

SAFERWORLD

PREVENTING VIOLENT CONFLICT. BUILDING SAFER LIVES

Counter-terrorism and the logic of violence in Somalia's civil war

Time for a new approach



Joanne Crouch
November 2018



Counter-terror and the logic of violence in Somalia's civil war

Time for a new approach

Joanne Crouch

Acknowledgements

The author would like to extend appreciation to Larry Attree, Peter Mackenzie and Ali Hersi for their support, contributions and review of this paper, together with Alastair Carr providing editorial and fact-checking support, and Jessica Summers for copy-editing and publication support. The report would also not be possible without the support of Abdi Ali and Muzzamil Abdi, without whom the field research could not have been conducted. Finally, the author would like to recognise and show thanks to the Swedish International Development Agency, without whose generous support her research and this publication would not have been possible.

Contents

1 Introduction	1
2 Militarised efforts to tackle al-Shabaab	3
2.1 The Somali government and its international partners	3
2.2 Al-Shabaab's resilience	6
3 The logic of al-Shabaab violence in the Somali civil war	8
3.1 Control of territory and populations	9
3.2 Revenue generation	10
3.3 Protection of the institution	11
3.4 Types of violence deployed by al-Shabaab	12
4 Adverse impacts of the counter-terror approach	14
4.1 Extraversion of military aid	14
4.2 The role of abuses against civilians in fuelling grievances and conflict	16
4.3 Neglect of local governance and reconciliation in 'liberated' areas	17
4.4 Absence of an over-arching peace strategy	18
5 Considering alternatives to the counter-terror lens	20
6 Recommendations	22
6.1 Stronger conflict analysis	22
6.2 Exploring opportunities for dialogue with due care and sensitivity	23
6.3 Focusing security efforts on improving people's security and accountability	23
6.4 Prioritising legitimate models for providing justice and resolving disputes	24
6.5 Reorienting political settlements towards inclusion and delivering public goods	25

1

Introduction

ALTHOUGH MILITARY EFFORTS have pushed back al-Shabaab's territorial control in parts of Somalia, for some time neither the Somali government nor al-Shabaab itself have been able to change the basic dynamics of the conflict, or progress it toward conclusion. Al-Shabaab has benefitted from political instability within the government and uncertainty around the future of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). It has maintained its capacity to generate revenue, perpetrate attacks and make limited territorial gains. Meanwhile, despite the government's progress in deepening stability in areas under its control, it has found retaking, holding and stabilising new areas increasingly difficult, as this is contingent on successful military operations to push back al-Shabaab. As both sides continue to fall short of achieving decisive victories, the devastating human cost of the conflict continues to mount.

Building on findings outlined in Saferworld's January 2016 report on the impact of counter-terrorism and statebuilding in Somalia, *Barbed wire on our heads*,¹ this paper looks at the impacts of hard security approaches in Somalia, with an emphasis on the period from 2016 until 2018. It considers whether these approaches have meaningfully realised the objectives of building peace and stability, or whether they have escalated violence and worked at cross-purposes. Finally, it examines whether the counter-terror approach has brought about unintended consequences of sustaining conflict and obscuring comprehensive conflict analysis.

The analytical lens of this paper rests on two concepts. The first draws on what political scientist Stathis Kalyvas calls the 'logic of violence in civil war'.² Each actor in a civil war, however cruel and irrational it may appear, has its own perceptions of the world and of history, and its own experiences and rationality, all of which it uses to interpret threats, pursue its objectives and survive. The second concept is the 'pathology of violence', or how the actions of one actor in a conflict influence the behaviour and actions of others.

This paper interrogates whether the actions of al-Shabaab form part of a wider pathology of violence linked to war economies as much as the pursuit of power within the framework of civil war. It emphasises how the counter-terror driven 'degrade and destroy' approach has created a perceived existential threat to al-Shabaab. The resulting dynamic on the one hand situates the total defeat and destruction of al-Shabaab as the only viable outcome, and on the other escalates the cost of failure for al-Shabaab – elimination. This heightens the likelihood of the group mobilising violence to counter the threat, and may validate the perspective of al-Shabaab's more belligerent members. Such a dynamic influences al-Shabaab's behaviour towards communities and the Somali government, and ultimately how it perpetrates violence.

¹ Suri S (2016), 'Barbed wire on our heads: Lessons from counter-terror stabilisation and statebuilding in Somalia' Saferworld.

² Kalyvas S (2006), *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

The purpose of analysing armed groups like al-Shabaab is not to justify or excuse their violent and repressive behaviour, but to understand how this fits into a wider pathology of violence and logic of action. If one can analyse al-Shabaab's behaviour, a level of predictability can be derived that could help to reduce the threat it poses to Somali citizens and institutions alike, and work towards conflict resolution. If it is possible to anticipate the response to an intervention, this should inform decisions about which tools and approaches to use.

A concern is that the military strategies of the Somali government, its allies and al-Shabaab all place a greater importance on the control of territory, populations and financial flows than on civilian welfare and conflict resolution. Force is deployed by the belligerents and citizens suffer the blowback.

Our recommendations emphasise that to shift Somalia's bloody conflict towards peace, there is a need to shift the analytical and strategic framework for response. Counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE) paradigms now dominate the thinking behind interventions in Somalia. A peacebuilding lens would instead situate the value of an intervention in relation to objectives of diminishing violence, supporting reconciliation and building a peaceful and inclusive society underpinned by Somali-driven principles of legitimacy, accountability and justice.

When peace and violence reduction become the focus of analysis, as opposed to the destruction of a particular actor, intervention models shift. For example, through a peacebuilding lens we cease to view human rights abuses and civilian deaths incurred through military interventions as 'collateral damage' in the pursuit of defeating a targeted armed actor. Instead, we view these as threats to peace in and of themselves.

A peacebuilding lens could also heighten awareness of other points of violent contestation, such as inter-clan conflict, that are inherently problematic and that intersect with the conflict with al-Shabaab in violent ways. Such a lens focuses less on the elimination of political opposition to government actors and more on how to ensure that political confrontation can be conducted through non-violent means. Finally, the peacebuilding lens opens up a wider array of tools for tackling conflict such as dialogue and violence de-escalation, and is more open to local actors' determination of the ultimate outcome. By contrast, the counter-terrorism lens demands the conclusive defeat of al-Shabaab as the only viable outcome, regardless of its feasibility and cost, and often without regard for community perspectives.³

This paper looks in turn at the developments that inform this overall analysis. It begins by detailing the current state of militarised efforts against al-Shabaab and the resilience of al-Shabaab against them. It then explores how al-Shabaab violence can be understood as motivated, at least in part, by its drive to protect itself, combat the government and retain territorial and population control, and survive the existential threat placed upon it. It analyses additional adverse impacts of the counter-terrorism approach and how it is undermining the potential to resolve Somalia's protracted conflict. Finally, it considers whether a new paradigm focused on achieving peace could offer a better means of tackling violent political contestation in Somalia.

³ Crouch J, Ali A (2018 forthcoming), 'Community perspectives towards al-Shabaab – sources of support and potential for negotiation' in UNSOM (ed) 'War and Peace in Somalia: National Governance, Local Reconciliation and Al-Shabaab'.

2

Militarised efforts to tackle al-Shabaab

INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS TO ADDRESS CONFLICT in Somalia have proceeded in several waves since the fall of the Siad Barre government in 1991 and the subsequent fighting between clan leaders. The killing in October 1993 of 18 US Army rangers deployed as part of the ill-fated US-led Operation Restore Hope closed the first chapter of military engagement and triggered a hiatus in international involvement in the worsening conflict. Later, the 9/11 attacks renewed international, and particularly US, interest in Somalia. Identified by the US government as a suspected safe haven for al-Qaeda, Somalia was absorbed into the international ‘war on terror’ over subsequent years through indirect support for counter-terror operations by regional states, national forces and other proxies, strategic and financial assistance to AMISOM and, from 2007, through direct US-led airstrikes targeting al-Shabaab leaders.

The formation of a new Transitional Federal Government in 2004 brought about an expansion in development assistance to Somalia, which leading donors – including the US, European Union (EU) and UK – linked to strategic objectives such as extending federal government authority beyond Mogadishu. Since the emergence of al-Shabaab in 2007, CVE and stabilising areas recovered from the group have also been high priorities for donors. Since 2013, donors have aligned much of their assistance behind strategic state-building and stabilisation commitments outlined by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), including in the Somali Compact, National Strategy for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, and a jointly agreed security pact.⁴

2.1 The Somali government and its international partners

From 2011 to 2015, military operations against al-Shabaab by the Somali National Army (SNA) and AMISOM, backed by US airstrikes, effectively diminished al-Shabaab’s freedom of movement and territorial control and expanded the reach of the Somali state.⁵ Al-Shabaab suffered heavy losses of territory during this period, including major economic hubs and sea ports such as Mogadishu and Kismayo that had provided crucial economic support to the group. Al-Shabaab, however, remained close by, often

⁴ See: Federal Government of Somalia (2013), ‘Somali Compact: A New Deal for Somalia’, 17 September (<https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somali-compact>); Federal Republic of Somalia (2016), ‘National Strategy and Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism’, 27 June, (<http://www.radiomugdisho.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CVE-Strategy-26-August-English.pdf>); and London Somalia Conference (2017), ‘Security Pact’, 11 May (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact>).

⁵ Chandler et al defined area of influence as the areas over which an actor has freedom of movement without fear of attack. However, this definition is inherently limited given that even in areas where al-Shabaab do not have freedom of movement, they are still able to exert influence in political and local decision making. See Chandler N et al, (2016), ‘Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Somalia: Assessing the Campaign Against Al Shabaab’, RAND Corporation, p 16.

operating only a few kilometres outside of major urban centres and exerting influence across large swathes of predominantly rural areas together with key infrastructure routes.

Since 2016, there have been important developments relating to Somalia's military capacity, the future of AMISOM, the role of international actors, and the dynamics of the conflict. Starting with an airstrike in March 2016 that killed approximately 150 fighters at an al-Shabaab training camp,⁶ the 2016–2017 period saw an escalation in US military operations against al-Shabaab. Thirteen such operations were conducted in 2016,⁷ compared to 35 airstrikes in 2017.⁸ There are now as many as 500 US troops⁹ stationed in Somalia, delivering a combination of technical support, training and air and drone strikes, as well as direct accompaniment of ground force operations. In 2017, a US Navy SEAL was killed while working with the SNA in a special operation against al-Shabaab – the first US serviceman killed in Somalia since Operation Restore Hope in 1993.¹⁰ In 2017, the US also conducted its first airstrikes against ISIS-aligned militants in Puntland.

AMISOM, in collaboration with Somali national forces, has continued its efforts to recover territory and secure transit corridors for humanitarian groups and other actors. However, its effectiveness has been beset by domestic challenges for AMISOM troop contributing countries (TCCs) as well as international concerns. International support for the regional force is waning. In early 2016 the EU – the mission's main funder – cut its contribution to soldier salaries by 20 per cent, much to the chagrin of TCCs.¹¹ The move reportedly reflects unwillingness on the part of the EU to sustain funding without contributions from the African Union (AU) itself.¹² In 2017, facing operational overstretch and a potentially endless war, the AU and the UN Security Council affirmed plans for an AMISOM drawdown from 2018 to 2020. Despite a commitment to remove a thousand troops before the close of 2017, it is understood that only 281 Ugandan troops had been removed as of 30 December.¹³

AMISOM's leadership and donors, including the 'S6' group of security donors,¹⁴ have stressed that any exit strategy must be conditional on a gradual handover of authority to a 'legitimate and inclusive' Somali force capable of degrading al-Shabaab. The May 2017 security pact between the S6 donors underlined their commitment to beef up Somalia's police and security forces, as was further reiterated after the December 2017 Somalia Security Conference in a communique that assessed progress and defined targets within the pact.¹⁵

Troubling questions surround the potential fallout from a swift AMISOM exit, given the scale of the challenges facing the SNA. Riddled with corruption, the FGS is struggling to deliver regular salaries and to feed its troops, while barracks and training facilities are lacking.¹⁶ Many soldiers owe greater loyalty to their clan leaders than to the government.¹⁷ The withdrawal of regional troops has the potential to create a security vacuum in urban centres, risking an upsurge in fighting, attacks on civilians, and territorial gains by al-Shabaab.

⁶ Cooper H (2016), 'U.S. Strikes in Somalia Kill 150 Shabab Fighters', *New York Times*, 7 March.

⁷ United Nations Somalia and Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG) (2017), Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1811', UN Security Council, p 9.

⁸ Roggio B, Gutowski A, (2018), '2017: A record year for US counterterrorism strikes', *The Long War Journal*, 3 January.

⁹ PressTV, (2017), 'US now has significantly more troops in Somalia', 17 November.

¹⁰ Weston-Phippen J (2017), 'The First U.S. Casualty in Somalia Since 'Black Hawk Down'', *The Atlantic*, 5 May.

¹¹ Williams PD (2017), 'Paying for AMISOM: Are Politics and Bureaucracy Undermining the AU's Largest Peace Operation?', IPI Global Observatory, 11 January.

¹² Mahmood OS, Ani NC (2017), 'Impact of Somalia funding dynamics on AMISOM', Institute for Security Studies, 13 December.

¹³ Xinhuanet (2017) 'Uganda completes first withdrawal of troops from Somalia', 30 December (http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/30/c_136861784.htm).

¹⁴ UK, US, UAE, Turkey, EU and UN.

¹⁵ London Conference (2017), 'Security Pact'.

¹⁶ Rahman K (2017), 'Somalia: Overview of Corruption and Anti-Corruption', U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Center, Transparency international.

¹⁷ *The Economist* (2016), 'Most-failed state: Twenty-five years of chaos in the Horn of Africa', 10 December, (<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2016/09/10/most-failed-state>).

AMISOM TCCs have emphasised the adverse impact of inadequate funding and the need for force multipliers such as attack helicopters. Interviews with senior diplomats indicate that TCCs are deeply frustrated and view the international community's reductions in support as a reflection of its underappreciation of TCC efforts and sacrifices in one of the deadliest environments for international peace operations. Uncertainty around AMISOM's future threatens to damage troop morale and make the force more defensive and less likely to pursue high-risk offensives to retake territory, especially as it focuses on building the capacity of Somali troops.

AMISOM is locked in a catch-22, lacking the operational reach and capacity to make decisive gains on the ground, while unable to attract additional resources to change this situation. The Mogadishu-based Heritage Institute for Policy Studies reports that significant expansion is needed to enable AMISOM 'to seriously degrade rather than simply displace al-Shabaab's fighting capabilities.'¹⁸ President Farmaajo's engagement of AMISOM TCCs in March 2018 was disappointing in this regard: only Ethiopia indicated a commitment to increase its military presence, though TCCs have committed to finding additional resources to support their existing troop contingents.¹⁹ Uganda has expressed willingness to send more troops but only if international financing of AMISOM continues.

An Operational Readiness Assessment (ORA) conducted in late 2017 by the FGS and international partners provides a clear picture of gaps and inadequacies within the Somali military. These include insufficient weaponry and training, poor communication and command and control. The US has withdrawn its funding to the SNA for logistics due to allegations of corruption,²⁰ and the Dutch and German governments have reduced their technical training and support.²¹ The ORA emphasises the SNA's reliance on local clan militias to provide weaponry and equipment. This has created a dependency on informal arrangements that can lead to conflict; for instance, SNA units have lost weapons and equipment to al-Shabaab that were provided by a local clan to the SNA and have been unable to replace or return them.²²

The ORA strongly indicates that without substantial international support, the SNA will not be able to advance or even maintain its territorial gains against al-Shabaab. This view is also supported by an interview given by US senator and Armed Services Committee member Jack Reed after a March 2018 visit to Somalia in which he asserted that, despite the best efforts of the US and Somalia's other international partners, the SNA have not been able to 'clear and hold' new territory, but merely to disrupt al-Shabaab and maintain the government's existing presence.²³

Even if additional support for military operations and heavy investments into training the SNA and strengthening the security apparatus materialise, it will take years for Somalia to grow the capacity to manage its own security. It will be further contingent on substantive reform to tackle corruption within the SNA and to mitigate the risk of diversion of weapons, equipment, personnel and funding that have afflicted the SNA and reduced its capabilities.²⁴

¹⁸ Williams PD, Hashi, A (2016), 'Exit Strategy Challenges for the AU Mission in Somalia', the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, p 1.

¹⁹ African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) (2018), 'Somalia and Troop Contributing Countries call for a halt to AMISOM troop reduction', 3 March. (<http://amisom-au.org/2018/03/somali-somalia-and-troop-contributing-countries-call-for-a-halt-to-amisom-troop-reduction>).

²⁰ Houreld K (2017), 'Exclusive: U.S. suspends aid to Somalia's battered military over graft', 14 December, (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-military-exclusive/exclusive-u-s-suspends-aid-to-somalias-battered-military-over-graft-idUSKBN1E81XF>).

²¹ Reuters (2018), 'German military to end role in EU training mission in Somalia', 1 February, (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-military-somalia/german-military-to-end-role-in-eu-training-mission-in-somalia-idUSKBN1FL67S>); and Fish T (2018), 'EU Training Mission in Somalia suffers another setback', 27 February, (<http://www.janes.com/article/78194/eu-training-mission-in-somalia-suffers-another-setback>).

²² Confidential security report from partner agency. December 2017.

²³ Houck C (2018), 'We're Finding It Difficult to Hold' Territory in Somalia: Senator', Defense One, 2 March (<https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2018/03/were-finding-it-difficult-to-hold-territory-somalia-senator/146376/>).

²⁴ Suri S (2016), pp 29–30, 39–40; Keen D, Attree L (2015), 'Dilemmas of counter-terror, stabilisation and statebuilding', Saferworld, p 23; Bryden M (2013), 'Somalia redux', Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS); SEMG (2008), 'Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1811', UN Security Council, p 12.

Should al-Shabaab regain territory previously liberated from the group, people's confidence in the SNA and AMISOM to provide security and governance may drastically dwindle, fulfilling a central objective of al-Shabaab attacks. Already personnel within international missions have criticised the government's inability to hold new territory, placing the blame on deficiencies in the military and stabilisation initiatives, with the ultimate impact being that "communities we are supposed to be liberating think we are weak."²⁵ Some analysts have predicted a bleak future, including counter-terror expert Catherine Zimmerman, who argues that without shifts in approach, the stage is set for the collapse of the gains made to date against al-Shabaab.²⁶

2.2 Al-Shabaab's resilience

Though targeted strikes have inflicted setbacks on al-Shabaab's military capability and leadership structure,²⁷ the group does not appear close to elimination. Having been pushed back through interventions such as Operation Juba Corridor²⁸ during July 2015, over the past two years al-Shabaab has delivered a steady campaign of attacks on AMISOM and SNA forward bases. This has allowed it to retake control of strategic infrastructure routes, regain territory, expand its sphere of influence and acquire weapons and equipment from SNA and AMISOM bases for use against AMISOM in future attacks.²⁹ Al-Shabaab has displayed an increased capacity to conduct complex attacks, including a string of devastating car bombings and suicide attacks against government, military and civilian targets. This is in part a result of al-Shabaab's increasing ability to develop and deploy complex improvised explosive devices (IEDs), using chemicals commonly found in fertilisers such as potassium nitrate.³⁰

Al-Shabaab's attacks have included a major truck bombing in January 2017, a massive attack in the capital on 14 October 2017 that killed over 500 people,³¹ and a subsequent attack on the Nasa Hablood II hotel two weeks later. While al-Shabaab has never publicly claimed responsibility for the Zoobe Junction attack, it is the only actor capable of an assault of that size. The incident underlined the increasing difficulties AMISOM and the SNA face in averting attacks on the capital in light of al-Shabaab's gains in surrounding locations.³² Al-Shabaab's disinclination to claim responsibility may also indicate disquiet within its senior ranks about the scale of civilian deaths, which has increased public hostility toward al-Shabaab.³³

Financial uncertainty created by the EU's reduction of funding to AMISOM together with domestic political turbulence³⁴ among TCCs have resulted in unilateral troop withdrawals by AMISOM contingents, which have been exploited by al-Shabaab for territorial gains. When Ethiopian troops withdrew in late 2016, al-Shabaab militants immediately re-entered the towns of Burduhule, Garasweyne and Tigelow in Bakool region, Eli Ali, Halgan and Moqokiri in Hiraan region, Bud and Ga'lad in Galgudud region and Adan Yabal in Middle Shabelle.³⁵ The expansion of territorial control in these areas, together with the prospect of an AMISOM drawdown, may increase al-Shabaab's confidence that a sustained military approach could further its objectives.

²⁵ Saferworld interview, official of an international delegation, May 2018.

²⁶ K Zimmerman et al (2017), 'US Counterterrorism Objectives in Somalia: Is Mission Failure Likely?', Critical Threats.

²⁷ C. Barnes, Z Yusuf (2016) 'Somalia's Al-Shabaab Down but Far from Out', International Crisis Group, 27 June (<http://blog.crisisgroup.org/africa/somalia/2016/06/27/somalias-al-shabaab-down-but-far-from-out/>).

²⁸ Operation Juba Corridor was an AMISOM led offensive conducted in July 2015 with a focus on Gedo, Bay and Bakool regions in order to degrade al-Shabaab. It has been credited with recapturing key towns of Dhinsoor and Bardheere.

²⁹ SEMG (2017), p 11 and Mahmood OS, Ani NC (2017).

³⁰ SEMG (2017), p 10.

³¹ Reuters (2017), 'Death toll from Somalia truck bomb in October now at 512: probe committee', 30 November (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-blast-toll/death-toll-from-somalia-truck-bomb-in-october-now-at-512-probe-committee-idUSKBN1DU2IC>).

³² International Crisis Group (2017), 'Managing the Disruptive Aftermath of Somalia's Worst Terror Attack', 20 October (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b131-managing-disruptive-aftermath-somalias-worst-terror-attack>).

³³ *The Guardian* (2017), 'At least 23 dead in bombing and gun attack at Mogadishu hotel', 29 October (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/28/mogadishu-people-dead-car-bomb-outside-somalia-hotel>).

³⁴ Ethiopia in 2016/7 underwent a political crisis and uprisings in the Oromo region with political protests together with military repression leading to the resignation of Prime Minister Desalegn. Kenya underwent presidential elections in 2017 which saw heavy debate over the sustained presence of the KDF in Somalia.

³⁵ Lahiff C (2016), 'Ethiopian AMISOM Withdrawals', Critical Threats, 4 November, (<https://www.criticalthreats.org/analysis/ethiopian-amisom-withdrawals>).

At present, both the government and al-Shabaab have sustained their capacity to perpetrate attacks on each other, inflict grave harm and make modest territorial gains, but not to the extent that either side is able to shift the dynamics of the conflict. Al-Shabaab has taken control of some important transport routes and is using them to restrict the flow of goods and people into areas that the government has retaken, but this has not had the detrimental and destabilising impact that the group seeks. Al-Shabaab has also maintained and in some cases broadened control of areas close to urban centres, but this has merely increased its ability to launch deadly attacks on population centres, without bringing it appreciably closer to regaining control of cities or seaports. Meanwhile, the SNA and AMISOM have had sporadic success in retaking territory from al-Shabaab. However, they lack the resources (human, financial and material) to stabilise and bring needed services to these areas. In many cases they have had to pull back, leaving towns vulnerable to reclamation by al-Shabaab, and risking repercussions for any residents who have cooperated with government authorities.

The overwhelming image is of a stalemate between warring parties, in which despite some gains on each side, there has been little meaningful advancement towards a conclusion. Meanwhile, the toll in civilian lives continues to be catastrophic.

3

The logic of al-Shabaab violence in the Somali civil war

IN ASSESSING THE IMPACTS of hard military approaches to the Somali conflict, it is important to understand that not only do they show limited potential to end the conflict, but they also feed into a wider pathology of violence.

The counter-terror approach that has underpinned the response to al-Shabaab drastically constricts how the conflict is understood and addressed. From the original AMISOM mandate to more recent US and UK statements, the central objective has consistently been to 'degrade and destroy' al-Shabaab.³⁶ This locks Somali and international interventions into a combative posture, whether through military, stabilisation or CVE means. While this may have temporarily driven al-Shabaab from much of the territory it controlled, it has not led to a sustainable peace and it polarises communities and draws the belligerents into a vicious circle of violence and revenge.

Most civil wars, which are effectively contestations over sovereignty, entail the need for one or both sides to capture and hold territory, generate income and control populations, protect their leaders, recruit personnel and indoctrinate populations to support their ideological worldviews while attacking and undermining their opponents.³⁷ Most warring parties meet violence with violence, and the zero-sum nature of contestation, accompanied by threat of elimination, places an imperative on deploying all tools possible, including violence, both to respond and to further strategic objectives. This section elaborates the ways in which al-Shabaab seeks to achieve its objectives through violence, suppression and coercion of local populations. It also explores the extent to which these approaches are a predictable response to the existential threat posed by the militarised counter-terror approach. Considering these dynamics could support the emergence of new strategies to reduce violence and advance peace.

³⁶ US Department of State (2014), 'U.S. Foreign Policy in Somalia', 3 June (www.state.gov/p/us/rm/2014/227079.htm); Daily Hansard (2012), 'Debate', 9 February (www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201212/cmhansrd/cm120209/debtext/120209-0002.htm#12020952000002); UN Security Council (2017), 'Resolution 2372', 30 August ([https://undocs.org/S/RES/2372\(2017\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2372(2017)))

³⁷ de la Calle L, Sanchez-Cuenca I (2015), 'How Armed Groups Fight: Territorial Control and Violent tactics', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, **38** (10), pp 795–813; Kalyvas S (2006); United States Government Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative (2009), 'US Government Counterinsurgency Guide', January.

3.1 Control of territory and populations

In civil wars, capture and control of territory, together with control of local populations is often a key strategic endeavour in pursuing overall state control. Al-Shabaab's assertion of control frequently involves harshly sanctioning populations to dissuade their engagement with the government or international partners, and to disrupt efforts by the government and international partners to gain, hold and stabilise new areas.

Somali civilians within areas of disputed control are trapped between very determined warring parties, and have to navigate their personal allegiances carefully to limit their exposure to violence. On one hand, communities in liberated areas are expected to engage enthusiastically with the Somali state (and punished if they do not in some cases). Reluctance to do so may be equated with sympathy for al-Shabaab. At the same time, many communities and their elders are acutely aware that engaging with the Somali state may place them at serious risk of death if government actors fail to maintain their control and al-Shabaab returns.

In areas al-Shabaab has reclaimed after they were temporarily 'liberated' by AMISOM and the SNA, the group has attacked civilians perceived to have supported or economically engaged with government forces. Elders and community members in Bay region reported that al-Shabaab sentenced to death anyone who so much as rented a vehicle to a government official.³⁸ AMISOM and SNA troop withdrawals from these areas exhibit the government's inability to hold onto and expand upon territorial gains as opposed to disrupting and displacing al-Shabaab only briefly. UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for Somalia Michael Keating has attributed this to the government's stabilisation capacity not keeping pace with its military capacity to take territory.³⁹

In Lower Shabelle, clans have alternately formed and switched alliances with al-Shabaab and the government. Al-Shabaab has burned down villages in the region to punish them for switching their allegiance to the government, displacing thousands of people.⁴⁰ Interviewees elsewhere noted that al-Shabaab has ordered civilians to leave villages that the government and its allied forces targeted for reclamation. Civilians seeking to return were accused of wanting to live under government rule.

Movement restrictions between al-Shabaab and government-held areas have become both common and aggressive in their application. Interviewees spoke of restrictions on the movement of vehicles transporting goods or people into specific towns and villages in Bay region. As punishment, al-Shabaab were reported to have killed donkeys that facilitated movement and certain towns such as Hudur in Bay region that were under government control were effectively surrounded to prevent goods from passing in overland.⁴¹

Al-Shabaab commonly monitors civilians traveling between areas under their control and those under government control, and have accused civilians of engaging with the government. The reverse is also true, as the government has punished those who decline to cooperate with it out of fear. In Jubaland, one interviewee travelling from an al-Shabaab-held area into a major urban centre to meet with the Saferworld research team was arrested after previously declining to participate in a government meeting on community development and local governance. This individual explained that engaging with the government would threaten his security back home.⁴²

Conversely, some interviewees noted that movement between and within areas under full al-Shabaab control were subject to fewer restrictions, security was strong and transport and travel taxation was well-managed, with receipts issued for road levies, indicating that restrictions were grounded in a strategic purpose as opposed to being ideologically driven.

³⁸ Saferworld interview, NGO worker, Baidoa, March 2018.

³⁹ Keating M, Abshir S (2018) 'The politics of security in Somalia', Centre on International Cooperation.

⁴⁰ Human Rights Watch (2017), 'Somalia: Al-Shabab Forces Burn Villages', 26 July, (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/26/somalia-al-shabab-forces-burn-villages>).

⁴¹ Saferworld interviews, community members and elders, Baidoa, May 2018.

⁴² Saferworld interview, Gedo, February 2018.

In parts of Gedo, al-Shabaab convened elders in advance of the 2016 political selection process to demand that they refrain from participation in any way. One candidate who wished to return home to campaign was told by his own father that he could not stay in his house for fear of reprisals. The same individual spoke of how al-Shabaab have maintained a level of peace in his town as a result of community acquiescence, but there have been one or two targeted killings of people who engaged in political processes with the government.⁴³ Community members who avoid engaging with the government are able to go about their lives and be economically productive, but those who interact with the government are subjected to sanctions.

One analyst stated that al-Shabaab violence against civilians was primarily aimed at enforcing compliance with their rules, laws and requirements. Violence is frequently public in order to demonstrate what happens to those who transgress these rules. In some instances, those who owe taxes have been contacted and told to look out for the news the following day, when invariably someone is killed.⁴⁴

Such stark warnings are intended to invoke compliance as opposed to merely punish civilians. In all these respects, al-Shabaab behaves like a conventional insurgent actor pursuing its own political, military and economic objectives, using violence to secure territorial and population control.

3.2 Revenue generation

Military pressure on al-Shabaab likewise reinforces its need to generate revenue from civilian populations to compete militarily, and it has deployed the threat of violence where necessary to enforce this.

In areas under al-Shabaab control or influence such as Mogadishu, the implementation of *zakat* as a taxation and revenue generation mechanism enables al-Shabaab to sustain its position. Enforcement of *zakat* on certain goods, such as local crop harvests and livestock, has often involved violence as community members are killed for resisting. In other areas, community members have declined to harvest crops due to the high tax imposed, which sometimes exceed their net revenue from sales. However, other interviewees stated that al-Shabaab's demands for *zakat* reflect the size and scale of each business operation.⁴⁵ Furthermore, *zakat* requirements on the transport of goods through al-Shabaab held areas is often clearly understood by business personnel, and administered in an organised way, with the issuance of receipts for payment and a level of predictability for the amount levied.

Despite attempts to close al-Shabaab's financial tap, interviews with senior analysts indicate that al-Shabaab's declining ability to generate funds through its control of ports or access to international financial flows has led to a greater emphasis on domestic revenue generation. However, despite efforts by the government and international partners to resume control of major ports and import/export routes as a means to restrict al-Shabaab's ability to generate income, such efforts may have inadvertently had the reverse effect. More secure government-held ports have permitted greater trade and flow of goods, which has often meant more goods passing through al-Shabaab territory and thus subject to taxation by the group.

Interviewees from businesses asserted that the inadequacy of port management by government actors forces them to use al-Shabaab managed routes for effective and financially viable transport of their goods. One interviewee spoke of an arbitrary US\$10,000 levy placed at the last minute upon their goods at Kismayo port by the local administration, and stated that the excessiveness of and lack of clarity on costs results in diminished business viability. Therefore, they saw no other option than to use overland routes through al-Shabaab territory.⁴⁶

⁴³ Saferworld interview, parliamentary candidate, March 2017 and May 2018.

⁴⁴ Saferworld interview, Somalia analyst, May 2018.

⁴⁵ Saferworld interview, Baidoa, March 2018; Saferworld interview conflict analyst, May 2018.

⁴⁶ Saferworld interview, business leader with operations in Lower and Middle Juba, May 2018.

Government troops, as well as local clan militias, are also known to demand taxes; one business leader from Bay region noted that the most problematic taxation comes from multiple illegal checkpoints and looters along government-controlled transport routes.⁴⁷ A fertile environment is emerging for government and allied forces, along with non-state armed actors, to loot with impunity. In contrast, despite heavy criticism of the level of *zakat* that al-Shabaab demands from communities, some community members perceive al-Shabaab as being less corrupt than the government and have noted that *zakat* is not used flagrantly to enrich its members.⁴⁸ Reverting to the earlier concern about civilian casualties, a number of research participants stated that such behaviour serves only to diminish trust and support in the armed mission against al-Shabaab and causes some communities to prefer, albeit with important reservations, al-Shabaab to the government.

In addition to obtaining funds, accessing weapons and equipment has also been a priority. One military interviewee described some of the ways in which al-Shabaab procures its weapons. First, its members infiltrate government forces and then return with training and equipment.⁴⁹ Al-Shabaab also kidnaps people and forces their elders to buy weapons for the group in exchange for their release. The group also acquires caches of weapons from the AMISOM or SNA bases it attacks. Finally, it implements taxes on businesses, or merely extorts money from them under the threat of death to purchase weapons elsewhere.⁵⁰

Al-Shabaab has therefore deployed violence and sanctions against populations and the state to generate income and secure weapons to pursue a war effort and combat the threat placed upon it.

3.3 Protection of the institution

Al-Shabaab has frequently protected against threats to itself and its leaders through such means as strategic withdrawal and rooting out spies or potential defectors among civilians and its own members. In lower Shabelle, al-Shabaab has targeted and killed elders and community members alike, with an increased sensitivity towards those who it perceives to be spies or members of opposing groups.⁵¹ After the Zoobe Junction attack, fears of dissent by al-Shabaab members escalated and information surfaced that those perceived as disloyal were being targeted with arrest or even death.

An inadvertent consequence of armed action against al-Shabaab leaders has been the impact on communities as a result of al-Shabaab's strategic withdrawals due to the military threat against them. Armed action against al-Shabaab makes it difficult for communities and elders in al-Shabaab controlled areas to engage the group and express frustrations with taxation, seek local dispute resolution, handle local grievances and support community needs. As a result of attacks and drone strikes, local al-Shabaab leaders are often killed, driven into hiding or replaced with junior members who are less adept at managing local governance needs.⁵² Interviewees regularly expressed that the change in al-Shabaab behaviour towards local governance changed once attacks against al-Shabaab had escalated. Many interviewees expressed a degree of appreciation for al-Shabaab in the 'early days' with some elders emphasising the change being related to protection of their leaders following increased government and AMISOM attacks.

⁴⁷ Saferworld interview, businessman, Baidoa, March 2018.

⁴⁸ Saferworld interviews, Baidoa, March 2017.

⁴⁹ Saferworld interview, military commander in South and Central Somalia, March 2018. Al-Shabaab made a nod to this dynamic when a combatant attacked Villa Somalia wearing a police uniform that had only recently been provided to police recruits in early 2018. See Radio Dalsan (2018), 'Mogadishu on High alert after attack', 25 February (<https://www.radiodalsan.com/en/2018/02/25/mogadishu-on-high-alert-after-attack/>).

⁵⁰ Saferworld interview, military commander, March 2018.

⁵¹ SEMG (2017), pp 42–43.

⁵² Saferworld interview, clan militia leader, March 2018; Saferworld interview, community elder, Lower Shabelle, November 2017; Saferworld interview, community elder, Gedo, November 2017.

However, as documented in Saferworld's previous work,⁵³ targeting leaders has not inherently brought about a reduction in al-Shabaab's capacity. Although some analysts and international actors have argued the removal of leaders through targeted strikes to be a valuable tool in the fight against al-Shabaab and have hailed military action to kill al-Shabaab commanders as a success,⁵⁴ others deem such plaudits premature, and have questioned predictions of al-Shabaab's decline through the removal of its leaders. According to international affairs scholar Jenna Jordan, who has analysed 298 instances of leadership targeting in various counter insurgency campaigns, "decapitation is not ineffective merely against religious, old, or large groups, it is actually counter-productive... In many cases, targeting a group's leadership actually lowers its rate of decline."⁵⁵ A similar view has been advanced by the UN Arms Monitoring Group, which has warned that the removal of al-Shabaab leaders in 2016–17 may not have affected the group's capacity to operate.⁵⁶ Furthermore, analyses of group cohesion in relation to peace agreements state that fractured organisations have a harder time than unified organisations in pursuing agreements and in gaining acceptance for them among their members.⁵⁷ In this regard, while the approach of targeting leaders of al-Shabaab is ineffective, it also limits the potential for alternative approaches such as dialogue.

Where al-Shabaab has sought to protect against the threat placed against it, not only has this limited the effectiveness of counter-terror measures, it has also had highly adverse impacts on community members.

3.4 Types of violence deployed by al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab's attacks on civilian and government targets have often been dramatic, from suicide bombs or explosive-laden trucks to complex attacks entailing a combination of vehicle borne and person borne IEDs as well as active shooters. Attacks have targeted the UN compound in Hargeisa in 2008 and Baidoa in 2016, along with numerous targets in Mogadishu such as hotels used by politicians as well as locations frequented by civilians such as restaurants and Lido Beach.

The motives and methodologies of armed groups are tailored to their specific contexts as opposed to being indiscriminate. Polo and Gleditsch have emphasised that these types of attack serve a dual purpose of coercion combined with communicating an armed actor's resolve and capacity to undermine the opposition. They further emphasise the logic of terror attacks by an armed actor as underpinned by the pursuit of its objectives and show how such strategies can inflict a great cost on government actors by demonstrating their lack of political control and thereby undermining their popular support. The level of civilian casualties tends to reflect an armed group's logic within a pragmatic analysis of strategic gains versus potential fall-out.⁵⁸

De la Calle and Cuenca argue that the nature of violence is related to conflict dynamics and particularly to the scale of territory that insurgents control. Actors with a high level of territorial control are more likely to engage in guerrilla warfare to hold and gain territory, while those who lack territorial control focus on actions that undermine their opposition. The exception is in cities, primarily the capital, where local control is so dominated by the government that armed insurgents tend to rely on terror attacks. The nature of al-Shabaab violence in Mogadishu shifted dramatically after the group's late 2011 withdrawal from Mogadishu, after which conventional but complex terror attacks sharply escalated.

This coheres with analysis indicating that within irregular wars, armed groups resort to actions targeting civilians when their capabilities are decreasing or when their

⁵³ Suri S (2016), pp 24, 31.

⁵⁴ Chandler et al (2016).

⁵⁵ Suri S (2016), pp 23–24.

⁵⁶ SEMG (2017), p 9.

⁵⁷ Salih C, Gray S, (2017), 'Group Cohesion and Peace Processes', United States Institute of Peace.

⁵⁸ Polo SMT, Gleditsch KT, (2016), 'Twisting Arms and Sending Messages: Terrorist Tactics in Civil War', *Journal of Peace Research* 53(6), pp 815–829.

control of territory is increasingly contested.⁵⁹ According to data analysis conducted by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), violent actions by al-Shabaab were at their lowest point in 2009 and began to increase from around 2010 onward without any significant or sustained reduction since.⁶⁰ This trend broadly corresponds with the increase in scale and scope of AMISOM's presence in Somalia during that period. AMISOM had a minimal presence in Somalia in 2007, within a peacekeeping mandate. In July 2010 the decision was made to shift from a peacebuilding to peace enforcement mandate that would engage al-Shabaab more directly. Since 2010, the size of the AMISOM mission has escalated and with it the scale of attacks against al-Shabaab and pressure on their territory – notably with the removal of al-Shabaab from Mogadishu in late 2011. Numerous interviewees spoke of an escalation in violence by al-Shabaab as a result of AMISOM's intervention and the growing military pressure on them.

In areas under stronger control by al-Shabaab, interviews with both Somali analysts and communities have emphasised lower levels of violence and that the greatest level of violence experienced by al-Shabaab or the government tends to be situated in areas highly contested by the government and AMISOM. Areas under total al-Shabaab control are less subject to violence as there is less need to combat communities directly (and thus its sanctions centre more on dispute resolution and tax collection).

One clan militia leader who has joined an anti-al-Shabaab alliance with the government noted how in his view, the level of control al-Shabaab holds influences its ability to engage effectively with communities and mediate disputes in constructive ways:

“This happened from 2008 to 2010. Al-Shabaab would address the land disputes. They would look into things and return the land appropriately. When al-Shabaab were very strong they were really doing good. When they were attacked, they were expelled, they had to go to the bush. They became thieves after that; they were forced to change. Because they were under pressure, they changed. When they were in power and they were strong, they were good.”⁶¹

As with other armed groups, terror attacks by al-Shabaab, abhorrent as these are, should be understood within the context of how they advance its objectives, how much pressure it is under, and how much control it has in the locality in question.

While it is crucial to avoid conflating analysis with justification, it is vital to go beyond the widespread portrayal of al-Shabaab violence as an entirely incomprehensible phenomenon whose underpinnings warrant no further scrutiny. Al-Shabaab behaviour must be seen and understood in relation to the context within which it sits (under the pressure of the existential threat provided by zero-sum contestation). This is a significant factor in al-Shabaab's use of violence towards civilians and the state. Understanding the logic underpinning al-Shabaab's decisions and behaviour in context offers an opportunity for recalibrating response strategies.

While recognising that al-Shabaab rejected the Somali government's offer of dialogue in 2007 in favour of mounting a sustained militarised campaign, the group's nature, scale and modes of violence cannot be de-linked from the military threat imposed upon it by the counter-terror approach. It is of course unclear whether al-Shabaab would consider renouncing violent pursuit of its objectives if circumstances were more conducive for it to do so. However, the counter-terror approach makes it impossible to find out. This raises doubts about whether the counter-terror approach is a viable way to tackle the conflict. The defeat of al-Shabaab does not appear any closer on the horizon and the escalation of military contestation via the counter-terror response likely escalates al-Shabaab's use of violence to pursue its goals. Meanwhile, citizens bear the brunt of the violence, sanctions, restrictions and other hardships that result from the war.

⁵⁹ De la Calle L, Sanchez-Cuenca I (2015).

⁶⁰ ACLED, 'Al Shabaab and Boko Haram: Patterns of violence', (<https://www.acleddata.com/2017/10/09/al-shabaab-and-boko-haram-patterns-of-violence/>).

⁶¹ Saferworld interview, leader of a clan militia in South and Central Somalia, March 2018.

4

Adverse impacts of the counter-terror approach

DESPITE MEETING SOME OBJECTIVES of pushing back al-Shabaab and expanding the Somali state presence in some parts of Somalia, as documented in the *Barbed wire on our heads* study, drawbacks of the counter-terror approach include: negative consequences of militarised approaches; ignoring and exacerbating key drivers of conflict including corruption, the war economy and the problematic behaviour of relevant national and regional actors; the imposition of external templates and time-tables on peace-and state-building processes; and related lack of public buy-in to international efforts.⁶² Here, we provide further evidence on the role of abuses against civilians in fuelling grievances and conflict, the diversion of international military assistance, the neglect of local governance and reconciliation needs in ‘liberated’ areas, and the absence of an over-arching peace strategy.

4.1 Extraversion of military aid

The counter-terror approach’s emphasis on military engagement has brought about problematic aid dynamics that benefit the financial, military and political interests of regional AMISOM forces. The politics of ‘extraversion’ – the exploitation of international military assistance by recipient governments pursuing their own political and financial agendas⁶³ – have been deployed to great effect by regional states. AMISOM forces have participated in a war economy involving actors such as regional administrations, al-Shabaab, and other armed groups. This economy is sustained through a combination of AMISOM fees, illicit trade and international assistance.

Ethiopia in particular has benefitted from its sustained military presence in Somalia. It maintains 4,000 troops on Somali soil, fully supported by the international community at a monthly cost of \$822 per troop at nearly \$40 million per year.⁶⁴ Addis Ababa has also profited from its perceived status as an anchor state in the ‘war on terror’ in the Horn of Africa. The US has consistently described Ethiopia as a key ally in the regional fight against al-Shabaab and other Islamist groups,⁶⁵ and international

⁶² Suri S (2016), pp 21–40.

⁶³ Tull D M (2011), ‘Weak States and Successful Elites: Extraversion Strategies in Africa’, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik German institute for international and Security Affairs.

⁶⁴ Williams P D (2017); SIPRI (2017), ‘Military expenditure by country, in constant US\$ m’, (<https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Milex-constant-2015-USD.pdf>).

⁶⁵ This also involved extensive collaboration during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, as well as hosting US administered ‘black sites’ and drone bases in Ethiopia to target al-Qaeda operations in Somalia and Yemen. See Mulat YK (2016), ‘Domestic sources of international action: Ethiopia and the global war on terrorism’, *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 10 (11), pp 131–144.

assistance has reflected this status.⁶⁶ This assistance has enabled the Ethiopian government to tackle its domestic political opposition. For example, the UK has contributed £13–15 million to train the notorious ‘Liyu’ police in Ethiopia’s Somali Region, who have carried out a brutal counter-terror campaign marked by systematic abuses against civilians.⁶⁷

The scale of donor funding attached to Ethiopia’s military operations in Somalia has generated a strategic interest for Addis Ababa in continuing the status quo. Accordingly, Ethiopia responds forcefully when financial incentives linked to its Somalia operations come under threat. In January 2016, Ethiopia conducted a number of unilateral troop withdrawals across south and central Somalia. As noted above, this hasty withdrawal and Addis’s failure to notify AMISOM command of its plans allowed al-Shabaab to move in quickly to take over. Former Ethiopian information and communication minister Getachew Reda told journalists that the withdrawal was related to the “financial burden” of its operations and international “lack of support”,⁶⁸ in response to the EU’s announcement of a 20 per cent reduction in AMISOM funds. Whatever the rationale for this withdrawal, the move underlined Ethiopia’s role as a linchpin in the fight against al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab took advantage of this move to retake rural locations, placing more civilians on the frontline between competing military forces.

Kenya has maintained extensive financial and trade interests in Somalia, which have deepened as a result of its participation in AMISOM. Kenyan operations in Somalia have been expensive, pushing the national military budget up from \$587 million before the 2011 invasion to \$821 million in 2012–13, excluding \$156 million spent by the National Security Intelligence Service.⁶⁹ Kenya began receiving roughly \$138 million per year in UN reimbursements after the absorption of its troops into AMISOM in 2012, a move described by then-finance minister Njeru Githae as a deliberate measure to reduce the cost of the deployment to the national budget.^{70,71}

Since 2011, Kenyan engagement under Operation Linda Nchi has also provided Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) personnel with highly lucrative access to the illicit trade in sugar and charcoal through its presence in Kismayo.⁷² KDF personnel, the Jubaland Administration and the Ras Kamboni militia have all taken cuts of taxes on the sugar industry, worth approximately \$200–400 million a year in imports from Brazil.⁷³ Al-Shabaab, KDF personnel and Ras Kamboni have also shared access to the illicit charcoal trade, with the KDF and Ras Kamboni controlling around 70 per cent of sales.⁷⁴ A breakdown in revenue sharing agreements between al-Shabaab and Ras Kamboni in 2015 led to a sharp downturn in charcoal revenues, causing the Jubaland Administration to fall into financial difficulty and raising fears that militias allied to the administration would shift loyalties to al-Shabaab.⁷⁵

⁶⁶ Following 9/11, US aid to Ethiopia increased three-fold, reaching a peak of over \$1 billion in 2008 following its intervention against the Union of Islamic Courts. While official military aid has remained low, the US has supported Ethiopia’s security apparatus in less tangible ways through training, logistics and intelligence, providing over \$18 million in 2015 for a ‘Counterterrorism Partnerships Fund’ and \$50 million of non-military security oriented aid. The UK meanwhile has spent £390 million a year since 2014 on assistance to Ethiopia, which in 2011 was the UK’s biggest aid recipient. This is complemented by additional security assistance in the form of intelligence, security training and postgraduate education of security officials. See USAID (2016), ‘U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants: Greenbook’ (<https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/us-overseas-loans-and-grants-green-book-usaid-1554>); Human Rights Watch (2010), ‘Development Without Freedom: How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia’ (<https://www.hrw.org/report/2010/10/19/development-without-freedom/how-aid-underwrites-repression-ethiopia>); Guevara MW (2012), ‘Ethiopia reaps U.S. aid by enlisting in war on terror and hiring influential lobbyists’, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, 2 May (<https://www.icij.org/projects/collateral-damage/ethiopia-reaps-us-aid-enlisting-war-terror-and-hiring-influential>).

⁶⁷ Quinn B (2013), ‘UK tenders to train Ethiopian paramilitaries accused of abuses’, *The Guardian*, 10 January (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jan/10/ethiopia-forces-human-rights-funding>).

⁶⁸ Tekle T (2016), ‘Ethiopia says pullout of troops from Somalia not linked to unrest’, Sudan Tribune, 29 October (<http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article60684>).

⁶⁹ Anderson DM, McKnight J (2015) ‘Kenya at war: Al-Shabaab and its enemies in Eastern Africa’, *African Affairs*, **114** (454), p 27.

⁷⁰ Mutambo A (2016), ‘Amisom receives Sh20bn from EU to pay soldiers’, Daily Nation, 24 September (<https://www.nation.co.ke/news/africa/Amisom-receives-Sh20bn-from-EU-to-pay-soldiers/1066-3393428-g5b9gx/index.html>).

⁷¹ Somalia Newsroom (2012), ‘Kenya Defense Forces Officially Integrate into AMISOM to Save Money’, 6 July (<https://somalianewsroom.com/2012/07/06/kenya-defense-forces-officially-integrate-into-amisom-to-save-money/>).

⁷² Suri S (2016), p 39.

⁷³ Ibid, p 39.

⁷⁴ Gridneff I (2018 forthcoming), ‘Burning Somalia’s Future: The Illegal Charcoal Trade between the Horn of Africa and the Gulf’, in Verhoeven H (ed) ‘Environmental politics in the Middle East: Local Struggles, Global Connections’ (London: Hurst); Fanusie Y, Entz A (2017), ‘Al Shabaab Financial Assessment’, Centre on Sanctions and Illicit Finance.

⁷⁵ Rawlence B (2015), ‘Black and White: Kenya’s Criminal Racket in Somalia’, *Journalists for Justice*; Allison S, (2015) ‘Think Again: Who profits from Kenya’s war in Somalia?’ Institute for Security Studies, 5 December.

Where the international community relies upon hard military approaches to tackle violent political contestation, the inadvertent result is subservience to the financial and political interests of TCCs that have much to gain from continued instability in Somalia. Such a dynamic works at cross-purposes to addressing the perceived terror threats emanating from Somalia that have driven western donors to intervene in Somalia.

4.2 The role of abuses against civilians in fuelling grievances and conflict

Indisputably, AMISOM and the SNA face an enemy that is guilty of exacting an enormous civilian death toll through roadside bombings, complex attacks on hotels and restaurants, and the targeting of accused spies and government collaborators. At the same time, the failure of AMISOM and SNA forces to avoid victimising large numbers of Somali civilians has generated bitter enmity to their presence among victims, reducing their ability to claim the moral high ground and feeding into al-Shabaab's narrative of grievance.⁷⁶

Reports continue of abuses by regional and national forces – including gang rape, sexual exploitation and discrimination – with little progress toward addressing widespread impunity. Human Rights Watch has documented numerous illicit acts by AMISOM troops, regional forces and proxy militia from 2009 to 2017, including indiscriminate attacks, sexual violence and arbitrary killings of Somali civilians.⁷⁷ For example, a military operation by the SNA together with US troops in Barire, Lower Shabelle in August 2017 allegedly led to the death of ten civilians.⁷⁸

Civilian deaths are tragic in and of themselves, but they also exacerbate the conflict and undermine the legitimacy of the state. For example, the Barire operation has been linked to the Zoobe Junction explosion, with the driver of the explosive-laden truck reported to be a relative of one of those killed in Barire.⁷⁹ Saferworld's 2016 report, *Barbed wire on our heads*, further elaborates on the counterproductive impact of civilian deaths from US drone strikes, which may have strengthened public support for al-Shabaab and attracted angry recruits who otherwise had little motivation to join.

Academic research has identified a link between state violence and violence by armed insurgents. Counter-terror analysts Anneli Botha and Mahdi Abdile's survey of ex-al-Shabaab fighters found many who pointed to the invasion by Ethiopia in 2006 and grievances over civilian casualties caused by the SNA, AMISOM and the US as influencing their enlistment.⁸⁰ A recent United Nations Development Programme report, *Journey to Extremism*, drew even stronger linkages, with 71 per cent of respondents indicating that government actions served as the final trigger leading them to join 'extremist' organisations.⁸¹ Furthermore, Saferworld research in Afgoye and Baidoa indicated that civilian casualties from FGS and AMISOM operations have fuelled community grievances, with community members and elders speaking openly about their frustration and why they see value in al-Shabaab's continued presence.⁸² Respondents also stressed that their clans' decisions to approve youth participation in al-Shabaab were directly attributable to these operations.

⁷⁶ Suri S (2016), pp 25–27.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch world reports have been reviewed from 2009 to 2017. Each annual edition notes further instances of abuses by both Somali and regional security forces. For example, 'Somali government security forces, African Union (AU) troops, and allied militias were responsible for indiscriminate attacks, sexual violence, and arbitrary arrests and detention' in Human Rights Watch, (2015), 'World Report 2015', p 483.

⁷⁸ Omar F, Sheikh A (2017), 'Somali government: 10 civilians were killed in joint Somali – U.S. raid', Reuters, (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-attacks-idUSKCN1BB0QE>).

⁷⁹ Burke J (2017), 'Somalia bombing may have been revenge for botched US-led operation', *The Guardian*, 17 October, (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/17/somalia-bomber-was-ex-solider-whose-town-was-raided-by-us-forces>).

⁸⁰ Botha A, Abdile M (2014), 'Radicalisation and Al Shabaab recruitment in Somalia', Institute for Security Studies.

⁸¹ UNDP (2017), 'Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment'.

⁸² Saferworld interviews, community members, March 2017.

4.3 Neglect of local governance and reconciliation in 'liberated' areas

The quest to eliminate al-Shabaab militarily has taken precedence over local governance needs, with a subsequent impact on local clan conflict. Military interventions have not been accompanied by the necessary planning or capacity to establish interim local administrations and provide governance following al-Shabaab's removal.⁸³ Thus, the liberation of areas under al-Shabaab control often leads to the re-emergence of local clan conflict as attested by Saferworld interviews with community members, elders and clan militia leaders in Gedo and Lower Shabelle.

In Marka town in Lower Shabelle, al-Shabaab control suppressed conflict between the Biyomaal and Habr Gedir, as well as other local clans. Following AMISOM offensives in 2013 to liberate these areas, the ensuing power vacuum resulted in the resurgence of inter-clan contestation for various political positions in the emerging local administration. One clan militia leader stated that in the past, al-Shabaab sought to reconcile his clan and another who were in a protracted dispute, but that since al-Shabaab's departure their military contestation with the opposing clan has escalated dramatically. The clan leader further emphasised that recent government-led reconciliation efforts between his and the other clan had only brought a short-term pragmatic agreement, in which after strategically combatting al-Shabaab together, they would return to fighting the opposing clan due to the lack of meaningful redress of his clan's grievances.⁸⁴

Al-Shabaab's efforts to resolve disputes were also noted by other analysts. One older NGO analyst hailing from Lower Juba spoke of the time he was called by al-Shabaab in 2009 to provide advice on how best to resolve land disputes.⁸⁵ Belet Hawo in Gedo region has long been a site of contestation for dominance between sub-clans of the Marehan. Under al-Shabaab rule, this competition was suppressed and al-Shabaab's dispute mediation helped maintain its authority over the area. After Ethiopian forces pushed al-Shabaab out in late 2010, clan factions resumed their contestation, often over positions in the district administration. This contestation resulted in the re-emergence of inter-clan conflict. The Jubaland administration has so far been unable to reconcile these inter-clan issues and ensure the appointment of a district commissioner acceptable to all communities.⁸⁶

Similarly, elders and community members in Afgoye in Lower Shabelle stated their frustration that the removal of al-Shabaab had brought about control of local authorities by one clan with little interest in supporting all community members. The new authorities were perceived to provide building permits and access to justice or services only to their own clan members. Some respondents stated that they had little choice but to support al-Shabaab against the government, whatever their views on the group, as they felt that its treatment of community members was not biased toward or against any clan background.⁸⁷

According to one evaluator of stabilisation interventions in Somalia, communities tend to support the actor that can consistently provide them with enough security to pursue individual and community-level objectives, including income generation and health.⁸⁸ In communities where al-Shabaab has provided a modicum of stability and consistent governance, residents often give only reluctant support to their 'liberators,' especially if the government cannot provide basic security and assure them it can hold the territory. The inadequate capacity of the government and its allies to hold liberated areas thus makes it difficult to secure community support for the government.

⁸³ Keating M, Abshir S (2018).

⁸⁴ Saferworld interview, clan militia leader, Mogadishu, March 2018.

⁸⁵ Saferworld interview, Somali conflict analyst, February 2018.

⁸⁶ Saferworld interview, Gedo, November 2017

⁸⁷ Crouch J, Ali A (2018 forthcoming).

⁸⁸ Saferworld interview, international evaluator focused on stabilisation programming in Somalia, September 2017.

4.4 Absence of an overarching peace strategy

The counter-terror lens through which the conflict with al-Shabaab has long been viewed has led to violent interventions that have caused suffering of Somali communities. The emphasis on 'degrade and destroy' has also prevented deeper analyses of the wider conflict dynamics that have fed into al-Shabaab's violent contestation of state power in important ways. Interviews with community members in Lower Shabelle have stated that their elders could withdraw their youth from al-Shabaab if they wanted, but because of political and economic exclusion by undemocratic local administrations that prioritise the interests of a particular clan, they militarily back al-Shabaab and feel al-Shabaab's contestation of the government is a legitimate means of undermining it in the absence of fair processes.⁸⁹

The focus on al-Shabaab's destruction has also enabled neglect of key issues, such as communities' security, justice and governance needs, and the inter-clan conflicts that affect civilians and state security. Nuance may exist at the technical level among policy-makers, and stabilisation initiatives do recognise the value of tackling community grievances and governance deficiencies, but overall the counter-terror strategy applied in Somalia has long failed to address such factors.

It has likewise taken options that could be steps towards a viable end of the conflict off the table (for example, co-optation of armed groups or resolution of the conflict through political means). Although al-Shabaab is a violent movement that has rejected dialogue in the past, if the door to non-violent political engagement is kept closed, its pursuit of violent military contestation is almost guaranteed to continue.

Al-Shabaab is designated as a 'terrorist' organisation, and its extensive use of violence for political and ideological ends reinforces this label. However, the term has impaired understanding of its objectives, motives and the grievances that drive it, as well as the attributes that give it a degree of public support. In many ways, al-Shabaab is like an iceberg, with the visible component (its use of violence) obvious to all, but its wider, more complex array of governance, security, justice and taxation practices far less perceptible.

While al-Shabaab deploys violence in pursuit of political objectives, it is by no means the only actor doing so for highly questionable reasons in Somalia. There is a wide range of violent political actors in Somalia, including clan militias. Some of these violent political actors have been engaged by Somali authorities to establish a new political settlement with them despite their use of violence to attain power. Examples include contestation over power in Galkayo between competing clans, contestation between Barre Hiralle and Ahmed Madobe during the formation of the Jubaland administration and the ongoing negotiations over power in Galmudug where three factions, the Sa'ad, Saleban and Ahlu Sunna W'al Jamma all use the threat of violence to contest state power. Under the right circumstances, this option should be explored in relation to al-Shabaab, or elements within it.

Al-Shabaab is increasingly subjecting its members to imprisonment and capital punishment based on accusations that they are spies or potential defectors or deserters. Interviewing members is becoming increasingly difficult. As a result, engagement with al-Shabaab members to better understand their motivations and objectives has been limited. Analysts have relied on Al-Shabaab's public statements projecting a desire for global domination and an unequivocal adherence to a fundamentalist Islamist agenda. Such narratives are not dominant in interviews with ex-combatants, who speak more of local grievances driving their participation.⁹⁰

The counter-terror lens has limited the ability of communities to speak honestly and openly about governing actors and about al-Shabaab, either positively or negatively. Communities situated between the warring belligerents are expected to side with the actor in control of their area, or risk being alternately identified as government spies

⁸⁹ Interview March 2017, community member, Lower Shabelle.

⁹⁰ Botha A, Abdile M (2014).

or terrorists, and subjected to violent sanctions. In Saferworld's research interviews, all participants immediately stated that al-Shabaab was bad and widely hated, but over the course of lengthy individual interviews, participants often gave examples of certain positive changes they attributed to al-Shabaab in their communities. In a context where the terrorist label and military combat make it hard to gain a clear picture on which to base responses to the group, limited understanding is reinforcing adherence to problematic assumptions and interventions.

Under the counter-terror lens, al-Shabaab is the problem to be addressed, and other conflict dynamics struggle for attention. Yet in the view of many analysts and research participants, including government officials, academics, elders and community members, al-Shabaab is a symptom of the conflict rather than its cause. Gaining a better understanding of conflict dynamics could widen understanding of the belligerents and their intentions and objectives, and enable better identification of intervention strategies to address them. For example, one clan elder compared the conflict in Lower Shabelle to two layers of paint on a wall. The top layer is white [al-Shabaab] but the base coat [inter-clan conflict] is black and smells rotten. So when one looks at the wall, one senses the rot but sees the white paint and assumes that it is the problem, when actually the problem lies with the black paint underneath.⁹¹ Interventions have focused on al-Shabaab, when the real need is to address the clan issues and other inter-linked drivers just beneath the surface.

⁹¹ Saferworld interview, Mogadishu, November 2017.

5

Considering alternatives to the counter-terror lens

THE PERSISTENT APPLICATION of a counter-terror analytical lens to Somalia has limited the scope of conflict analysis and constrained options for engagement. Those in the policy community working on Somalia who grasp the shortcomings of the counter-terror lens should decrease its use and look beyond the singular aspect of ‘terrorist’ violence in describing current realities.

Moving away from counter-terror as a framework for analysis and intervention would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the drivers of social and political conflict and the myriad pathologies and logics of violence, rather than an analysis of one particular type of actor or one type of action. Support for al-Shabaab is driven to a great extent by governance deficiencies and popular grievances, with justice and dispute resolution, as well as inclusive politics and good governance as primary concerns – all connected in turn to clannism. These need to be more clearly prioritised and addressed to solve Somalia’s conflict problems.

Peacebuilding provides an important and viable analytical and strategic alternative to the counter-terror framework. If the ultimate objective was reducing violence and building peace, more emphasis could be placed on addressing the range of issues driving violence – and the most expedient and least costly means of pursuing them could be better explored. This would mean much less emphasis on overly militarised, counterproductive strategies, and more room for political dialogue, reconciliation and justice. Moreover it would attach much greater importance to the demands and interests of Somali communities, over and above the interests of external actors and elites.

Considering al-Shabaab’s atrocities, political dialogue may be perceived as an uncomfortable and unpalatable option. At the same time, such peacebuilding approaches are increasingly deployed in places such as Afghanistan where the Taliban are now being engaged in endeavours to find a political solution to conflict and international and local NGOs are increasingly working to reduce levels of violence and improve security in areas held under Taliban rule.⁹² In view of the dim prospects of ending Somalia’s war through existing approaches, such avenues should not be closed off for Somalia.

The militarised approach to combatting al-Shabaab has, after over a decade, failed to eliminate the threat of al-Shabaab. Despite marginal gains on the part of AMISOM and the SNA, the group has persisted in its ability to control swathes of territory and wield

⁹² Jackson A The Taliban’s Fight For Hearts and Minds Foreign Policy 12 September 2018 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/12/the-talibans-fight-for-hearts-and-minds-ghanistan/>

strong influence in areas it doesn't directly control. The counter-terror approach poses an existential threat to al-Shabaab to which its predictable response will remain an ugly fight for survival. This dynamic guarantees a violent future for Somalia in which civilians bear the brunt and there is scant possibility of ending the conflict.

The importance al-Shabaab places on securing loyalty, income and weapons suggests that significant violence against civilians will remain pronounced in periods when the group feels threatened. The targeting of al-Shabaab leaders for removal, combined with the group's actions to protect its leaders, have resulted in an array of adverse impacts on local governance in al-Shabaab held areas, including increased surveillance and restrictions, and have had little demonstrable effect in curtailing the organisation's existence. The violence perpetrated by state and international actors through the hard security approach against al-Shabaab has not only harmed civilians, but fed into a wider pathology of violence in which civilians feel sympathy for al-Shabaab or even see value in participating or supporting youth participation in the group. In turn, civilians are caught up between political fault lines in the looting, violence and taxation that comes with each actor's pursuit of territorial, population and financial gains.

While one cannot downplay the culpability of al-Shabaab in the actions it has chosen to deploy and the levels of violence it has perpetrated, analysts should also recognise that the hard security approach to al-Shabaab has fed into the perpetration of violence against civilians, both by state and non-state militants. With civilians bearing the brunt of the conflict, all parties involved in the response to al-Shabaab should consider whether this paradigm of intervention situates the drive to control territory and people above civilian welfare and conflict resolution.

As this report has also illustrated, Somalia's capacity to continue its militarised approach to al-Shabaab may sharply decrease in a few years' time. Such an approach brings multiple challenges with regard to financial support, challenges that have up to now been addressed through massive inflows of foreign capital and military resources. The considerable financial and training support Somalia has received from AMISOM and international partners for its domestic security forces is unlikely to continue at the same scale as until now, and recent assessments like the ORA make it clear that Somalia's security forces on their own are woefully overmatched and under-resourced. Furthermore, lessons from Afghanistan and elsewhere demonstrate that external military surges and financial support for the security sector seldom adequately diminish the presence, role and capacity of opposition actors such as the Taliban. Instead, they typically fail to build effective capacity to provide security or changes in security culture – and can even entrench predatory behaviour.

It is necessary to consider Somalia's future if it continues to rely excessively on a militarised approach to al-Shabaab, in a context where external support seems set to wane faster than Somalia can develop sufficient security capacity.

6

Recommendations

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE HARD MILITARY APPROACH to al-Shabaab have created an important need to explore alternative approaches that prioritise violence reduction and the pursuit of peace. Without a clear strategy for peace, it will be impossible to shift the current overall position in a positive direction.

6.1 Stronger conflict analysis

Counter-terror and countering/preventing violent extremism approaches tend to focus on factors relevant to defeating ‘terrorist’/‘violent extremist’ groups. Promoting peace requires looking more comprehensively at the factors and actors shaping the conflict, considering carefully how to influence them, and thinking through how different engagement strategies are likely to impact on the conflict as a dynamic system. Deployed in this way, thorough and forward-looking conflict analysis can offer an important basis for developing strategies for promoting peace.

Continuing to engage in military combat without politically addressing the roots of the conflict will only sustain and normalise the use of violence in pursuit of political objectives.⁹³ It is vital to understand al-Shabaab as a response to the grievances that have undergirded Somali conflict, not as a driver of the conflict in and of itself. Looking beyond the threat posed by al-Shabaab, future interventions should be underpinned by conflict analysis that considers the economic, social, security, historical and political factors that fuel Somalis’ grievances, and identify the wider array of conflict drivers and dynamics that enable actors like al-Shabaab to control territory and perpetrate violence to achieve political or financial aims.

An important benefit of thorough conflict analysis is the potential to develop a clearer understanding of the actors involved. Understanding why all actors, including community members, militants and government authorities, behave in the ways they do may help to break the cycle of violence. This paper has illustrated how al-Shabaab’s problematic and violent behaviour, including its oppressive control of territory and populations, can be seen as a means to pursue its strategic objectives. However unpalatable its violence may be, it is not wholly irrational or ideologically driven, but the product of a certain logic. Its violence can also be understood as a reaction to the existential threat it faces. Sustained military pressure against al-Shabaab is an important motive for it to collect taxes, control the population, and forcibly recruit children into its cadres. In some respects, the exclusion of al-Shabaab from conventional politics, through degrade and destroy tactics, offers valuable leverage to voices within the movement (often foreign) that assert armed violence as the only means of pursuing

⁹³ Mercy Corps research in 2016 found that as much as 25 per cent of youth believed that using violence for political objectives was legitimate. See Mercy Corps (2016), ‘Critical Choices: Assessing the effects of education and civic engagement on Somali Youth’s propensity to political violence’, November.

the group's objectives.⁹⁴ Continuing to analyse al-Shabaab and its members' diverse motivations is essential to anticipate the potential ramifications of US, AMISOM and FGS military engagement – and of other policy alternatives.

Using analysis of actors, scenarios, and past experience is indeed crucial to anticipate and avoid the likely fallout from military and non-military interventions, and the potential responses by opposition actors and political stakeholders. For example, failure to analyse or engage differently with al-Shabaab may lead it to further harden its positions. Options for engagement with al-Shabaab should entail careful scenario planning to consider the implications, both positive and negative, to ensure an informed understanding of the potential impact of new approaches. Using conflict analysis in this way may make it possible to pre-empt violence affecting communities, and take steps to avoid power vacuums and the re-emergence of localised conflicts.

6.2 Exploring opportunities for dialogue with due care and sensitivity

Somalia's armed conflict, poverty, food insecurity, and myriad other challenges impact primarily on Somalis. It is they who will (and should) determine whether peace initiatives are viable, and they who should lead the conversation on conflict resolution and state-building in Somalia. Researchers must seek out and elevate these perspectives, and policymakers must situate them at the heart of their policy design. Although Saferworld has not interviewed a representative cross-section of Somali society, over 70 per cent of those we have spoken to have stated that they would welcome a dialogue approach with al-Shabaab.⁹⁵

Given that a clear majority of Somalis appear to support an alternative to the militarised approach that has dominated the past decade of interventions, and military efforts to defeat al-Shabaab have reached a stalemate, it is time to begin taking this perspective more seriously. There is a need to understand al-Shabaab better, to explore whether dialogue is possible and to assess the potential for resolution of the conflict with elements within it.

Such a process requires detailed research and analysis to assess not just the popular appetite, but also the feasibility of such an endeavour – acknowledging the political risks, sensitivities, and perspectives of all actors. Such endeavours are not easy and are susceptible to multiple attempts and failures. It would also be essential to avoid sacrificing people's rights to broker a peace deal, and to consider the potential destabilising consequences of dialogue with al-Shabaab for a range of other complex local, national and regional relationships. Challenging questions would need to be answered regarding post-conflict transitional justice and national reconciliation – and again, Somali voices should lead the conversation on this. However, as with the Taliban in Afghanistan, the prospects for improving conditions in Somalia look bleak if political dialogue and conflict resolution are not attempted. In support of this, further research could usefully assess the prospects for a process to emerge, including mapping community, political and business connections with al-Shabaab in order to identify points of constructive engagement and entry points for peacebuilding and violence de-escalation.

6.3 Focusing security efforts on improving people's security and accountability

Security measures continue to be needed in Somalia, not least to protect people from al-Shabaab's violence as well as criminal violence more broadly. However, they need to be pursued less destructively, and need to be part of a wider effort to promote peace and people's security. From this perspective, community security and justice provision is not a mere tactic for expanding state authority and undermining al-Shabaab. Rather,

⁹⁴ Foreign fighters appear particularly unlikely to back a political resolution of the conflict: as non-Somalis, they would presumably not be able to participate in a future amnesty and political settlement. They are therefore more likely to push for a continued military approach over alternatives should a political approach ever emerge.

⁹⁵ Crouch J, Ali A (2018 forthcoming).

it is a valued means of reducing violence, human rights abuses and corruption, and strengthening community cohesion.

Because civilian deaths and abuses impair peacebuilding, stabilisation and violence reduction, preventing harm to civilians must be a much greater priority, along with implementing accountability, transparency and reparations. US airstrikes and special forces raids have been executed based on a poor comprehension of local conflict dynamics, and have led to extensive loss of civilian life and the escalation of local tensions. Policymakers and security sector actors, including donors, AMISOM TCCs, and the UN and AU, should support accountability measures for all armed actors in response to abuses. Because certain actors may mobilise against such accountability mechanisms and create obstacles to their implementation, analysis is required to understand how to undertake this while navigating the political interests at play.

AMISOM's current mandate makes it an active conflict party. This has been a rallying call for Somalis who have a long-standing animosity towards their Ethiopian and other neighbours' military interventions in their country. Many Somalis see AMISOM as protecting the nascent state, but not necessarily its people. Perceptions of AMISOM could dramatically improve if the nature of the deployment changed. One option for deployment could be to mandate AMISOM in such a way to ensure force would be used for defensive purposes alone, to protect public spaces and civilians rather than to advance and protect the state or international interests. Although efforts to strengthen the community security and protection aspects of AMISOM are already underway, to succeed they must be linked to a wider strategic shift in approach to the conflict as a whole.

6.4 Prioritising legitimate models for providing justice and resolving disputes

Somalis have time and again emphasised the lack of fair justice provision and dispute resolution, and the accompanying lack of enforcement that permeates Somali dispute resolution in both rural and urban settings. In light of this, it is important both to link effective, fair and reasonable enforcement to judicial decision making, and to encourage models that are appropriate and legitimate in the eyes of Somalis.

Somali proverbs such as "it's not justice but a solution" are deeply influential in devising short term gains at the cost of long term peace within local dispute resolution methods. Corruption and manipulation are pervasive throughout both the customary and statutory systems. Xeer, the Somali model of community-level dispute resolution, was designed for moderating local-level issues in inter-communal settings. Though still valued, 25 years of conflict, migration and the commodification of dispute resolution⁹⁶ has eroded this model, though that is not to say it should be disregarded. Statutory systems continue to lack popular support, engagement and understanding. Moreover, even where judicial decisions are perceived as fair and agreeable to all parties, lack of enforcement mechanisms can enable impunity, lack of restitution and a recurrence of disputes. Sanctions, restitution, compensation and forgiveness need to be non-violent, deployed consistently, and be reflective of the crime committed. They need to be better designed in ways that are locally supported and viable in their application. If they are not, impunity for perpetrators and sustained inter-communal grievances will persist.

In the meantime, al-Shabaab continues to implement a model of justice that is as much feared as it is respected and enforced, such that people from urban centres sometimes seek out al-Shabaab to help resolve a dispute. While there is no question that al-Shabaab's threat of violent sanction induces compliance through fear, at the same time, Somalia's future justice arrangements could incorporate those aspects of their justice provision that Somalis do appreciate. Customary systems are inherently evolutionary in nature, and Sharia systems have a broad spectrum of interpretation

⁹⁶ Crouch J, Chevreau O (2016), 'Forging Jubaland: Community perspectives on federalisation, governance and reconciliation', Saferworld; Gundel J et al (2016) 'Political Economy of Justice in Somalia', World Bank.

and application across the Muslim world, with certain models more cognisant of human rights norms than others.

Ultimately, justice is central to Somali politics and social relations and effective, legitimate models for strengthening justice will need to be considered creatively by both Somali institutions and the donors that have been providing technical and financial support. Finding viable models could lead both to fairer local and national politics, and to a reduction in the grievances that drive support for al-Shabaab.

6.5 Reorienting political settlements towards inclusion and delivering public goods

The current political settlement, centred on the 4.5 model of power sharing, has created a modicum of stability that was urgently required at the time of its creation during the Djibouti peace process in 2000. Nonetheless, it has also laid the foundation for an elite bargain in which political elites who have used it to wield power and counter opponents see little value in democratic transformation. According to Menkhaus, ‘the local actors who have been expected to support the development of a political settlement and peace accords have in fact been serving as silent spoilers.’⁹⁷

It is within this environment that political shifts towards more inclusive, effective and just governance arrangements need to take place. Until the basis of the political settlement is reformed in such a way as to enable popular democratic engagement, the pursuit of public goods rather than private interests and accountability, grievances, and support for militant opposition will likely persist. If these changes are not achieved incrementally over time, even when one armed insurgent has been defeated, another will emerge, as did al-Itihad al-Islamiya, the Islamic Courts Union and al-Shabaab.

Although it is not the aim of this paper to articulate all the elements of a comprehensive peace strategy for Somalia, these recommendations offer suggestions for areas that should be explored in the development of such a strategy, based on the perspectives revealed in the course of Saferworld’s research. If international engagement in Somalia shifted its focus from combating al-Shabaab towards a focus on conflict resolution and addressing the factors, relationships and behaviours that perpetuate the violence, this could create a new enabling environment for addressing the variety of deep challenges that have held back Somalia in recent decades.

⁹⁷ Menkhaus K (2018), ‘Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Somalia Case Study’, HMG Stabilisation Unit.

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe in a world where everyone can lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from fear and insecurity.

We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

COVER PHOTO: A young Somali woman looks on as a Ugandan police officer serving as part AMISOM police unit patrols the street. © AMISOM

SAFERWORLD

UK OFFICE

The Grayston Centre
28 Charles Square
London N1 6HT, UK

Phone: +44 (0)20 7324 4646
Fax: +44 (0)20 7324 4647
Email: general@saferworld.org.uk
Web: www.saferworld.org.uk

Registered charity no. 1043843
A company limited by guarantee no. 3015948
ISBN 978-1-912901-04-3