping*, 28(1), pp. 34-56.
- Felbab-Brown, V. (2023). *Terrorist adaptation and AU counterterrorism failures in Somalia*. Place of publication: Brookings Institution. Washington, D.C., USA
- Hagmann, T. and Hoehne, M. V. (2009). Failing States or failed debate? multiple Somali political orders within one country. *African Affairs*, 108(432), pp.15-33.
- Hansen, S. J. (2013). *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The history and ideology of a militant Islamist Group*. Place of publication: Hurst & Company. London, UK
- Hess, S. (2012). The Horn of Africa and Terrorism: The Impact of External Interventions. *Journal of African Affairs*, 111(444), pp. 1-21.
- ICG (International Crisis Group). (2023). *Somalia and Ethiopia's growing rift: implications for regional stability*. Crisis Group Africa Report No. 300.
- Kilcullen, D. (2009). *Counterinsurgency*. Place of publication: Oxford University Press. Oxford, UK
- Marchal, R. (2011). Somalia: The resilience of Al-Shabaab and the failure of external interventions. *African affairs*, 110(439), pp. 273-290.
- Menkhous, K. (2014). *Somalia: state collapse and the politics of coping*. The World Bank Group.
- Selassie, B. G. (2022). Climate change, resource scarcity, and conflict in the horn of Africa: the case of Somalia. *Journal of African environmental studies*, 17(2), pp. 67-85.
- UNSC (United Nations Security Council). (2023). *Resolution 2704: Establishing the African Union support and stabilization mission in Somalia (AUSSOM)*.
- Williams, P. D. (2022). *Fighting for peace in Somalia: AMISOM, ATMIS, and the future of AU peace operations*. Place of publication: Oxford University Press. Oxford, UK