

Statement of

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Consolidating Gains, Confronting Challenges and Charting the Path Forward”

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* The views expressed in this testimony are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Defense Department or the National Defense University.

Thank you, and good afternoon Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member, and members of the Subcommittee. It is an honor to appear before you today to discuss Somalia's ongoing political and security transition, and the ways in which the United States can promote stability and combat terrorism in East Africa.

Mr. Chairman, as requested in your letter of invitation, I will focus my remarks on the status of Al Shabab in Somalia, and the progress of international efforts to defeat that terrorist group. Before I begin, let me note that my comments reflect my personal analysis, not the positions of U.S. policy or the National Defense University (NDU).

My overall assessment is that Al Shabab has indeed been weakened as a conventional insurgency force. However, it retains the capability and intent to employ guerilla and terrorist attacks that inflict deadly harm against U.S. and partner-nation interests both inside Somalia and across the region. This was vividly demonstrated on September 21st, when Al Shabab-linked terrorists stormed the Westgate shopping complex in Nairobi, Kenya, killing scores of innocent civilians – including Africans and non-Africans; Muslims and non-Muslims; men, women and children.

Without additional efforts to defeat the group, it is only a matter of time before Al Shabab undertakes additional deadly attacks. Moreover, there is a significant danger that Al Shabab's brutal tactics will set a precedent for other Al Qaeda-affiliates and "lone wolf" terrorists that are intent on doing harm to the United States and its allies.

The Political & Security Context

Al Shabab – which is currently led by the group's emir, Ahmed Abdi "Godane" – was established by 2004 by a small group of Somali Islamist militants. They had

been part of an earlier Islamist movement – Al Itihad al Islamia (AIAI) – and had provided protection and support for the Al Qaeda East Africa (AQEA) cell that was responsible for the 1998 attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. As of 2004, Al Shabab operatives were functioning independently from AIAI, conducting assassinations of Somali peace activists and security officials, as well as foreign journalists and aid workers.

Al Shabab's existence became publicly known in 2006 when it served as a self-appointed vanguard force within the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). The UIC took control of much of southern Somalia after it defeated the clan-based warlords that had dominated southern Somalia since the fall of the Siad Barre regime in 1991. Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia from 2007-2009 defeated the UIC, and installed the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and African Union (AU) peacekeepers in Mogadishu.

While the TFG languished amidst political infighting, Al Shabab successfully launched an insurgency campaign that gradually retook control of southern Somalia. Moreover, Al Shabab increasingly gained control over all foreign fighters in Somalia, including those loyal to AQEA. This was a byproduct of the success of international security operations targeting senior AQEA operatives Saleh Ali Saleh "Nabhan", Fazul Abdullah Mohamed "Harun" and others. As a result, the Al Shabab movement today combines the traits of a local insurgency seeking to impose an extremist Islamic state on Somalia, and the traits of a transnational terrorist group that seeks to conduct attacks outside of Somalia's borders in the name of global *jihad*.

In 2011, the tide began to turn dramatically against Al Shabab. The African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) partnered with former clan-based militia in Mogadishu that had been integrated into a nominal Somali National Army (SNA). They succeeded in pressuring Al Shabab to execute a "tactical withdrawal" from Mogadishu in August 2011, and subsequently liberated several key towns in Lower and Middle Shabelle regions from Al Shabab control (including Afgooye, Merka,

Jowhar, Wanleweyn and others). Combined ground offensives by Ethiopian and Kenyan militaries then succeeded in wresting control of those countries' border regions from Al Shabab, and liberated the major cities of Baidoa and Kismayo in 2012. Finally, in Central Somalia, Ethiopia supported clan leaders and the Sufist movement Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a (ASWJ) to create local administrations that could resist Al Shabab's presence.

Somalia's Federal Government

As Al Shabab lost ground, there was a general assumption that the movement was significantly weakened and could be defeated by 1) the gradual expansion of AMISOM's area of control, and 2) efforts to build a post-transitional national government. Global attention slowly shifted away from security issues to Somalia's political scene with the establishment of Somalia's Federal Government (SFG) in September 2012.

The SFG – led by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Speaker of Parliament Mohamed Osman Jawari and other Somali intellectuals with long-standing civil society ties – has received remarkable levels of international support. This includes *inter alia* the formal recognition of the Federal Government by dozens of countries around the world and the reestablishment of traditional diplomatic ties; increased foreign aid from the United States and other major donors; the partial lifting of the international arms embargo on Somalia; negotiations with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund to reestablish formal relations; and efforts by the United Nations to shift from Kenya-based, cross-border to in-country operations.

The leadership of the SFG will be critical to completing Somalia's transitional process, and they will require substantial international diplomatic, military and financial support in the process. At the same time, it is important to understand that much of Somalia's political and security progress over the past few years has been the result of a combination of factors:

1. Somalia's warlords and militia-factions, which dominated the country's political, economic and security affairs since 1991, were disarmed by the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in 2006. Since then, the warlords have not been able to rebuild their powerbase and no longer exercise a veto on Somalia's progress.
2. At the same time, popular support for Al Shabab has dwindled quickly. When it controlled most of southern Somalia, the group failed to govern effectively. It dispensed with international aid agencies amidst famine conditions, levied high taxes and forced conscription to support the group's war effort, and imposed extremely severe forms of shari'a law. As a result, Somalis had little interest in continuing to support the group, while more moderate Islamist movements splintered away.
3. Many major clans – whose warlords had been disarmed by Al Shabab – have worked to reestablish their political position and began to resist the movement. This includes major segments of the Marehan and Ogaden in Gedo Region, former supporters of the Rahanweyn Resistance Army (RRA) in Bay and Bakol Regions, the Hawadle in Hiraaan, and the Habr Gedir who supported formation of the Sufist movement Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a (ASWJ) movement, Galmudug State and Himan and Heeb State. With assistance from Ethiopia and Kenya, these groups began to create local administrations and participate in anti-Shabab military activities.
4. AMISOM is an overwhelming military force relative to both Al Shabab and any clan-based forces that may oppose its mandate. AMISOM now requires additional forces and enablers (including helicopters) to continue their advance, but thus far have been able to roll back Al Shabab and hold locations that they "liberate".

5. Many of Somalia's militia are slowly integrating into battalions and brigades that form the nucleus of the Somali National Army (SNA) in Mogadishu. Outside the capital city, militia that were initially proxy forces for Ethiopia or Kenya may now be incorporated into a national command-and-control structure. All of this is supported by Western aid that provides salaries, training, equipment and mentors to professionalize the SNA – much of which has been funded by the United States.
6. Finally, regional politics across the Horn of Africa have begun working in Somalia's favor. In particular, Ethiopia is now working to support the SFG, including brokering the recent Addis Ababa agreement to form the Interim Jubba Administration. At the same time, countries such as Eritrea – which previously supported spoilers of Somalia's peace process – are no longer significantly active in the country.

In addition to supporting the SFG, defeating Al Shabab and building a sustainable post-transition government for Somalia will require national, regional and international efforts to sustain these trends.

The Current Al Shabab Threat Network

Despite these positive political developments, Al Shabab remains a determined and vicious enemy. To conserve its forces and resources, Al Shabab has avoided direct, conventional engagements with AMISOM, the Ethiopian military and the emerging SNA forces. Instead, Al Shabab has withdrawn from their areas of advance and shifted its forces and focus in several directions to establish new safe haven areas, including:

- **Southwest Somalia Safe Haven:** a zone in the far southwest of Somalia that lays between the villages of Barawe in Lower Shabelle, Jilib in Lower Juba, Bardhere in southern Gedo, and Dinsoor in Bay region.

- **Central Somalia Safe Haven:** a zone in the central regions north of Mogadishu, based in Bulo Burti village of southern Hiran region and extending west in Bakol region, east to the towns El Bur and El Dheer in Galgadud, and south into rural areas of Middle Shabelle.
- **Golis Mountains Safe Haven:** a small, mountainous zone outside Bosasso city in the northeastern region of Puntland, running from Galgala towards Badhan, and affording Al Shabab with the potential to attack key Puntland cities including Bosasso, Garowe and Galkayo.
- **Somaliland Safe Haven:** the northwestern area of Somaliland, Al Shabab likely retains a limited capacity to operate. While Al Shabab has no standing military capacity in this region, it does maintain a clandestine network capable of terrorist attacks, and a network of facilitators that support recruitment, indoctrination, training, weapons trafficking and support for the movement of men and materiel.

In these safe havens, Al Shabab's regional governors and ideologues are essential components of the network. They maintain Al Shabab's local control, allow for terrorist training camps to operate, raise funds from taxes and extorting the local community, and manage clan relations and recruitment. Their ranks include well-known Al Shabab leaders – such as Yassin Kilwe and Abdulkadir Mumin in Puntland; Hassan Yakub and Hassan Fidow in Central Somalia; Yusuf Kabakutukade in Middle Shabelle; Moalim Jinow in Bay and Bakol Regions; and Abdirahman Fidow and Mohamed Dulyadeen in the Juba Valley area. However, despite their critical role in the group's hierarchy, these leaders do not appear to be the focus not a focus of counterterrorism efforts.

Al Shabab employs its intelligence wing, the Amniyat, to infiltrate SFG- and AMISOM-held cities and to emplace improvised explosive devices (IEDs), conduct

assassinations or carry out suicide bombing attacks. This group, led by Mahad Mohamed Ali “Karate”, is comprised of hardliners loyal to Al Shabab’s emir Godane and serves as the movement’s parallel governance structure to monitor and regulate the actions of other leaders who may be opposed to Godane. In addition, Al Shabab’s guerilla militias are used primarily for hit-and-run attacks against AMISOM and SNA forward operating bases and main supply routes.

Finally, as demonstrated by the Westgate mall attack last month, Al Shabab retains a significant “external operations” cadre, existing either within or distinct from the Amniyat unit. These individuals, including both Somalis and foreign fighters, are dedicated to expanding the reach of Al Shabab and the wider Al Qaeda network to conduct terrorist operations outside of Somalia. The region has a long history of terrorist attacks, including the 1998 bombings of the U.S. Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, the 2002 attacks targeting tourists in Mombasa, and the 2010 Kampala attacks the end of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. As Al Shabab has lost ground in Somalia, more of its trained and battle-hardened fighters have focused on other parts of East Africa, particularly through cooperation with local affiliates such as Al Hijra in Kenya, and the Ansar Muslim Youth Centre (A-MYC) in Tanzania.

Sustaining Al Shabab: Funding and Personnel

Al Shabab’s finances have been dramatically reduced as a result of its loss of safe haven to the military offensives undertaken by AMISOM, regional partners and the SFG. Prior to those offensives, Kismayo seaport – from which charcoal and other commodities were traded – provided Al Shabab with its primary source of revenue. Nonetheless, Al Shabab is still able to access funds and manage their distribution across its areas of operations in order to sustain its personnel and undertake guerilla attacks. In particular, Al Shabab continues to levy taxes on national and regional trade routes that cross Al Shabab safe haven areas. The group extorts revenue from major businesses under threat of attack and coerces donations in cash

or in kind from clan-based communities in areas that it controls. Finally, Al Shabab likely still receives foreign donations by supporters of its jihadi ideology.

Al Shabab today has a reduced number of personnel as the result of two factors: first, the growing resistance of major Somali sub-clans, and second, the successful military offensives by AMISOM, regional partners and the SFG. As a result, many clan-based militia who joined Al Shabab when the movement occupied their traditional clan areas or who supported Al Shabab in order to gain financial payments have left the movement. The reduction in the number of clan-based personnel supporting Al Shabab is a positive factor in so far as the reduction degrades the fighting capabilities of the movement. However, a smaller, more ideologically committed force is easier to sustain for Al Shabab's leadership, particularly given the group's potentially declining access to funds.

Nonetheless, Al Shabab has demonstrated its capacity to sustain thousands of personnel in its safe haven areas, and remains able to surge militia in the hundreds against specific targets, particularly in rural areas of south-central Somalia. In addition, some Somali sub-clans – for example, the Duduble and Murosade in Mogadishu and Central Somalia, or the Warsangeli and Lelkase in Puntland – have aligned themselves with Al Shabab in order to strengthen their lineages' hand in long-standing struggles against other sub-clans for local political and economic control. This affords Al Shabab a continued supply of militia recruits and funding, as well as safe haven and safe passage.

Al Shabab's Internal Conflicts

Since its creation, Al Shabab was nominally led through the collective decision making of its Shura Council. However, following the appointment of Godane as the group's emir, he has personalized command-and-control, marginalized other senior Al Shabab leaders who disagree with his decisions, and

even arrested or killed Somali and foreign fighters who seek to develop their own operational plans.

Long-standing leadership tensions between Al Shabab's emir Godane and his deputy Mukhtar Robow broke into open violence in June 2013. Forces loyal to Godane killed several key leaders, including Godane's mentor Ibrahim Haji Jama "al-Afghani". Following the fighting, Robow has sought protection in his clan's home on the border between Bay and Bakol regions. Meanwhile, the U.S. jihadist Omar Hammami "Abu Mansor al-Amriki" was killed by Godane's faction, Hassan Dahir Aweis (one of the original AIAI leaders from the 1990s) fled and was arrested by the SFG, and other senior leaders expect they may be next.

Many analysts and policy makers hoped this internal conflict would weaken Al Shabab and make it less capable to launch attacks. However, that is obviously not the case. For several years, Godane had been building and taking firm control over a splinter faction of Al Shabab – primarily based around the Amniyat intelligence unit – and he has centralized control over the Al Shabab movement, including its forces, funding and operational planning.

It is worth noting that the Amniyat, which leads attacks against Somali and AMISOM forces in Mogadishu, was barely impacted when the infighting broke out this past summer. Their attack rate in Mogadishu never fell, and the severity of those attacks never dulled. Over the past year, they have also succeeded in conducting several major attacks including those against senior SFG officials, the Turkish embassy, the United Nations compound, as well as popular restaurants and hotels.

Al Shabab's Strategy and the Westgate Attack

Al Shabab's long-term strategy is not entirely clear. On the one hand, the group may be playing a "waiting game". By this analysis, Al Shabab is working hard

to stay alive, to preserve its strength and to stay relevant for as long as possible. It hopes that the wider political context in Somalia and the region will change and Al Shabab will have an opportunity to resurge. This would be the case if the SFG fails to rebuild a national government, if new clan-based opposition groups emerge with which Al Shabab can align its movement, or if new regional crises force AMISOM to depart Somalia.

On the other hand, Godane, his loyal Amniyat structure, and his external operations cadre may have no illusions that they will eventually succeed in imposing an extremist Islamic state on Somalia. By this account, the group is satisfied with managing a clandestine jihadist movement that inflicts serious harm through nihilistic violence for as long as possible.

In this context, the attack on the Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi should not come as a surprise. Al Shabab and its regional networks across East Africa have long harbored both the ambition and capability to conduct such a deadly attack. Nonetheless, the attack begs a series of questions regarding the level of external threat posed by Al Shabab.

There should be no doubt that Al Shabab's emir and spokesman both claimed credit for the attack, and have threatened additional bloodshed. Almost certainly, the Westgate attack was a combined operation involving an element of the Al Shabab network in Somalia, and an element of the its Kenyan affiliate, the Al Hijra network. From an intelligence perspective, the key is to identify exactly which individuals were involved and their chain-of-command. Was the attack authorized and directed by Godane to demonstrate that he is now fully in charge of the Al Shabab movement and indispensable to Al Qaeda's senior leaders despite his group's recent infighting? Or, was the attack planned and undertaken by remnants of the AQEA network and foreign fighters that have felt undermined by Godane – acting independently and forcing Al Shabab leadership to catch up?

It will also be critical to assess what form of "intelligence failure" allowed the Westgate attack to happen. In short, we need to understand why the attack cell was not identified in advance. How long was the attack cell in Kenya before they took action? Was the attack cell "too quick" from its infiltration into Kenya until the execution of their plot for local security service (even with foreign assistance) to take action? Was the attack cell in Kenya for a long time and parts of previously identified, but considered a "watch target" by mistake? Or, was the attack cell not identified at all due to sufficient compartmentalization and operational security?

The challenge in answering these questions today is the huge amount of contradictory information that exists in the public domain, and the possibility of developing reasonable hypotheses to support many different assessments. Answers to these questions will eventually emerge as the investigation moves forward. In the meantime, it is critical to focus on the best possible response to prevent such an attack from happening again.

Continuing the Fight against Al Shabab

As detailed above, Al Shabab has indeed been weakened as a conventional insurgency force inside Somalia. However, the group has recalibrated its approach and retains the capability and intent to employ guerilla and terrorist attacks. In response, the United States and its Somali, regional and international partners need to redouble their efforts to roll back Al Shabab and build a national, federal government for Somalia that can consolidate the country's security gains into the future.

Succeeding to defeat the Al Shabab insurgency and prevent the resurgence of Al Qaeda-inspired terrorist cells across East Africa will require a combination of efforts:

- **Reviving Regionally-Supported Offensive Operations against Al Shabab:**

- Increase intelligence collection and sharing, as well as operational support, for regional security partners to support targeted operations that remove key Al Shabab and other Al Qaeda-linked operatives from Somalia, and disrupt terrorist training camps.
 - Strengthen regional military commitments to sustain and increase the capabilities of AMISOM and their ability to work alongside the SFG's security structure and regional partners, including Ethiopia.
 - Invest in the development of a capable and professional national security structure in Somalia, including the Somali National Army (SNA), the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) and the Somali National Police (SNP), including careful attention to the integration of anti-Shabab forces at the local- and regional-levels.
- **Support for the development of Somalia's federal system:**
 - Provide diplomatic and foreign aid support to the SFG and its local-level Somali governance partners to achieve negotiated durable political agreements, power-sharing and resource-sharing deals that allow for the emergence of a federal governing system.
 - Address the vexing and politically charged question of how "federalism" will be implemented, including the need to finalize the Provisional Constitution and to negotiate with both long-standing, quasi-independent administrations in Puntland and Somaliland, and nascent, clan-based administrations formed across south-central Somalia.

- Ensure the continued formation of national security forces that reflect the decentralized, clan-based reality of the country's post-war political economy, which is enshrined in Somalia's new federal structure.
 - Support the SFG and its federal units to develop, resource and implement sectoral strategies and regulatory mechanisms to ensure the delivery of essential public goods, including health care, education and development, as well as training a new civil service cadre after twenty years without a functioning government.
 - Support the SFG and its federal units to establish positive control over Somalia's resource flows, including anti-corruption efforts and tax revenues from Mogadishu's key economic infrastructure points (airport, seaport, checkpoints and markets).
- **Support for regional partners to combat terrorism:**
 - Continue support for Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and other regional partners who are vulnerable to attacks by Al Shabab and its regional affiliates, including Al Hijra and the A-MYC.
 - Build regional security cooperation between these countries and the SFG to prevent future attacks.

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