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**PRECIPITATING THE DECLINE OF AL-SHABAAB:
A CASE STUDY IN LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF SCIENCE IN INFORMATION STRATEGY
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ABSTRACT

The tactic of leadership decapitation, using military action to capture or kill terrorist leadership, is a key component of United States counterterrorism strategy. Policymakers argue that eliminating terrorist leadership is an effective way to disrupt, and, ultimately, destroy terrorist organizations. Since 2001, hundreds of terrorist leaders have been captured or killed by U.S. counterterrorism operations. In spite of this, the spread of violent, radical jihadist groups like Al-Shabaab has expanded and grown in strength. This thesis analyzes the United States' approach of leadership targeting toward Al-Shabaab in Somalia, and asks the research question: Under what conditions are leadership decapitation effective in degrading the terrorist group Al-Shabaab? This thesis finds that leadership decapitation operations have a limited effect in disrupting and preventing future acts of terrorism. It argues for a more analytical approach to leadership decapitation in order to improve its effectiveness. This thesis argues for leadership targeting principles that are likely to be effective counterterrorism strategies and lead to the long-term decline of the group, including basing targeting decisions on understanding the group's internal dynamics, integrating decapitation operations into comprehensive counterterrorism strategies, and capitalizing on existing leadership divisions, which can be as effective as lethal military action.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AMISOM	African Union Mission to Somalia
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQEA	Al-Qaeda East Africa
AU	African Union
AUMF	Authorization for Use of Military Force
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DOJ	Department of Justice
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
ICU	Islamic Courts Union
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JSOC	Joint Special Operations Command
SFG	Somali Federal Government
SNA	Somali National Army
SOF	Special Operations Forces
TCC	Troop Contributing Country
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USSOCOM	United States Special Operations Command

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I.   INTRODUCTION

A.   KILLING GODANE

On September 5, 2014, the United States military officially confirmed the death of Ahmed Godane, Al-Shabaab's Emir since 2008, remarking that, "removing Godane from the battlefield is a major symbolic and operational loss to Al-Shabaab."[1] Decapitating Al-Shabaab's co-founder removed a charismatic yet divisive leader that recently merged the group with Al-Qaeda.[2] Godane's elimination left the group exposed and vulnerable to fracture, leaving some analysts guessing if the most recent leadership strike signaled the death knell of the pressured group. According to analyst Tres Thomas, "given the divisive and dictatorial nature of Godane's leadership … his death would result in an increasing number of defectors and bring the inevitable break-up of the group."[3] However, more than a year after the decapitation strike little has changed. Godane's successor, Abu Ubaidah, has reaffirmed his allegiance to Al-Qaeda; Al-Shabaab carried out a brutal attack on Kenyan Students at Garissa University College killing 147 students[4] and continues to conduct devastating raids on African Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeepers.[5] Godane's removal is a paradox of leadership targeting. During his tenure, Al-Shabaab reached the height of its territorial, administrative, economic, and military power. It was also under his leadership, however, that Al-Shabaab fell into decline, losing great swaths of territory, key sources of income, and purging Al-Shabaab's most experienced leadership. The death of Ahmed Godane typifies the

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1 U.S. Department of Defense, "Statement from Pentagon Press Secretary Rear Admiral John Kirby on Ahmed Godane," September 5, 2014, http://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/605172.

2 Bill Roggio and Thomas Joscelyn, "Shabaab Formally Joins Al Qaeda," *The Long War Journal*, February 9, 2012, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/02/shabaab_formally_joi.php.

3 Tres Thomas, "Is al-Shabaab Stronger or Weaker after Godane's Death?" Somalia Newsroom, September 27, 2014, http://somalianewsroom.com/2014/09/22/analysis-is-al-shabaab-stronger-or-weaker-after-godanesdeath/.

4 Josh Levs and Holly Yan, "147 Dead, Islamist Gunmen Killed after attack at Kenya College," *CNN*, April 2, 2015, http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/02/africa/kenya-university-attack/.

5 "Al-Shabaab Continues Mass Raid Tactics against AMISOM," Somalia Newsroom, September 2, 2015, http://somalianewsroom.com/2015/09/02/al-shabaab-continues-mass-raid-tactics-against-amisom/.

leadership targeting campaign against Al-Shabaab—the United States has dealt devastating blows to Al-Shabaab's leadership, but nothing proved decisive enough to defeat the group. It is also wrought with uncertainty, with no clear answers as to who would succeed Godane, or whether Al-Shabaab would respond the way many analysts have predicted, with a splintering of the group. Moreover, would Godane's death contribute to the decisive factor in leadership decapitation—organizational decline of the group?

B.   PURPOSE

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze leadership decapitation theory, determine the systematic conditions that lead to success or failure, and apply the concept to a contemporary terrorist organization, Al-Shabaab in Somalia. Despite the limited knowledge regarding how targeting leaders can precipitate an organization's decline, decapitation tactics remain a cornerstone of U.S. counterterrorism strategy. Understanding the characteristics of organizations that are susceptible or resilient to leadership decapitation is a critical step in creating effective counterterrorism policies. This thesis will focus on answering the following research questions: Under what conditions is leadership decapitation effective in disrupting or defeating Al-Shabaab in Somalia? Is the United States' leadership decapitation strategy effective in weakening organizational capacity of Al-Shabaab?

This thesis argues for a more analytical, dispassionate approach to leadership decapitation. Furthermore, this thesis will argue that the singular tactic will have little effect on the organizational capacity of Al-Shabaab, and must be combined with a multi-faceted, coherent counter-terrorism strategy, proportionate with the level of threat. This paper will show that leadership targeting decisions are often shortsighted, ignorant of the environment within the conflict group and unsynchronized with the strategies they support. Area experts and policy analysts have thoroughly described the social and

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political mechanisms[6] that gave rise to Islamic jihadism in Somalia; therefore, it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the conditions responsible for the formation and rise of the group. Obviously, the decline of terrorist groups is a result of multiple factors. This thesis focuses on just one: the campaign of leadership targeting against Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

C. METHODOLOGY

A brief examination of the history of terrorism in the failed state of Somalia is the starting point for understanding the rise of Islamic extremism and conditions that spurred the growth of terrorism in Somalia. The histories of Al-Qaeda East Africa (AQEA) and leadership targeting strategies implemented shortly after 9/11 are instructive in understanding the evolution of leadership targeting in Somalia, including rendition, and the use of drones, as a tool in the war on terror.

This study prescribes a more robust leadership targeting doctrine based upon success and failures of leadership targeting. In Chapter I, I review the prevailing military, political and theoretical rationale for the use of leadership targeting in order to bring the tactics and claims of effectiveness into current context. In Chapter II, I outline the current U.S. policy and strategy of leadership decapitation as described in policy statements, speeches, and legal findings. Next, I analyze the implications the policy has on the use of leadership targeting in the Global War on Terror. I describe the evolution of the approach and how it extends to decapitation policy and strategy in the current fight against Al-Shabaab. In Chapter III, through a detailed case study analysis, I analyze the current leadership targeting campaign against Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda in East Africa through its current life cycle. In Chapter IV, I examine why Al-Shabaab may be resilient to the loss of leadership by applying theories terrorist leadership and organizational stability. Next, I describe the factors bearing on the efficacy of leadership targeting specific to the Somalia jihadist context. Finally, in Chapter V, I offer recommendations on how to

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6 For a thorough treatment of this, see Stig Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*: *The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005–2012*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013, and Matt Bryden, The Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab? Think Again. Nairobi: Sahan Research, 2015, and numerous reports of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea.

improve the prospects of leadership decapitation and alternative methods to hasten the group's decline. This thesis utilizes both primary and secondary sources that examine policy and strategy statements from administration officials, journal articles and archives that detail U.S. counter-terrorism policy, strategy, and the evolution of targeted killings.

D. EXISTING LITERATURE

The spread of transnational terrorism continues to underscore the efficacy of leadership targeting. Leadership decapitation is a cornerstone of the United States' current counter-terrorism strategy, primarily using drone strikes and special operations raids. Moreover, leadership targeting against insurgents, terrorists, state leaders, and military commanders by the United States is not new.[7] Decapitation operations against enemy leaders during wartime (Rommel, Yamamoto, and Hussein) and heads of state during limited war (Qaddafi) highlight its expected utility. The prospect of shortening conflicts, defeating terrorism, and effecting enemy behavior suggests that leadership targeting will continue to be employed as a tactic to counter transnational terrorism.

In order to fully understand the conflicting viewpoints on the efficacy of leadership targeting, it is necessary to examine the existing research on the effectiveness of the tactic. The major theoretical basis for leadership targeting lies primarily in the importance of leaders to a terrorist organization.[8] Terrorist organizations are often headed by charismatic leaders, which, by nature, are more volatile and less stable than are decision makers in other types of organizations.[9] Terrorist leaders fulfill operational and inspirational roles, are able to provide tactical experience, technical expertise, and strategic direction. Additionally, hierarchical-based terrorist organizations and religious-based organizations rely heavily upon leaders for guidance and ideology.

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7 Hays W. Parks, "Memorandum of Law: Executive Order 12333 and Assassination," *The Army Lawyer* (December 1989), 7.

8 Michael Freeman, "A Theory of Terrorist Leadership (and its Consequences for Leadership Targeting)," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26, no. 4 (2014): 666.

9 Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009), 722.

Much has been written about the durability and resilience of terrorist and insurgent organizations.[10] Responses to leadership targeting have led to the decentralization and autonomy of terrorist groups, particularly Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. These adaptations include decentralization and formation of smaller, leaderless networks, which diminish the importance of top-tier leadership. Recent empirical studies have examined group dynamics such as organizational structure, age, and type as important variables of leadership targeting.[11] For example, size is also an important factor for determining the effectiveness of decapitation; larger groups have larger pools of resources and can better withstand a state's efforts to counter them, especially through leadership targeting. In general, as terrorist groups age and grow in size, they become more resilient to leadership targeting.[12]

1.   The View That Leadership Decapitation Is Effective

Several studies have shown that leadership decapitation is an effective tactic against terrorist groups.[13] Price analyzed the efficacy of leadership decapitation by evaluating the long-term effects of leadership decapitation by measuring the mortality rate of terrorist groups. Price's findings suggest decapitation strategies may increase violence in the short-term, but precipitate the decline of terrorist groups in the long-term.[14] Additionally, terrorist groups' unique organizational characteristics make them susceptible to leadership decapitation. These characteristics amplify the importance of

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10 Martha Crenshaw, "How Terrorism Declines," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3, no. 1, (1991): 80.

11 Aaron Mannes, "Testing the Snake Head Strategy: Does Killing or Capturing Its Leaders Reduce a Terrorist Group's Activity?" *The Journal of International Policy Solutions*, vol. 9, (Spring 2008): 41; Jenna Jordan, "When Heads Roll: Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Decapitation," *Security Studies* 18, no. 4 (2009): 720.

12 Jordan, "When Heads Roll," 744.

13 Patrick Johnston, "Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns," *International Security* 36, no. 4 (2012): 77; David Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism." *International Security* 36, no. 4 (April 2012): 11.

14 Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists," 46

terrorist leadership and make leadership succession especially difficult.[15] In counterinsurgency operations, evidence suggests that, "leadership decapitation increases the chances of ending insurgencies, enhances the probability of campaign outcomes favorable to counter-insurgents, reduces the intensity of violent conflict, and shrinks the number of insurgent initiated attacks."[16] Johnston asserts that the elimination of leaders degrades capabilities and puts terrorist groups on the defensive with less resources, time, and expertise to plan and conduct terrorist operations.[17] Leadership targeting may have deterrent effects as well. Advocates claim that leadership targeting deters terrorist organizations from carrying out operations against the state. Leadership targeting can bring terrorist groups under moderate control, and targeting high-level political leaders can bring organizations to the bargaining table.[18] In fact, leaders that are captured occasionally abandon the tactic of terrorism and encourage supporters to surrender.[19]

Capturing targeted leaders can have similar "lethal" effects that contribute to the decline of terrorist organizations.[20] While capturing a leader is not always possible and arguably much riskier, it may be more beneficial than killing.[21] Cronin also argues that

15 David Price, "Targeting Top Terrorists: How Leadership Decapitation Contributes to Counterterrorism," *International Security* 36, no. 4 (April 2012): 11. These are the propensity for violence, clandestine operational nature, and values-based organizations.

16 Patrick Johnston, "Does Decapitation Work? Assessing the Effectiveness of Leadership Targeting in Counterinsurgency Campaigns, "International Security 36, no. 4 (2012), 77. Author also contends that counterinsurgency (COIN) operations are more successful where leaders are decapitated than those that are not, regardless of group objectives or ideology.

17 David, "Fatal Choices: Israel's Policy of Targeted Killing,*" Mideast Security and Policy Studies*, 51, (2002), 8.

18 Ibid., 7. The number one negotiation demand of the Palestinian Authority is the cessation of leadership targeting practices by Israel.

19 Ibid.

20 Kathryn Gregory, "Shining Path, Tupac Amaru (Peru, Leftists)" Council on Foreign Relations, August 27, 2009, http://www.cfr.org/peru/shining-path-tupac-amaru-peru-leftists/p9276#p5.

21 Matt Frankel, "The ABCs of HVT: Key Lessons from High Value Targeting Campaigns Against Insurgents and Terrorists," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 34, no. 1 (January 2011), 17. Frankel posits a tenet of HVT is capture over kill, citing examples like the Japanese terror group Aum Shinrikyo, The Shining Path's Abimael Guzman and Abdullah Ocalan from the Kurdistan People's Party. The raids against bin Laden and Al-Shabaab's Saleh Nabhan are examples where capture was conceivably possible, but ended in killing both.

arresting a terrorist leader is more effective than killing in order to prevent retaliation.[22] It is important to note that the killing of Osama bin Laden, which was predicted to result in a massive wave of retaliatory attacks, has never materialized.[23] Staeheli compared the effects between capturing and killing terrorist leaders and found little difference between the two. Instead, "insurgent organizations are most likely to collapse when they fail to name a successor regardless of whether the leader is killed or captured."[24]

2.   The View That Leadership Decapitation Is Ineffective

Critics have claimed that leadership decapitation strategies are not only ineffective, but also counterproductive.[25] Eliminating leadership can lead to an increase in retaliatory attacks, radicalization, and recruiting.[26] Killing an influential or charismatic terrorist leader may increase popular support for the cause and create a martyrdom effect, which can increase a movement's legitimacy.[27] Byman's research on Israel's targeted killing policy found that while targeted killings reduce the lethality of attacks, the practice spurred retaliatory attacks and led to an increase in frequency of attacks.[28] Hosmer's research finds that although leadership targeting operations have impeded or prevented terrorist strikes in some cases, those aimed at individual leaders have had marginal deterrent value. Assassinated leaders were quickly replaced and terrorism resumed, sometimes more ferociously than before.[29]

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22 Audrey Kurth Cronin, "How Al-Qaida Ends: The Decline and Demise of Terrorist Groups," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (2006), 22.

23 Bradley Jay Strawser, *Killing bin Laden, A Moral Analysis*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 30.

24 Paul Staeheli, "Collapsing Insurgent Organizations through Leadership Decapitation a Comparison of Targeted Killing and Targeted Incarceration in Insurgent Organizations," (Master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014): 20.

25 Jordan, "When Heads Roll," 723. Jordan also finds that targeting leaders of older, larger, and religious groups is not only ineffective, but counterproductive as well.

26 Jenna Jordan, "Leadership Targeting of Terrorist Organizations," Presentation at the Strategic Multi-Layer Assessment Support to SOCCENT Speaker Series, Tampa, FL, June 5, 2015.

27 Daniel Byman, "Do Targeted Killings Work," *Foreign Affairs*, 89 no. 2 (March-April 2006), 100.

28 Byman, "Do Targeted Killings Work," 99. For example, following leadership strikes against Hezbollah during the 1980s, the group quickly replaced its leaders and stepped up its suicide attacks on Israel

29 Hosmer, "Operations against Enemy Leaders," 25.

Capturing a leader can have negative consequences as well. The FLN leader Ahmed Ben Bella was captured after multiple abortive attempts to assassinate him. His capture increased the militancy of the FLN, resulted in a more unified organization, and effectively killed the chances of a negotiated settlement.[30] Aaron Mannes highlights other negative consequences, including "greater radicalization of the targeted terrorist group, elimination of possible negotiating partners, and the triggering of retaliatory attacks."[31] An additional unintended effect is the notion of raising the profile and relevance of terrorist organizations. Leaders from both Al-Qaeda and its affiliates have claimed that being killed by or escaping a drone strike is considered a badge of honor.[32]

3.   Improving Leadership Decapitation

While there is consensus that leadership decapitation is not a silver bullet tactic that leads to the demise of organizations, there are conditions that favor its use.[33] There is general agreement that leadership targeting is most effective when integrated with a broader counterterrorism strategy. For example, Israel's targeted killing campaigns are most effective when executed in conjunction with other military operations, defensive measures and real-time intelligence.[34] Frankel identified best practices that may improve the effectiveness of leadership decapitation. These include using host nation forces, capturing over killing, and understanding enemy organizational dynamics. Increasing the effectiveness of leadership targeting should include a deliberate calculation of benefits weighed against potential risks. Hosmer reasserts that any action taken must take into account the likely reactions, its effects of power relationships, and likeliness of enemy

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30 Hosmer, "Operations against Enemy Leaders," 35.

31 Both Mannes and Jordan find that leadership decapitation against religious groups may even be counter-productive, increasing the frequency, lethality and number of overall attacks.

32 Jack Serle, "U.S. Drone Strikes in Somalia Considered a Badge of Honour by Al Shabaab, Says BBC Africa Boss." Bureau of Investigative Journalism, February 6, 2015, http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2015/02/06/us-drone-strikes-in-somalia-considered-a-badge-of-honour-by-al-shabaab-says-bbc-africa-boss/; Abdirahman Ali, Anatomy of Al-Shabaab: Terrorism Research & Analysis Consortium, 2010.

33 Frankel, "The ABCs of HVT," 28.

34 Byman, "Do Targeted Killings Work?" 108.

behavior after the attack.[35] Additionally, to develop an effective strategy against terrorist leadership, "one needs to understand their organizational culture, psychology and behavior."[36]

Weighing the benefits and costs of leadership decapitation is often difficult. As I alluded to earlier, leadership decapitation can be a paradoxical response to terrorism. This review suggests that the question of efficacy of leadership targeting is far from being satisfactorily settled. The United States' inability to "degrade and destroy" terrorist or insurgent groups, despite eliminating numerous top tier leaders from terrorist organizations, underscores the need for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of terrorist leaders and their organizations. Likewise, identifying the conditions in which leadership decapitation is effective at destroying terrorist groups is critical. Although the use of leadership decapitation has amplified the efficacy debate, legal and moral considerations will continue to constrain its use against certain terrorist groups.[37] Furthermore, despite a lack of strategic successes, it is likely that leadership targeting operations will remain a counterterror tactic due to its immediate, measurable impact.

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35 Hosmer, *Operations against Enemy Leaders*, 2.

36 Gal Luft, "The Logic of Israel's Targeted Killing," *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2003): 8.

37 John Odle, "Targeted Killings in Yemen and Somalia: Can the United States Target Low-Level Terrorists?" *Emory International Law Review* 27, no. 1 (2013): 605–660; Bradley Jay Strawser, *Opposing Perspectives on the Drone Debate*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

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II.   ANATOMY OF U.S. LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION POLICY

In a recent speech outlining his latest counterterrorism strategy, President Barack Obama vowed to degrade and defeat extremists groups and promised, "to use force against anyone who threatens America's core interests."[38] The president highlighted his record of killing Osama bin Laden and much of Al-Qaeda's leadership, as well as the recent elimination of Al-Shabaab's Emir, using a mixture of drone strikes and special operations raids. Although targeted killings have been practiced for centuries, the United States has revolutionized its use in counterterrorism operations. The United States has adroitly evolved the practice since the ban on assassination through Executive Order 12333.[39] Targeted killing has been redefined since the ban to reflect the current the realities of today's conflicts.[40] Furthermore, the administration defends targeted killing as legal, essential to keep Americans safe, and effective in combating terrorism.[41]

In this chapter, I describe the contributing factors that led to the evolution of leadership targeting strategy currently used by the United States. I trace the origins of U.S. leadership decapitation and the conditions that contributed to the use of leadership targeting in the face of international terrorism incidents. I also identify factors that shaped the formulation of the policy, including the controversial detention program, the proliferation of armed drones, the dispersion and the spread of Al-Qaeda affiliates, and a reluctance to commit American troops into low-intensity conflicts. In turn, these factors constraint the approach to leadership targeting in ways that prevent the United States from having a clear and coherent counterterrorism strategy.

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38 Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by the President on ISIL," https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1.

39 Ronald Reagan, "Executive Order 12333, United States Intelligence Activities," December 4, 1981, http://www.ncsc.gov/publications/policy/docs/EO_12333.pdf.

40 Blum and Heymann, "Law and Policy of Targeted Killing," 150.

41 Lisa Hajjar, "Anatomy of the U.S. Targeted Killing Policy," *Middle East Report* 42, (Fall 2012); 1.

A. **THE EVOLUTION OF LEADERSHIP TARGETING**

The United States' policy of targeted killings and leadership decapitation was first used in 1986 against Libyan Dictator Muammar Qaddafi, who employed terrorism as an element of his foreign policy. Policymakers cited the United States' inherent right of self-defense against nations that are culpable in aiding and abetting international terrorism to justify the attack.[42] Later, several incidents of terrorist attacks against U.S. targets (Khobar Towers, the *USS Cole*, and American Embassies) spurred the Clinton administration to re-examine preemptive military options. The rhetoric was intensified by President Clinton, who issued findings that "foreign terrorists who pose a credible threat…will be subject to preemption and disruption abroad," effectively overriding the assassination ban.[43] New directives authorized counterterrorism units to lethally target Osama bin Laden, his lieutenants, and Al-Qaeda's infrastructure. While the administration adopted an increasingly aggressive and lethal counterterrorism policy, self-imposed restraints kept special operations forces (SOF) from being employed against terrorist leaders.[44] First, terrorism was viewed as a criminal act, and thus, terrorists should be brought to justice using law enforcement. Since the policy was to treat terrorists as criminals and apply the rule of law, it effectively removed any authority for the Defense Department to take the lead against terrorism. Second, as a criminal justice issue, terrorism was not up to the "standard of war" and not worthy of the military's attention. As a result, arresting and prosecuting terrorists where they trained or planned—Afghanistan, Yemen and Somalia—remained off-limits. This policy severely limited U.S. counterterrorism options, despite the murder of American citizens and military personnel abroad.

The 9/11 attacks brought a change of philosophy for fighting terrorism and the pendulum swung toward lethal actions. The Bush Administration put USSOCOM as the lead in the war on terror, ordering it to track down and destroy Al-Qaeda around the

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42 Parks, "Memorandum of Law," 7.

43 Bill Clinton, "Presidential Decision Directive/NSC-62," Washington, DC: The White House, May 22, 1998, 4.

44 Richard Shultz, "Nine Reasons Why We Never Sent Our Special Operations Forces After Al Qaeda before 9/11," *The Weekly Standard*, 9, no. 19 (2004); 5.

globe.[45] Since then, leadership decapitation against terrorist groups has expanded and escalated in Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Pakistan. Leadership decapitation strategies have inevitably expanded the role of the military's elite counterterrorism units and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Consequently, both organizations execute leadership targeting using separate authorities and develop their own list of targets.[46] Technological breakthroughs in surveillance, intelligence, and armed drones have further extended America's reach into previously denied areas.

The Obama administration has taken several steps to justify the practice of targeted killing for a sustained, limited war model. In order to justify leadership targeting outside declared conflict zones, the Department of Justice (DOJ) produced a finding that relaxed the definition of imminence required to act in self-defense. The DOJ White Paper explicates that, "in a non-international armed conflict context, the fundamental law of war principles—necessity, distinction, proportionality and humanity—must be adhered to in targeted killing."[47] John Brennan, President Obama's former counterterrorism advisor, further formalized the process for targeted killing, referred to as the counterterrorism playbook.[48] Presented as an unclassified "Fact Sheet," the United States established criteria for the use of lethal action. The policy extends leadership targeting to threats posed by Al-Qaeda and its "associated forces" and the employment of lethal force "outside areas of active hostilities."[49] The United States invokes a vigorous right to self-defense. The policy states that lethal force can be used outside areas of active conflict when a senior leader poses an imminent threat to U.S. persons and when capture is not feasible. The determination of imminence gets more attention in the DOJ White Paper on

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45 Shultz, "Nine Reasons," 11.

46 Hajjar, "Anatomy," 1.

47 U.S. Department of Justice, "Lawfulness of a Lethal Operation Directed against a U.S. Citizen Who is a Senior Operational Leader of Al Qaeda Or an Associated Force," Department of Justice White Paper (Nov. 8, 2011), 8.

48 Karen DeYoung, "CIA Veteran John Brennan has Transformed U.S. Counterterrorism Policy," *Washington Post*, October 24, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/cia-veteran-john-brennan-has-transformed-us-counterterrorism-policy/2012/10/24/318b8eec-1c7c-11e2-ad90-ba5920e56eb3_story.html.

49 Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet: U.S. Policy Standards and Procedures for the use of Force in Counterterrorism Operations outside the United States and Areas of Active Hostilities," 2013.

targeted killing, but it is relaxed to give the United States the ability to pre-empt or disrupt terrorist attacks in almost any stage of planning and execution.

The unclassified Fact Sheet clearly expresses the preference of capturing leaders over killing; but in practice, lethal force is nearly always used. Two examples of high-profile leaders whose capture was conceivably possible were Osama bin Laden and Saleh Nabhan, killed in Pakistan and Somalia, respectively. Intelligence officials argue that the best way to gather intelligence, preempt, and disrupt future terror attacks is to capture terrorist leaders instead of killing them.[50] In the face of mounting threats, the United States' adherence to its policy and principles of leadership decapitation remains tenuous. The policy is further complicated by the administration's lack of a clear detention policy and the questionable value of intelligence gained from capture.[51] With pledges to close Guantánamo Bay and concern over releasing dangerous terrorist suspects, there is a strong incentive to kill terrorist leadership instead of attempting capture.[52]

A second factor drives leadership targeting toward kill over capture. Administration officials and analysts claim drones have decimated Al-Qaeda leadership[53] and have done so at relatively little cost, at low risk to U.S. forces, with fewer civilian casualties, and few political consequences.[54] During his first year as president, Obama approved more drone strikes than Bush did during his eight years in office, most of them in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Additionally, drone use for surveillance and attack was dramatically expanded in Yemen and Somalia, where weak central governments are unable to combat AQAP and Al-Shabaab.

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50 Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks of John O. Brennan Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Program on Law and Security Harvard Law School Cambridge, Massachusetts Friday, September 16, 2011, 'Strengthening our Security by Adhering to our Values and Laws,'" 2011.

51 Mark Bowden, "The Dark Art of Interrogation." *The Atlantic* (October 2003): 1–53. Bowden describes why once a leader's capture is made public, his intelligence value plummets. His organization scatters, operations, and communications are altered. FLN members were also trained to resist interrogation for only the first 24 hours in light of this fact.

52 Hajjar, *Anatomy,* 2.

53 Elisabeth Bumiller, "Panetta Says Defeat of Al Qaeda is 'Within Reach,'" *New York Times*, July 9, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/10/world/asia/10military.html.

54 Daniel Byman, "Why Drones Work: The Case for Washington's Weapon of Choice," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 4 (July/August, 2013), 32.

The Obama Administration's aim to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and to remove American troops from foreign soil has also shifted the counterterrorism strategy toward leadership decapitation. However, analysts, argue that the rapid troop drawdown at the end of the Iraq War contributed to the rise and spread of the Islamic State.[55] With no significant contingent of troops on the ground to combat terrorist groups, the United States' reliance on leadership strikes has enabled the expansion of franchised groups such as ISIS, AQAP, and Al-Shabaab. The United States has also been reluctant to commit its forces into Middle East and African conflicts, opting instead to train, equip, and advise proxy forces such as is the AMISOM and Yemeni tribal militias.[56]

The spread of Al-Qaeda's affiliates has significantly shaped the way leadership targeting is used to combat terrorist groups. This evolution is due in part to the changing nature of the threat. As core Al-Qaeda leadership was weakened by targeted strikes and dispersed, affiliated groups grew stronger in states like Yemen, Syria, and Somalia. The rapid spread and expanding influence of Al-Qaeda affiliates and ISIS have spread throughout the Middle East and Africa, challenging central governments and swallowing up large swaths of territory. While Al-Qaeda's core leadership may be "operationally ineffective,"[57] its influence and expansion into weak and failing states has never been greater. Military commanders, such as then-USSOCOM commander, Admiral Bill McRaven, described the threat as "metastasizing," referring to the rise of Al-Qaeda affiliates.[58] This has led to the preference for low-cost and low-risk lethal options that deal severe blows to terrorist organizations without committing large military contingents, and, but being able to "stay in the fight."

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55 Danielle Pletka, "What Obama Has Wrought in Iraq," *U.S. News & World Repor*t, June 13, 2014, http://www.usnews.com/opinion/articles/2014/06/13/iraq-falls-apart-to-isis-after-obama-withdrawal.

56 AMISOM is made up of 22,000 military and police forces from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Ghana and Nigeria.

57 Greg Miller, "Al-Qaeda Targets Dwindle as Group Shrinks," *Washington Post*, November 22, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/Al-Qaeda-targets-dwindle-as-group-shrinks/2011/11/22/gIQAbXJNmN_story.html.

58 Emma Slater, Chris Woods and Jack Serle, "Somalia: Reported U.S. Covert Actions 2001–2015," The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, June 01, 2015, https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/category/projects/drones/.

In this section, I have examined the factors that shape leadership decapitation policy and how lethal strikes have become the weapon of choice in the war against terrorist groups. The evolution of this policy has allowed the United States to sustain leadership decapitation through a non-war legal justification, giving it broad authorization in terms of where and against whom it can target. Successful lethal strikes against senior terrorist leaders combined with limited options for detention and trial continues to drive the targeting process toward a lethal track. In addition, the reluctance to be drawn into evolving international conflicts and the risks associated with putting troops in combat zones continues to dictate lethal options. The tactical advantages of drones also compels the United States to focus its efforts on leadership decapitation to eliminate or destroy terrorist groups. Although these factors have served to justify the U.S. counterterrorism strategy, key components prevent policy and strategy coherence. First, by opting to kill rather than capture, the ability to gain valuable intelligence about the group, operations and members is lost. Second, the policy largely ignores the issue of detention and whether terrorist leaders should be treated as combatants or criminals. Since the closure of black detention sites, offshore interrogation, and the difficulty of prosecuting suspects, the policy has simply shifted to the simpler, lethal tactic. Therefore, focusing on leadership decapitation, encourages a myopic view of defeating terrorist groups, and promotes a tactic that drives the overall strategy. In the next section, I describe the dynamics that inform the strategy and policy used specifically toward the terrorist group Al-Shabaab.

B.   LEADERSHIP TARGETING IN SOMALIA

How has the evolution of targeting killing governed the use of leadership decapitation against Al-Shabaab? Richard Shultz dubbed conditions limiting the use of lethal force against terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab as the Somali Syndrome.[59] In 1993, Clinton ordered a mission to capture or kill Somali Warlord Mohammed Aidid in order to stabilize the humanitarian mission in Somalia. The administration expected a quick, surgical decapitation. Instead, the operation culminated in the deaths of 18 special

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59 Shultz, "Nine Reasons," 5.

operators and the televised viewing of a U.S. Soldier being dragged through Mogadishu's streets.[60] The failed operation led, in part, to the Unites States' future reluctance to put boots on the ground in Somalia, a heightened wariness about manhunting operations, and an aversion to using SOF to counter terrorist threats.[61] However, targeting priorities changed considerably when Al-Qaeda's plans to reconstitute in safe havens like Somalia were discovered through the interrogation of captured terror suspects. Alarmed by the influx of foreign fighters and money into the region, President George W. Bush directed the CIA and the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) to carry out its leadership targeting program in the shadows.[62] By January 2003, JSOC discretely established operating bases in the Horn of Africa to carry decapitation operations against AQEA.[63] Currently, the United States justifies leadership targeting inside Somalia because Al-Shabaab is deemed a direct threat and fits the definition of Al-Qaeda's "associated forces."[64] Furthermore, the United States claims it can conduct leadership targeting inside Somalia, given the Somali Federal Government of Somalia (SFG) has offered its consent and is unable to directly address the threat itself.

Al-Qaeda's long history in East Africa expanded the war on terror's battlefields into Somalia. Al-Shabaab has had a significant Al-Qaeda presence in its operating core since its formation.[65] Al-Shabaab gradually solidified its relationship with Al-Qaeda central over time, and recently reaffirmed its allegiance after a leadership strike.[66] Since 2007, Al-Shabaab's leadership has been targeted with other AQEA leadership and suffered repeated losses to its Emirs other senior intelligence and operational chiefs. The United States has focused on senior leadership within Al-Shabaab and only targeting

60 Shultz, "Nine Reasons," 5.

61 Ibid.

62 Sean Naylor, *Relentless Strike: The Secret History of Joint Special Operations Command* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015), 326.

63 Naylor, *Relentless Strike*, 173.

64 Office of the Press Secretary, "Fact Sheet."

65 Rob Wise, "Al Shabaab," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Case Study No. 2, (July 2011), 7.

66 Thomas Joscelyn, "Shabaab Names New Emir, Reaffirms Allegiance to Al Qaeda," *The Long War Journal*, September 6, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/09/shabaab_names_new_em.php.

those who are planning attacks against U.S. interests.[67] Overall, the U.S. administration has approved a small number of signature strikes,[68] out of concern that widening the conflict could turn Al-Shabaab from a "regional menace into an adversary determined to carry out attacks on U.S. soil."[69]

Imposing a restriction on signature strikes in Somalia stands in stark contrast to the strategy in Yemen and Pakistan where both senior AQAP leaders and low-level fighters are subject to targeting.[70] The United States has carried out an estimated 15–20 strike in Somalia using drones, AC-130 gunships and special operations forces raids to kill Al-Shabaab's leadership, primarily those with direct links to Al-Qaeda.[71] Leadership targeting in Somalia undoubtedly increased once the group adopted Al-Qaeda's global jihadist ideology, but the limited number of strikes against senior leaders in the group has not significantly degraded the group.[72] While Al-Shabaab is no longer able to control large areas of territory, it has transformed into a dispersed asymmetric threat, capable of carrying out high-profile attacks across Somalia and East Africa. Security analysts suggest that the decapitation strategy is far below the level required to destroy the leadership network.[73] The United States supports it leadership targeting operations with a small military footprint, which provide advice, training, and coordinate intelligence

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67 Greg Jaffe, "Obama Team Mulls Aims of Somali Extremists," *Washington Post*, April 11, 2009, https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/10/AR2009041003734.html.

68 Signature Strikes are lethal strikes based upon the profile or activity of terrorists, rather than based upon positive identification.

69 Greg Miller, "Under Obama, An Emerging Global Apparatus for Drone Killing," *Washington Post,* December 27, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/national-security/under-obama-an-emerging-global-apparatus-for-drone-killing/2011/12/13/gIQANPdILP_story.html.

70 Bill Roggio, "U.S. Drones Strike Again in Yemen, Killing 6 AQAP fighters Near Capital," *The Long War Journal*, January 23, 2013, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/01/us_drones_strike_aga_5.php.

71 Slater, Woods and Serle, "Somalia: Reported U.S. Covert Actions 2001–2015."

72 W.J. Hennigan and David S. Cloud, "U.S. Airstrikes in Somalia signal a more direct role against Shabaab," *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 2015, http://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-us-airstrikes-somalia-20150723-story.html.

73 Katherine Zimmerman, "A Successful Strike against Al-Shabaab?" Critical Threats Project, September 2, 2015, http://www.criticalthreats.org/somalia/zimmerman-successful-strike-against-al-shabaab-september-2-2014.

efforts.[74] A modest African proxy force numbering 22,000, with United States and United Nations support, also bolsters the effort. The Obama administration counts Somalia as a successful counterterrorism model, but Al-Shabaab has demonstrated resiliency against leadership targeting, and the regional threat from Al-Shabaab has intensified.

C. THE TERRORIST THREAT FROM AL-SHABAAB

1. Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda

Al-Shabaab's strong connections with Al-Qaeda leadership were strong from the start of the organization, leading to their designation as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) in 2008.[75] Several of Al-Shabaab's founding members traveled to Afghanistan during the Soviet intervention, and were highly important for the future Al-Shabaab. These early leaders were commonly referred to as the "Afghanistan veterans." Al-Shabaab's first Emir, Aden Ayro visited Afghanistan in 1998 and met with Osama Bin Laden, and became highly admired amongst older Somali Afghan veterans.[76] A second generation of Shabaab's founders returned after 9/11, drawn by a duty to defensive jihad.[77] Several members trained and fought alongside Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan before returning to Somalia. Al-Shabaab's Afghan veterans promoted a more violent jihad and were important in the formation of the group's jihadist ideology, including the goal of establishing an Islamic Caliphate in Somalia. Since then, Al-Shabaab has hosted and recruited foreign fighters. By doing so, they benefitted from technical assistance, training, and cooperation with affiliates, while strengthening its ties to Al-Qaeda.

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74 Gregg Jaffe, "'White House Officials Defend Somalia Strategy as Counterterrorism Model," *Washington Post*, April 3, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/white-house-officials-defend-somalia-strategy-as-counterterrorism-model/2015/04/03/f996e5c0-da1c-11e4-b3f2-607bd612aeac_story.html.

75 Christopher Harnisch, "The Terror Threat from Somalia," Critical Threats Project, February 12, 2010, 20.

76 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 22.

77 Defensive jihad is the defense of Muslim communities in response to aggression of a non-Islamic enemy.

Al-Qaeda East Africa played an important role in the ascendance of Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab's protection of the AQEA leaders,[78] who participated in the 1998 Embassy bombings, were essential for Shabaab's early formation as a new jihadist network.[79] Al-Shabaab gained numerous benefits from sheltering AQEA leaders. While Al-Qaeda central institutionalized Al-Shabaab's ideology, AQEA played an important operational role, commanding sizeable militia contingents and rising to senior positions within the group. Hansen argues that AQEA were highly respected by Al-Shabaab and functioned as informal leaders.[80] Al-Qaeda East Africa leaders held high-ranking positions in Al-Shabaab after establishing a considerable fighting reputation, and were given large militias to command.[81] Al-Qaeda took the lead in training Al-Shabaab fighters, and individuals like AQEA leader Saleh Nabhan drove the development of tactics.[82] The group received technical training in bomb making, establishing training camps and boosting international recruiting, especially online.[83] Finally, the experience diffused to Al-Shabaab's leaders in conducting high-profile, complex attacks, clandestine operations, and evading security forces for long periods cannot be understated. However, AQEA leadership faced numerous difficulties in Somalia: constant man hunting by both internal and external security forces, the hostility toward foreigners and a xenophobic society speaks to how well Al-Shabaab valued Al-Qaeda's assistance, especially early in its formation. Al-Shabaab's formal merger with Al-Qaeda in 2012 all but guaranteed the United States would continue to target Al-Shabaab in Somalia.[84]

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78 These operatives were Abu Talha al-Sudani, Saleh Nabhan and Bilal al-Berjawi, all since killed by U.S. military strikes.

79 Al-Shabaab received training in skills such as bomb-making, document forging, establishing training camps, and international recruiting.

80 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 28.

81 Ibid., 40.

82 Ibid., 55.

83 Ibid., 62.

84 Jeremy Scahill, "The CIA's Secret Sites in Somalia." *The Nation*, August 8, 2011, http://www.thenation.com/article/cias-secret-sites-somalia/.

2. The Terror Threat from Al-Shabaab

What is the threat to the United States from Al-Shabaab? Given Al-Shabaab's public statements and the ability to act upon threats within the region, Shabaab represents a significant terrorist threat U.S. interests in East Africa. Al-Shabaab also possesses a legitimate capability and willingness to conduct lethal operations outside of Somalia.[85] The Director of National Intelligence assessed that as Al-Qaeda's core leadership loses influence, regional affiliates like Al-Shabaab will drive the global agenda.[86] Due to continued military pressure leadership targeting and AMISOM offensives, Al-Shabaab was forced to change its strategy. After the failed offensive in late 2010, Al-Shabaab was no longer able to challenge government forces through conventional warfare. As a result, Al-Shabaab has shifted its internal focus to destabilizing the central government and AMISOM through guerrilla tactics such as: assassinations, ambushes and roadside bombs. Additionally, since its formal merger with Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab has focused on pursuing its global jihadist agenda and has shifted its attacks to focus on "soft" targets outside of Somalia. High-profile attacks in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti further demonstrate its ability to plan, organize, and export terrorism, a tribute to its resiliency against leadership targeting.

Al-Shabaab's leadership has also warned of terrorist attacks on foreign targets, including American Embassies and symbolic targets in the United States. Al-Shabaab's propaganda arm, Al-Kataib, influences Western jihadists sympathetic to its cause and skillfully controls the reporting of group's actions to the Western world.[87] Al-Shabaab has also capitalized on Anwar al-Awlaqi's influential sermons aimed at Western audiences and Americans like Omar Hammami, who became an important military commander in Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab draws recruits from American cities and since

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85 Seth Jones, "The Terrorist Threat from Al Shabaab," testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, October 3, 2013, 1.

86 "Current and Projected National Security Threats to the United States: Hearing before the Select Committee on Intelligences," testimony before the 112th Congress, Washington, DC: January 31, 2012.

87 Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Al-Shabab's Western Recruitment Strategy," *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 1 (January 2012): 22.

2007, at least 40 Somali Americans have fought in Somalia in support of Al-Shabaab, leading other foreign fighters and committing suicide attacks.[88]

As Al-Qaeda's influence has diminished across the Middle East, ISIS has made overtures to Al-Shabaab to join its ranks. Thus, far, Shabaab's leadership is divided on whether to maintain its long-standing ties with Al-Qaeda or to follow Boko Haram as ISIS' latest affiliate.[89] An alliance with ISIS could further raise the profile of the group and provided sorely needed financial support to Al-Shabaab. A merger would also expand the reach and influence of ISIS and may provide a conduit for an influx of foreign fighters into Africa. While Al-Shabaab has yet to execute attacks in the United States, the group has demonstrated its ability to follow through with its threats to attack its enemies. Declaring its or loyalty with ISIS may give them a greater opportunity to do so.

D.   DEGRADE BUT NOT DESTROY

In this chapter, I traced the evolution of lethal targeting policy and strategies the United States has implemented to counter violent terrorist groups. Although once an ad hoc process, it has been codified to sustain leadership targeting campaigns in combat zones, and areas outside of declared conflict like Somalia and Yemen. I have highlighted the trends of leadership targeting: the expansion of Al-Qaeda affiliates and its offshoots, the proliferation of drone use against terrorist leadership, and the reluctance to commit ground troops to counter the threat. The United States' decision limit its military footprint undoubtedly affects the overall strategy. Additionally, I have described the limitations the United States has faced as it has attempted to conduct leadership targeting operations against Al-Shabaab and how previous forays into Somalia have colored the approach. This strategy has significant impacts on the efficacy of the program overall in places like Somalia. Additionally, I have also outlined the terrorist threat from Al-Shabaab, its call for attacks in America, and its sophisticated propaganda arm that routinely recruits ethnic Somalis and Muslims from the United States. Last, the impact of a formal merger with

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88 Jaffe, "Obama Team Mulls Aims."

89 Rukmini Callimachi, "Boko Haram Generates Uncertainty with Pledge of Allegiance to Islamic State," *New York Times*, March 7, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/08/world/africa/boko-haram-is-said-to-pledge-allegiance-to-islamic-state.html?_r=0.

Al-Qaeda continues to galvanize Al-Shabaab's global agenda, expanding its regional focus, and its ability to execute high-profile attacks in East Africa. As the next chapter will illustrate, the United States' targeting methods have significantly impacted the conditions within Somalia that have allowed Al-Shabaab to survive.

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III. TARGETING AL-SHABAAB LEADERSHIP

A. HISTORY OF U.S. LEADERSHIP TARGETING AGAINST AL-SHABAAB

The history of U.S. leadership targeting of Al-Shabaab in Somalia has been characterized by ad hoc measures and missed opportunities. In addition, the utility of the U.S. conflict model, consisting of airstrikes and proxy forces, has been questioned by its lack of progress in other conflict zones.[90] That being said, the United States has affected both the capability and influence of Al-Shabaab in ways not completely understood or predicted. There is little doubt that charismatic leaders, as well as important operational chiefs, have been eliminated from the organization. However, Al-Shabaab has not been destroyed by leadership decapitation. The group has reinvented itself, reorganized, and survived as a guerrilla force with transnational aspirations.

In this chapter, I identify three periods of Al-Shabaab's history in which leadership targeting had an impact: First, shortly after 9/11, the United States fought a shadow war in Somalia to eliminate AQEA leadership through extraordinary rendition. Second, after the Ethiopian invasion in 2006, the United States collaborated with regional partners to target AQEA and Al-Shabaab leadership through airstrikes. Last, Al-Shabaab's merger with Al-Qaeda in 2012 and its adoption of a transnational jihadist agenda accelerated the leadership targeting campaign in Somalia. While Al-Shabaab's ascendency through 2010 and its subsequent decline is predominantly due to local conflict conditions within Somalia, leadership targeting has had little impact on the group's leadership hierarchy and its operational capability. I assess the overall effectiveness of the leadership targeting campaign from 2007–2015 by examining the changes or adaptions Al-Shabaab undertook in response to targeting. I close the chapter with a detailed examination of Al-Shabaab's longest serving Emir, Ahmed Godane, who was killed in a U.S. drone strike in 2014. His case warrants further study because of the deep impact he had on the group. While Godane led Al-Shabaab from a loose network of

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90 Rosa Brooks, "U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy Is the Definition of Insanity," *Foreign Policy*, June 24, 2015, http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/24/u-s-counterterrorism-strategy-is-the-definition-of-insanity/.

jihadists to the most powerful group in Southern Somalia at its peak, his consolidation of power and his leadership purge had far more of a negative impact than any leadership decapitation to date.

B. SHADOW WARS: 2002–2006

Shortly after 9/11, the U.S. Joint Chiefs worked feverishly to gain legal authority to operate in Somalia, provide SOF authority and resources to target AQEA senior leadership, and create an intra-governmental system that facilitated time sensitive leadership targeting operations.[91] This strategy of targeting senior leadership was described as "cutting off the head of the snake," and was enticing to policymakers because it seemed to offer a "neat and relatively cheap solution to the intractable global problem of violent anti-Western Islamism."[92] Beginning in 2002, the U.S. administration opted to wage its campaign against AQEA largely in the shadows, primarily because of its involvement in Afghanistan and planning for an invasion of Iraq. This decision had significant impact on the growth of jihadist groups like Al-Shabaab. As described in a previous chapter, Al-Shabaab's founders were believed responsible for providing safe haven to Al-Qaeda East Africa leadership responsible for the 1998 Embassy attacks and for planning future terrorist attacks in East Africa.[93]

One of the major problems that beset U.S. operations against Al-Qaeda after 9/11 was the lack of understanding among personnel charged with operating in East Africa.[94] The lack of intelligence assets further hindered the hunt for Al-Qaeda leaders seeking refuge in Somalia. Over the next year, the United States slowly built up resources and personnel in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. The United States focused on intelligence collection and target development of Al-Qaeda and its associates in the Islamic Courts

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91 Robert Andrews, "Manhunts Memorandum," Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict, Washington, D.C., 2002.

92 Naylor, *Relentless Strike*, 165.

93 Anneli Botha, "The 2010 Suicide Attacks in Kampala," In *The Evolution of the Global Terrorist Threat: From 9/11 to Osama Bin Laden's Death*, edited by Bruce Hoffman and Fernando Reinares, New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, 603–604.

94 Sean Naylor, "The "The Secret War in Africa." *Army Times*, October 30, 2011, http://ec.militarytimes.com/navy-seals-horn-of-africa/.

Union, from which the group Al-Shabaab was empowered. Operations initially focused on building human and technical networks, but soon expanded to collaborating with warlords to hunt Al-Qaeda leadership.[95] Operation BLACKHAWK was a CIA-led decapitation campaign against senior leaders of AQEA, which relied on the delicate loyalties of Somali warlords to capture a target and hand them over to the United States for interrogation. The rendition campaigns were an opportunistic partnership with the warlords who were anxious to convince Americans to support them financially and who portrayed themselves as partners in the War on Terror.[96] In turn, the warlords labeled their rivals and critics as extremists and spawned a small industry in abductions, with hopes that those captured might be on the U.S. wanted list.[97] Working with Somali warlords was risky: "You could never actually trust the warlords-they're subject to the highest bidder."[98] The warlord's willingness to capture and sell Al-Qaeda senior members included targeting Al-Shabaab's early leaders, Afghan veterans, Aden Ayro and Mukhtar Robow.

The most significant outcome of U.S. targeting strategy in Somalia was the ill-fated decision to support the warlords. Matt Bryden, coordinator for the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, criticized the CIA's cooperation with Somali warlords, claiming the arrangement "actually strengthened the hand of the Islamists and helped trigger the crisis we're in today."[99] The rendition program created resentment, public unrest and unified the ICU, who were themselves rendition targets. Supporting the unpopular warlords ended up expanding the ranks of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), from which Al-Shabaab had risen. By June 2006 the ICU, strengthened by Al-Shabaab, ran the warlords' militias out of Mogadishu, effectively ending the United States covert rendition program, and its ability directly affect the capture of Al-Shabaab or Al-Qaeda leaders. The jihadists responded in kind with a campaign of intimidation and

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95 Naylor, "The Secret War in Africa."

96 International Crisis Group, "Counter-Terrorism in Somalia," 2.

97 Ibid., 17.

98 Naylor, *Relentless Strike*, 328.

99 Paul Salopek, "Nobody Is Watching," *Chicago Tribune*, November 24, 2008, http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-shadow_war2nov24-story.html.

assassinations, targeting Somalis working for Western intelligence agencies.[100] According to Al-Shabaab itself, rendition campaigns were also one of the reasons the group came into being.[101] Nevertheless, by ignoring the unpopularity of the warlords, the United States actually strengthened the hand of the jihadists.

Was the rendition program effective in eliminating Al-Qaeda leaders inside Somalia? From 2002–2006, the warlords helped render seven or eight Al-Qaeda figures out of Somalia and transferred them to interrogation sites in Afghanistan.[102] From a counterterrorism standpoint, the gains in human and technical intelligence provided plenty of targeting opportunities. However, capturing AQEA's senior leaders proved difficult because of the untrustworthy alliances with warlords and protection provided by jihadist groups.[103] Furthermore, despite improved intelligence capabilities within Somalia, the United States was unable to conduct any successful airstrikes or raids during the first half of the decade.[104] Al-Qaeda was unable to organize and fully realize its mission in Africa,[105] but jihadists matched the chaos created by rendition operations, assassinating the warlords tit-for-tat.[106] While the rendition program may have been a success in terms of capturing Al-Qaeda operatives, its core leadership remained at large.[107] The United States' manhunts did keep Al-Qaeda off balance and were able to disrupt several planned operations against U.S. targets.[108] The warlords' defeat was a disaster for strategy, operational ambitions, and intelligence programs.[109] What plagued

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100 International Crisis Group, "Counter-Terrorism in Somalia," i.

101 Hanson, *Al-Shabaab*, 26.

102 Naylor, *Relentless Strike*, 333–334.

103 According to the cited ICG Report, Al-Qaeda operatives in Somalia were provided with logistics, jobs, identities and protection, 5.

104 Naylor, *Relentless Strike*, 333.

105 Thomas Joscelyn, "The Gitmo Files: Fazul Mohammed Continued to Seek bin Laden's Direction," The Long War Journal, June 13, 2011, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/06/the_gitmo_files_al_q.php. Usama bin Laden admonished AQEA leaders for fighting Somali warlords and not carrying out terrorist operations.

106 International Crisis Group, "Counter-Terrorism in Somalia," 12.

107 Naylor, "The Secret War in Africa."

108 Ibid.

109 Naylor, *Relentless Strike*, 334.

the campaigns against terrorist leadership in 2002 still hampers U.S. counterterrorism strategies today: the lack of cultural intelligence to understand group dynamics and the collaboration with unreliable partners. Consequently, the shadow wars between the United States and AQEA provided the setting in which Al-Shabaab emerged.

C.   INSURGENCY: 2007–2010

The United States' support for foreign intervention significantly altered the conflict dynamics in Somalia. Al-Shabaab's success at fighting the unpopular U.S. backed warlords, its radical ideology, and the ensuing invasion prompted Al-Shabaab to declare jihad against Ethiopia. Furthermore, Ethiopia's invasion of Somali in late 2006 accelerated conditions that Al-Shabaab easily exploited and the group seized the opportunity to portray itself as a defender of Somalis against foreign aggression.[110]

How did the Ethiopian invasion affect the United States' ability to target Al-Shabaab? The Ethiopian invasion to oust the ICU provided the United States cover to assist the Ethiopians in targeting Al-Qaeda leadership and allowed further access into Somalia. During this time, the U.S. military's missions in Somalia were taking on a lethal aspect, increasingly attempting to kill targets rather than capture them.[111] U.S. aircraft was staged on Ethiopian airfields and small teams of advisors embedded with Ethiopian troops to coordinate airstrikes against Al-Shabaab and AQEA leadership.[112] In early 2007, the United States launched several airstrikes, pursuing Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda leaders, as they retreated toward the Kenya-Somali border.[113] The United States struck a convoy of Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabaab leadership, marking its first combat operation inside Somalia since the September 2001 attacks.[114] A third airstrike two days later targeted AQEA leadership near the Kenya border.[115]

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110 Harnisch, "The Terror Threat," 14.

111 Naylor, *Relentless Strike*, 337.

112 Naylor, "The Secret War in Africa."

113 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 47.

114 Slater, Woods and Serle, "Somalia: Reported U.S. Covert Actions 2001–2015."

115 Slater, Woods and Serle, "Somalia: Reported U.S. Covert Actions 2001–2015."

The aggressive targeting was not without drawbacks. Foreign military intervention quickly propelled Al-Shabaab into leadership roles, giving it the cause and opportunity to instigate their vision of global jihad. Ethiopia recognized the hazards involved in military intervention in Somalia, worrying that any overt action would be portrayed as a crusade against Islam.[116] The Ethiopians also objected to being cast as the United States' proxy army. There were more repercussions from co-opting an aggressive targeting strategy vis-à-vis Ethiopia: African Union peacekeepers planned to replace Ethiopian troops, who were withdrawing, and a prophetic note of concern crept into exchanges between U.S. and Ethiopian officials. Ethiopians argued that U.S. military operations had little operational security and risked weakening international support for the newly established AMISOM peacekeeping force if United States' actions were not kept at a low profile. The Ethiopians cited concerns that U.S. airstrikes created greater risk of terrorist attacks against African troop contributing countries (TCCs).[117] Soon after, U.S. assets were forced to withdraw from Ethiopian soil, removing a critical capability used against Al-Shabaab leadership. This effectively, this ended the lethal targeting campaign that decimated Al-Shabaab in 2007.

The results of U.S. lethal targeting practices were significant. As a result of aggressive targeting over the first half of 2007, Al-Shabaab was defeated in the field. The flurry of strikes killed or wounded several AQEA and Al-Shabaab leaders and effectively disrupted Al-Shabaab's command and control. The increased paced of leadership targeting efforts scattered the group; some escaped into Kenya or went into hiding. Several of its most experienced leaders were killed or captured. Hundreds of fighters went home or were killed and morale suffered a heavy blow.[118] Further, Al-Shabaab's political Emir, Abdullahi Arale, was captured and transferred to Guantánamo Bay in June 2007.[119] This resulted in a group that was geographically fragmented between clandestine networks in Mogadishu and a small stronghold in Southern Somalia.

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116 Naylor, "The Secret War in Africa."

117 Ibid.

118 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 47.

119 Joscelyn, "The Gitmo Files."

Despite these losses, without a permanent presence in Somalia, the ability to degrade Al-Shabaab leadership remained limited. Without a serious threat against its leadership, Al-Shabaab rebuilt its strength, stockpiled weapons, and redesigned its organization.[120] It was during this time that Al-Shabaab's second generation of foreign fighters poured into Somalia to wage jihad.[121] Al-Shabaab also built support inside Somalia and within the wider Islamic world, particularly through its sophisticated Internet presence.[122] Al-Shabaab was able to recover by raising funds, attracting recruits, and welcoming hundreds of foreign fighters into its ranks. Soon Al-Shabaab controlled more territory than any Al-Qaeda affiliate, ruling large parts of Southern Somalia.[123]

The United States continued to prioritize efforts against Al-Qaeda legacy leadership and in May 2008, successfully decapitated Al-Shabaab's first military Emir, Aden Ayro, and several senior operatives.[124] Ayro was the group's most notorious of Al-Shabaab, leading Al-Shabaab's military operations and advancement of the group's radical ideology. The killing of Aden Ayro was hoped to exacerbate divisions within the nationalist and Islamist factions of Al-Shabaab. However, Al-Shabaab promised to avenge his death and announced that Ayro's death would make no difference to its operations.[125] Despite losing its military Emir and several lieutenants, Al-Shabaab was able to "recapture most of the territory of south-central Somalia as well as most of the capital Mogadishu, pinning Ethiopian forces, African Union peacekeepers, and the weak Transitional Federal Government (TFG) down in a few districts of the city."[126] Hansen argues that while Aden Ayro was indeed an important figure in Al-Shabaab, by the time of his death he was easily replaceable.[127] Ahmed Godane, one of Al-Shabaab's co-

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120 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 53.

121 Ibid., 40–41.

122 Ken Menkhaus, "Al-Shabaab's Capabilities Post-Westgate," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol 7, no. 2, (February 2015): 1.

123 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 47.

124 Alex Perry, "U.S. Kills Bin Laden's Man in Somalia," Time, May 1, 2008, http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1736736,00.html.

125 "A Targeted Killing," Africa Confidential Vol 49, no. 11, (May 2008): 5.

126 Ken Menkhaus, "Al-Shabaab's Capabilities Post-Westgate," 1.

127 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 59.

founders, quickly succeeded Ayro. The emergence of Godane had a unifying effect on both its national and global jihadist factions. Godane's freedom from clan loyalties in Southern Somalia placed him in an ideal position to unify Al-Shabaab's factions under the banner of a radical Islamic ideology. Under Godane, Shabaab had a charismatic, visionary leader with broader ambitions for the group.[128] In addition, his Islamic credentials and military experience qualified him to lead Al-Shabaab from a dispersed, weakened organization into a unified and highly visible jihadist movement. As I describe later in this chapter, the leadership of Ahmed Godane presented a paradox for leadership targeting against Al-Shabaab.

In 2009, the United States focused on intelligence and surveillance efforts toward remnants of AQEA. After years of intelligence work following Saleh Nabhan, the U.S. military successfully killed AQEA's Emir. Years-long intelligence work enabled the United States to monitor his communications and to predict the precise time and location of the target. The United States developed several different plans to eliminate Nabhan, and a lethal option was chosen by the limited risk the United States was willing to take. Nabhan was a potential capture opportunity, arguably with an enormous potential for intelligence from interrogation. However, with both kill and capture options presented, the President opted for the "clean" option—killing Nabhan. This was chosen ostensibly because the United States had yet to establish a policy for terrorist detention outside of combat zones. The helicopter raid based from offshore carriers, resulted in the death of Nabhan and the capture of a "trove of valuable information."[129] The lethal targeting also demonstrated that the United States could conduct clandestine operations inside enemy territory with a small footprint, an option underutilized since the shadow wars of 2002. However, according to intelligence sources the decapitation had little long-term effect

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128 Sam Cleaves and Nathaniel Horadam. "Profile: Ahmed Abdi Godane (Mukhtar Abu Zubair)," Critical Threats Project. January 6, 2015, http://www.criticalthreats.org/somalia/al-shabaab-leadership/ahmed-abdi-godane-mukhtar-abuzubair-.

129 Naylor, *Relentless Strike*, 411.

against Al-Shabaab or Al-Qaeda operations.[130] Despite the operations' limited effects, only one of AQEA's veterans, Fazul Mohamed, was known to be alive and free.[131]

In July 2010, Al-Shabaab was able to execute its first successful terrorist attack beyond Somalia's borders. Al-Shabaab acted on its multiple threats against Uganda and Burundi, which made up the bulk of AMISOM peacekeepers in Somalia. Aiming to drive Ugandan forces out of Somalia, suicide bombers killed 76 people watching a World Cup Soccer match in Kampala. Al-Shabaab took credit for the high-profile attack and warned of further attacks against foreign troops operating in Somalia.[132] The attack was timed to gain maximum exposure for Al-Shabaab, and signaled that the group had the sophistication and expertise to carry out high-profile attacks outside Somalia. This attack also indicated Al-Shabaab's willingness to expand its transnational operations, and offered a preview of Al-Shabaab's future lethal terror attacks. International attacks have since provided the group greater notoriety and legitimized it as a contributor to the global jihad.[133]

Al-Shabaab's strength as an organization peaked in 2010. Convinced that government and AMISOM forces could be defeated in conventional battle, Al-Shabaab initiated a decisive battle in Mogadishu, known as the Ramadan offensive. Godane ordered the offensive despite objections by Al-Shabaab's collective leadership, which opposed an all-out battle in favor of insurgency warfare. Al-Shabaab was unable to dislodge AMISOM forces from the capital, and the battle ended in humiliation for Al-Shabaab, which lost up to 700 fighters and many top leaders. This alienated clans that suffered the most casualties and weakened Al-Shabaab significantly, especially Godane's status as Emir. After the Ramadan offensive, Al-Shabaab was a changed organization. Internal divisions intensified, and predictions of fracturing were taken seriously in

130 Naylor, *Relentless Strike*, 411. Figure 1, Al-Shabaab's

131 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 99.

132 Christopher Harnisch, "Al Shabaab's First International Strike: Analysis of the July 11 Uganda Bombings." Critical Threats Project, July 14, 2010, http://www.criticalthreats.org/somalia/al-shabaabs-first-international-strike-analysis-july-11-ugandabombings-july-14-2010-4559.

133 Harnisch, "The Terror Threat from Somalia," 33.

Somalia.[134] The group's appetite for conventional warfare ended and it completely withdrew from Mogadishu by mid-2011. This weakened version of Al-Shabaab, which was now on the defensive, dictated a change in strategy. The United States responded by accelerating the pace of its leadership targeting operations. The next period of targeting from 2011–2015 came as a response to Al-Shabaab's growing regional threat and its intention to attack foreign targets.

Some analysts suggest that the aggressive counterterrorism policy and support of the Ethiopian invasion, provoked in part by Al-Shabaab, was a catalyst for the rise of radical jihadism in Somalia.[135] While the United States' designation of Al-Shabaab in February 2008 brought increased scrutiny on the group, overall efforts were restricted to legacy AQEA leadership targets. Meanwhile, the narrow focus on AQEA targets gave Al-Shabaab the time and space to reorganize, recruit, and entrench itself into Somali society.[136] There is belief within the U.S. military that too much emphasis was placed on years hunting one or two AQEA leaders like Saleh Nabhan, supported by a belief that terrorist groups were centered on important leadership, and reinforced in other U.S. conflicts.[137]

D.   GUERRILLA WARFARE: 2011–2015

Al-Shabaab reached its weakest point politically and militarily when it announced its withdrawal from Mogadishu in August 2011. The group soon faced military offensives on three fronts in 2012, resulting in loss of territory at the hands of Ethiopia, Kenya, and AMISOM. Increased military pressure exacerbated divisions in the leadership network, leading to a period of vulnerability and infighting that would test the strength of its Emir.

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134 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 103.

135 International Crisis Group, "Counter-Terrorism in Somalia: Losing Hearts and Minds," Africa Report No. 95, July 11, 2005; 8.

136 Clint Watts, Jacob Shapiro and Vahid Brown, Al-Qaeda's (Mis)adventures in the Horn of Africa," Harmony Project: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, (July 2, 2007): 29. Early Intelligence Assessments suggested that Somalia was "inoculated" from Al-Qaeda and extremist organizations like Al-Shabaab.

137 Naylor, "The Secret War in Africa."

Al-Shabaab's fortunes slid quickly in 2011. Besides being humiliated in the ill-fated Ramadan offensive, Fazul Mohamed, the last legacy member of AQEA leadership, was gunned down by government forces in June 2011. It is widely believed that Al-Shabaab's Emir, Ahmed Godane, set up Fazul as part of a power struggle between the group's Somali and Al-Qaeda commanders.[138] Al-Qaeda was dissatisfied with Godane's leadership and planned to change Al-Shabaab's Emir with someone with closer ties to Al-Qaeda.[139] Fazul's death, along with the death of British jihadist Bilal al-Berjawi, sparked a mass exodus of foreign fighters who believed that Godane was purging non-Somalis from its ranks.[140]

The United States scored multiple successes in targeting Al-Shabaab leadership in 2011. However, the lack of viable detention policy continued to drive decisions on leadership targeting and have a greater impact both in and outside Somalia. The United States leadership targeting campaigns expanded, opening a cluster of drone bases in the Seychelles, Ethiopia, and Djibouti.[141] In the meantime, the United States shifted focus toward Al-Shabaab's cooperation with Al-Qaeda, killing a senior commander who planned the suicide attacks in Kampala, Uganda in July 2010.[142] The United States conducted its first lethal drone strike in June 2011, killing foreign fighters with links to Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and wounding Al-Shabaab's Deputy Emir, Ibrahim al-Afghani.[143] Al-Shabaab and AQAP would cooperate by reinforcing each other with fighters, while AQAP ideologues played a key role in Al-Shabaab's indoctrination. AQAP has historically drawn reinforcements from Somalia with estimations of Somalis

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138 Somalia Report, Al-Shabaab Leader Arranged Fazul's Death, Somalia Report, June 16, 2011, http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/973/Al-Shabaab_Leader_Arranged_Fazuls_Death

139 Raffaello Pantucci, "Bilal Al-Berjawi and the Shifting Fortunes of Foreign Fighters in Somalia," CTC Sentinel 6, no. 9 (September 2013): 15.

140 Ken Menkhaus, "Al-Shabaab's Capabilities Post-Westgate," 1.

141 Craig Whitlock and Greg Miller, "U.S. building secret drone bases in Africa, Arabian Peninsula, Officials Say," Washington Post, September 20, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/us-building-secret-drone-bases-in-africa-arabian-peninsula-officials-say/2011/09/20/gIQAJ8rOjK_story.html.

142 Slater, Woods and Serle, "Somalia: Reported U.S. Covert Actions 2001–2015."

143 Ibid.

being the largest foreign fighter group in the country.[144] In turn, AQAP supplied Al-Shabaab with weapons, training and financial support.

Later, a senior commander who acted as a liaison between Al-Shabaab and AQAP, was captured at sea in the Gulf of Aden, exposing extensive operational ties between groups. Abdulkadir Warsame was seen as a potentially valuable source of information on both organizations, and a decision was made to capture him alive. According to author Daniel Klaidman, the U.S. military used local spies to penetrate Warsame's network and arranged for Warsame to travel with no guards.[145] With a moratorium on American troops on the ground by Yemeni President Saleh, and the aversion to risk in Somalia, the United States was able to penetrate Warsame's network and manipulated the timing and logistics of his movements.[146] This led to the surrender of Warsame "with minimal fuss."[147]

The pressured situation Al-Shabaab found itself in 2011 prompted significant changes to its organization. After being humiliated in the Ramadan offensive, Godane replaced two influential deputies with loyalists and suspended meetings of Shabaab's decision-making council, the *Shura*.[148] However, by slowly purging Shabaab's leadership core of nationalists and political pragmatists, Godane narrowed the group's broad appeal toward a strict global jihadist agenda and alienated many former sympathizers.[149] As described later in this chapter, Al-Shabaab's Emir, Ahmed Godane was responsible for the consolidation of power, disbanding leadership councils, and relying on an autocratic leadership style.[150] Militarily, Al-Shabaab went back to its roots,

144 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 125.

145 Daniel Klaidman, *Kill or Capture: The War on Terror and the Soul of the Obama Presidency*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012, 122–126.

146 Naylor, *Relentless Strike*, 414.

147 Scott Shane, Objective Troy: A Terrorist, a President, and the Rise of the Drone. New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2015, 279.

148 Matt Bryden, The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab, a Strategy of Choice or Necessity? New York: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2014, 3–4.

149 Bryden, The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab, 2.

150 John Amble, "5 Questions with Stig Jarle Hansen on the State of Al-Shabaab," War on the Rocks, April 7, 2014, http://warontherocks.com/2014/04/5-questions-with-stig-jarle-hansen-on-the-state-of-al-shabaab/.

adopting a strategy that brought them success in 2007, conducting assassinations and suicide bombings to counter superior forces of AMISOM.[151] Al-Shabaab's merger with Al-Qaeda in February 2012 was met with resistance within both organizations, and exacerbated the divisions within Al-Shabaab.[152] Operationally, the merger meant little, but it served to strengthen the global jihadist faction within Al-Shabaab and solidified important ideological ties.

In June 2013, Godane responded to his critics by purging dissenting leaders within the group. First, Godane loyalists killed Ibrahim al-Afghani and Moalim Burhan in a shootout after the two resisted arrest. In September, Al-Shabaab assassins tracked down and killed Omar Hammami and a group of foreign fighters. Isolated Al-Shabaab leaders Mukhtar Robow and Hassan Aweys were also forced to flee to escape the purge. While Aweys surrendered to the central government, Robow established himself in his home region protected by his clan.[153] As a result, Godane's consolidation of power within Al-Shabaab robbed it of experienced leaders and diminished the group's influence within essential clan constituencies. Al-Shabaab's leadership losses precipitated its high- profile, unconstrained acts of terrorism.

Despite its weakened leadership core, Al-Shabaab continued to show its capability as a guerrilla force with high-profile attacks on the Somali Supreme Court and the United Nations compound in Mogadishu, producing high casualties and severely the central government. Al-Shabaab's *Amniyat*, became central to its asymmetric strategy and produced some of Al-Shabaab's most high-profile attacks. In September 2013, a small team of gunmen attacked a Western-own shopping center in Nairobi, killing 67 and wounding 200. As a result, the United States launched a raid to capture or kill the Al-Shabaab senior leader responsible for planning the Westgate attack. The pre-dawn amphibious-based assault was beaten back after a heavy firefight.[154] While the raid was

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151 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 114.

152 Hassan Abukar, "The Letters: How Al-Qaeda Failed in Mali and Somalia," Wardheer News, April 18, 2013, http://www.wardheernews.com/the-letters-how-al-qaeda-failed-in-mali-and-somalia/.

153 Bryden, The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab, 5.

154 Slater, Woods and Serle, "Somalia: Reported U.S. Covert Actions 2001–2015."

unsuccessful, the United States showed it had the capability and willingness to accept some measure of risk in order to detain a senior leader of Al-Shabaab, a tactic underemployed since the shadow wars. U.S. targeting lists soon expanded to include senior planners and operatives who were involved in planning external terrorist attacks and were aimed at disrupting Shabaab's assassination campaigns. In 2014, U.S. targeting efforts reached its height, employing drone strikes against senior leaders from Al-Shabaab's Amniyat. The U.S. military's successful campaign of drone strikes against Al-Shabaab senior leadership were followed by press statements claiming that their deaths, "will significantly impact al-Shabaab's ability to conduct attacks," and "his death has dealt another significant blow to…al-Shabaab."[155] Over the next year, Al-Shabaab would lose multiple senior leaders of the Amniyat, yet Al-Shabaab remained capable of planning complex operations outside Somalia.[156]

In September 2014, the United States successfully eliminated Al-Shabaab's long standing Emir, Ahmed Godane. Godane's death, lauded as another "significant blow" to Al-Shabaab, came at a vulnerable time for the group. Analysts were also quick to conclude that, "his death would result in an increasing number of defectors and bring the inevitable break-up of the group."[157] As described later in this chapter, Godane's removal drove optimism that his demise would seal the decline of Al-Shabaab. Success in leadership targeting, however, was short-lived. In April 2015, Al-Shabaab gunmen stormed Garissa University in Kenya and killed 147 students, Al-Shabaab's deadliest terrorist attack to date.[158]

Al-Shabaab's "reinvention" signaled it was no longer simply a Somali jihadist organization.[159] As Al-Shabaab was forced from its traditional strongholds, it expanded

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155 Bill Roggio, "US Confirms Shabaab Intelligence Official Killed in Drone Strike," The Long War Journal, March 19, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/03/us-confirms-shabaab-intelligence-official-killed-in-drone-strike.php.

156 Since 2010, Al-Shabaab has operated across Somalia's borders, staging 95 attacks in Kenya alone.

157 Tres Thomas, "Is Al-Shabaab Stronger or Weaker?"

158 Levs and Yan, "147 Dead."

159 Bryden, Defeat of Al-Shabaab?

into Southern Somalia and in Kenya, where its key affiliate, al-Hijra is based.[160] Al-Shabaab has survived as a guerrilla group despite the successive removal or disruption of its core leadership. Al-Shabaab has shown its resiliency toward leadership disruption; the group suffered multiple successive losses to its Amniyat, its longest serving Emir, as well as disunity within the group's nationalist and jihadist factions.[161] Al-Shabaab remains a lethal guerrilla force. It has demonstrated through significant pressure on its leadership structure that it can weather the storm. The U.S. counterterrorism strategy in Somalia is often described as a successful model, one that could be duplicated in other troubled African countries. However, the recent surge in violence demonstrates that leadership targeting strategy may have reached its limits against a resilient enemy.[162]

E.   LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION: THE CASE OF GODANE

Godane's removal is a paradox of leadership targeting. His removal warrants a dispassionate analysis as to whether his killing will have an impact on the group's capability to conduct future terrorist attacks. Godane's death has led to predictions of Al-Shabaab fracturing into competing factions, but a year after his death, this has not become reality. In this section, I examine the positive and negative impacts Ahmed Godane had on Al-Shabaab during his tenure as Emir, and posit whether the purported benefits of eliminating Al-Shabaab's top terrorist outweigh the harm he single-handedly inflicted on the group.

1.   Al-Shabaab's Golden Age

Godane's rise to power was unparalleled in Somalia's jihadist history.[163] His origins outside clan conflict areas meant he was free of the rivalries that dominated

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160 Al-Hijra is an affiliate based in Kenya of primarily Kenyan-Somali and non-Somali Muslim followers of Al-Shabaab.

161 Christopher Anzalone, "The Life and Death of Al-Shabaab Leader Ahmed Godane," CTC Sentinel 7, no. 9 (September 2014): 1.

162 Greg Jaffe, "White House Officials Defend Somalia Strategy as Counterterrorism Model," Washington Post, April 3, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/white-house-officials-defend-somalia-strategy-as-counterterrorism-model/2015/04/03/f996e5c0-da1c-11e4-b3f2-607bd612aeac_story.html.

163 Farouk Chothia, "Ahmed Abdi Godane," BBC Africa, September 9, 2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-29034409.

Southern Somalia. Godane's Islamist credentials and military training made him an ideal candidate to lead Al-Shabaab after Aden Ayro's death. Under Godane, Al-Shabaab's leadership was drawn from a diverse array of clans, which facilitated decentralized control and built popular support. Godane promoted a more violent jihadist agenda after returning from fighting in Afghanistan and became the group's chief ideologue. Godane was instrumental in reorganizing the Al-Shabaab into an insurgency force after being expelled from Mogadishu in 2006. During his tenure, Al-Shabaab reached the height of its power, overseeing the rapid expansion of Al-Shabaab's territorial control.[164] By 2010, the group controlled nearly all of Southern Somalia and most of the areas in the capital of Mogadishu. At Al-Shabaab's high point, it controlled more territory than any other Al-Qaeda affiliate, an example of Islamic governance lauded by prominent jihadist ideologues such as Anwar al-Awlaki.[165]

Under Godane, Al-Shabaab adopted an increasingly global jihadist agenda despite the group's historical Salifist-Irridentist ideology. Godane focused on hardline Islamic issues and had a strong relationship with Al-Qaeda leadership, which led him to petition Al-Qaeda to accept Al-Shabaab as an official affiliate. Godane oversaw the introduction of suicide tactics, foreign fighters, and declarations of allegiance toward Al-Qaeda.[166] It was not until after bin Laden's death however, that Al-Shabaab was accepted, announcing its formal merger in 2012. Godane's global jihadist ideology sanctioned high-profile attacks against civilians, threatened to attack the west, which undoubtedly raised his priority for lethal targeting efforts. While this may have narrowed the group's domestic appeal, it broadened Al-Shabaab as an Al-Qaeda brand. Godane oversaw the group's martyrdom operations, which was an assassination campaign that represents a serious threat to the stability of the Somalia central government. Under Godane, Al-Shabaab developed a sophisticated media network that connected the organization within the wider struggle for joining the global jihad, drawing foreign fighters and raising its international profile.

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164 Anzalone, "The Life and Death," 2.

165 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 2.

166 Ibid.

2.   Discontent and Purge

Godane's desire for undisputed power and autocratic methods weakened Al-Shabaab's internal cohesion. While differences between Godane and its co-founders existed since at least 2008, they were initially settled collectively. This is primarily because the executive Shura still functioned to settle disputes through mediation. Godane's divisiveness alienated its founding leaders from the group, and compelled prominent members to break ranks from Al-Shabaab. Godane also faced mounting criticism from other senior leaders in Al-Shabaab for his erred judgment in the Ramadan Offensive. Godane planned and ordered the August 2010 offensive. Subsequent failed offensives increased the dissention to the point where Godane eventually replaced his critics with loyalists. It was of great consequence, then, when Godane suspended meetings of the Shura shortly after multiple tactical errors. His suspension of the Shura undoubtedly exacerbated the divisions within the group.

Godane's unilateral decisions made outside the Shura were unpopular, especially his decision to formally align Al-Shabaab with Al-Qaeda in 2012. Ironically, Osama bin Laden advised the Emir to conceal Al-Shabaab's ties to Al Qaeda in order to avoid unwanted attention from the West.[167] In the months following the merger with Al-Qaeda, Godane's opponents within Al-Shabaab accused him of excessive brutality and mistreatment of foreign leadership. In an open letter to Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, leadership decried Godane for acting like a dictator and his draconian implantation of Sharia law, unpopular in a Somali setting. Anticipating a leadership struggle, Godane abolished the Shura and delegated power into loyal regional governors and military commanders.

Another source of disagreement among Al-Shabaab leadership concerned Godane's use of the Amniyat, the group's intelligence agency. Godane established the Amniyat to act as his person counter-intelligence arm, responsible for eliminating internal threats and enforcing loyalty.[168] Godane strengthened the Amniyat and used it as a tool to

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167 Abukar, "The Letters." Before bin Laden's death, he cautioned against the merger, reasoning that raising the profile of Al-Shabaab would bring unwanted counterterrorism attention.

168 Bryden, The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab, 4.

centralize power. The Amniyat by-passed the Shura, arresting or executing spies and imprisoning rivals in order to reduce divisions in the group. The Amniyat also jailed or killed defectors, inducing a fear in Al-Shabaab leaders who were contemplating leaving the group.[169] While Godane's purge brought Al-Shabaab under his control, it created many enemies within the ranks of Al-Shabaab. Discontent with Godane's decisions brought longer-simmering differences between Al-Shabaab to a head, and Al-Shabaab leaders called for change of Emir.[170] Anticipating a leadership struggle, Godane prohibited the formation of jihadist groups within Al-Shabaab controlled areas. The Amniyat moved against outspoken leadership, killing them when they refused to surrender. Other prominent members fled for their own safety. The irony of Godane's removal of his rivals is that he eliminated his would-be successor, Al-Afghani, a one-time advisor and co-founder of Al-Shabaab.

Godane's purge depleted Al-Shabaab's leadership of its most experienced and influential members. Al-Shabaab's weakened condition was not unlike Al-Shabaab's early leadership targeting troubles in 2007, and had similar results. Al-Shabaab was increasingly isolated among the Somali population.[171] Al-Shabaab's alignment with Al-Qaeda's extremist fringe further narrowed its appeal within the broader Somali clan community, from which it drew popular support.[172] Godane's mistreatment of foreigners resulted in a mass exodus from Somalia after the deaths of prominent foreigners, which many believe were orchestrated by Godane. Finally, Godane's autocratic leadership methods severely degraded the strength and influence of Al-Shabaab, and would likely have continued to isolate the group from clan and popular support.[173]

Days after Godane's death, Al-Shabaab announced the successor as Abu Ubaidah, a relatively unknown Godane loyalist. Ubaidah reportedly played an instrumental role in the purge of 2013 and was an experienced operational chief in Al-Shabaab before acting

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169 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 74.

170 Bryden, The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab, 4.

171 Ibid., 6.

172 Ibid.

173 Amble, "5 Questions."

as Godane's personal advisor. Ubaidah's position as Godane's closest advisor suggests that he shared Godane's vision for Al-Shabaab, emphasizing a global jihadist ideology and rejecting Somali nationalist goals.[174] Consequently, the unanticipated response from Al-Shabaab's new Emir has been one of reconciliation and unification, reaching out to Shabaab's isolated leaders. Policy makers hoped that Godane's removal would weaken the group's radical contingent and pave the way for defections and fractionalization. However, it appears Al-Shabaab survived another leadership decapitation.

F.   NARROW FOCUS

The United States has approached leadership targeting as an "Alexandrian solution."[175] The aggressive use of lethal attack against Al-Shabaab's leadership has been able to affect both the capability and influence in ways not completely anticipated or predicted. The focus of leadership targeting against Al-Qaeda leaders early in Al-Shabaab's life cycle was an attempt to localize the group and avoid being drawn into another conflict. However, this decision allowed Al-Shabaab to grow unabated in strength and influence. The leadership targeting campaigns were then expanded in an attempt to combat the increasingly unconstrained threats and spread of terrorism throughout East Africa. Nonetheless, these efforts have not been able to disrupt Al-Shabaab's ability to execute complex terrorist attacks against the U.S. backed-Somali Federal Government (SFG) and against Somalia's neighbors. The elimination of Godane was predicted to severely damage the group's operational capability and further splinter the group along strengthened nationalist factions.[176] In reality, the opposite has happened. Important leaders have not splintered and as previously stated, may have even been welcomed back into the collective fold.

Pundits might ask whether the elimination of Al-Shabaab's most divisive and unpopular leader was the appropriate tactic for precipitating the decline of Al-Shabaab as a terrorist group. Godane's importance to Al-Shabaab was undeniable even after he

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174 Sam Cleaves, "Profile: Ahmad Umar (Abu Ubaidah)," Critical Threats Project, February 17, 2015, http://www.criticalthreats.org/somalia/al-shabaab-leadership/ahmed-umar-abu-ubaidahfebruary-17-2015.

175 By this, I mean an aggressive, simplified answer to an intractable problem.

176 "Al Shabaab Shake-Up," Africa Confidential 55, no. 19 (September 2014): 4.

consolidated power and homogenized its radical ideological agenda. His status as a terrorist threat to United States' interests and the overwhelming appeal to eliminate him likely guaranteed his eventual death through lethal targeting. Yet, one must question whether the United States was in a position to capitalize on the chaos and disunity created by Ahmed Godane, reminiscent of Al-Shabaab's early troubles in 2007. Currently Al-Shabaab still retains the capability to strike government and military targets at the time and place of their choosing,[177] proving its resilience and effectiveness as a terrorist group.

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177 "Al-Shabaab Continues Mass Raid Tactics against AMISOM."

IV.   RESILIENCE TO LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION

The killing of Ahmed Godane deprived Al-Shabaab of its longest ruling Emir and chief ideologue and strategist. Analysts viewed his death as a significant blow to an already divided organization, resulting in more predictions of Al-Shabaab's collapse.[178] Moreover, the successive losses against Al-Shabaab's most powerful entity, the Amniyat, were expected to reduce the threat of external attacks and assassinations of government officials.[179] However, despite these instances of successful targeting, Al-Shabaab remains a potent threat to Somalia and its neighbors. In this chapter, I examine the elements within Al-Shabaab that are affected by leadership targeting, and the structural mechanisms that make Al-Shabaab resilient to this targeting.

Analyzing the conditions under which Al-Shabaab is both vulnerable and susceptible to leadership attacks critical to developing a strategy for effective counterterrorism. In the first section, I analyze a theory of terrorist leadership as it applies to leadership targeting and posit why Al-Shabaab has been able to survive multiple strikes to its top-tier leaders. I argue that to begin with, while Al-Shabaab's leaders initially fulfilled important inspirational and operational roles, but their influence diminished over time. As a result, Al-Shabaab was able to survive the decapitation of its Emir and continued to conduct complex terrorist operations. Next, I examine two important leadership mechanisms that further affected Al-Shabaab's resiliency to leadership targeting: the Shura and the Amniyat. I argue that both units are just as important to the long-term survival of the organization as the Emir. Al-Shabaab's retained its operational capability despite the loss of its top leader.

In Section Two, I analyze Al-Shabaab's organizational resilience in the face of leadership losses by examining the structural changes the group undertook to defend itself from collapse. Al-Shabaab's resiliency can thus be attributed to tow adaptations:

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178 Abdirahman Ali, "Al-Shabaab after Godane?" Garowe Online, September 4, 2014, http://www.garoweonline.com/page/show/post/287/somalia-alshabaab-after-godane.

179 Caleb Weiss, "Shabaab Targets Mogadishu Hotel in Suicide Assault," The Long War Journal, November 1, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/11/shabaab-targets-mogadishu-hotel-in-suicide-assault.php.

decentralization transferred operational autonomy and authority to regional governors and field commanders, and bureaucratization, which dispersed functional responsibilities and routinized Al-Shabaab's ideology. These changes reduced Al-Shabaab's reliance on top leaders and made the organization resilient to leadership attacks.

A.   IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP IN AL-SHABAAB

Al-Shabaab has survived multiple losses of its top leaders and has endured as a potent terrorist force. To explain why Al-Shabaab has thus far been resilient, an examination of how important Al-Shabaab leadership is to maintain organizational integrity is necessary. First, to make an obvious point, for leadership targeting to be an effective tactic, it must eliminate leaders providing either inspirational or operational benefit, or both.[180] Important leaders generally fulfill one of two roles in terrorist organizations: inspirational or operational. Leadership plays an essential role in organizational integrity as well. Since integrity (and unity) is necessary to achieve organizational goals, failure to maintain unity leads to dissention in the organization and eventually leads to group decline.[181] In addition, collective leadership bodies are an important unit in terrorist organizations. Collective leadership contributes to organizational integrity by dealing with formulation of strategy, distribution of resources and command responsibilities. Disagreements over power, strategy, and resources, which often are sources of conflict among leadership, are settled collectively. In terrorist groups, collective bodies plan and oversee all aspects of the organizations' operations and consult the leader throughout the decision-making process.[182]

1.   Value of Inspirational Leadership

At the outset, Al-Shabaab's leaders were inspirationally important to the formation of the group. Al-Shabaab's Emir provided inspirational leadership to its

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180 Freeman, "A Theory of Terrorist Leadership," 671.

181 C. H. Levine, "Organizational Decline and Cutback Management," Public Administration Review 38, no. 4 (1978), 316.

182 Martha Crenshaw, "An Organizational Approach to the Analysis of Political Terrorism," Orbis 3, no. 29 (Fall 1985), 466.

members through the articulation of the group's ideological vision. Al-Shabaab's rhetoric echoed Al-Qaeda's focus on defensive jihad, popular even with clan minded, nationalist leaders. The group's early leaders radical ideology also depicted Islam as under attack and inspired young Somalis and foreign fighters to join Al-Shabaab. The elimination of a single Al-Shabaab leader then had little effect on the ideology of the group, which continued to be expressed by multiple influential leaders and disseminated through sophisticated media operations.[183] Al-Shabaab's early leaders experience in waging jihad in Afghanistan alongside Al-Qaeda was also important in attracting new members. Al-Shabaab's members point to its founding leaders' charisma and stature as important for joining,[184] and many analysts point to the charismatic traits of Al-Shabaab's Emir, Ahmed Godane.[185] Godane's exceptional oratorical skills secured him considerable influence, and he became "the chief ideologue, custodian, and interpreter of Al-Shabaab's doctrine."[186] He often cited the poetry of the "Mad Mullah," an anti-colonial hero in Somalia, which he injected into his communiqués and propaganda.[187]

Conversely, inspirational leadership can diminish over time, resulting in decreases in ideological influence, and the overall importance in the organization.[188] The increased targeting pressure and military setbacks also limited Godane's capacity to lead in the open.[189] Godane rarely appeared in public, disseminating most of his missives through the Internet. He was reportedly wary of drone strikes, escaping on at least two occasions,[190] and avoided talking on telephones.[191] Godane also feared someone in his

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183 Christopher Anzalone, "The Nairobi Attack and Al-Shabab's Media Strategy," *CTC Sentinel* 6, no. 10 (October 2013), 2.

184 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 46.

185 Anzalone, "The Life and Death," 1.

186 Chothia, "Ahmed Abdi Godane."

187 Abdirahman Ali, "Somalia: Al-Shabaab after Godane?" See also Randal Gray, "Bombing the 'Mad Mullah'—1920," *The RUSI Journal*, 125, no. 4 (1980): 41–47.

188 Freeman, "A Theory of Terrorist Leadership," 669

189 For security reasons Al-Shabaab's leaders have a limited ability to participate in meetings, move freely and communicate by telephone and radio.

190 Slater, Woods and Serle, "Somalia: Reported U.S. Covert Actions 2001–2015."

191 Maruf, "Sources on Final Days."

inner circle would betray him, after a $7 million reward was authorized by the United States.[192] For these reasons, Godane's importance as an inspirational leader was in decline. Godane's decentralization of authority to regional commanders, who planned their own military operations and recruited forces locally, further contributed to his declining influence.[193] Godane's importance as an ideologue also diminished over time. His decision to merge with Al-Qaeda was an unpopular one, as his extreme interpretation of Islam, which spurred his critics to call for his removal.[194] Opting for a violent method of conflict resolution further called into question his legitimacy as Emir. In the beginning, Al-Shabaab relied upon charismatic leadership to develop and advance the organization's ideological objectives. However, as the organization grew, gained territory, and became entrenched in Somali society, the importance of inspirational leadership diminished over time.

2.   Value of Operational Leadership

In addition to inspiring members, leaders also provide guidance on strategy, tactics, and day-to-day operations.[195] While inspirational leaders identify the grand vision or ideology, operationally important leaders make decisions on the means to carry out their objectives. These objectives include making important decisions such as whether to engage in the political process, or if violence against civilians is permissible. Operational leaders also decide how the organization operates internally, such as recruitment, logistics, and training.[196] Early on, leadership is able to exercise direct control over members. However, as the organization succeeds and grows, the size often exceeds the span of control. For this reason, operational decisions are often delegated to lower levels of command. As described later in this chapter, decentralization and bureaucratization are two mechanisms that Al-Shabaab use to overcome the increasingly complex command

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192 Maruf, "Sources on Final Days."

193 Matt Bryden, The Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab? Think again. Nairobi: Sahan Research, 2015, 7.

194 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 104.

195 Freeman, "A Theory of Terrorist Leadership," 670.

196 Ibid., 669.

and control requirements to remain successful. As a result, both mechanisms became increasingly important as the organization grew, and resulted in the delegation of authority and influence to operational leadership.

Operational leadership was important in Al-Shabaab's early history. After being expelled from central Somalia in 2007, the few surviving leaders were critical in organizing Al-Shabaab to fight an insurgency, and organized the group's governing structures that enabled it to recruit, finance, and sustain its membership. However, one major event precipitated the Emir's operational decline: Al-Shabaab's ill-fated military offensives in Mogadishu. In this aspect, Godane was operationally important because he was able to exert his authority to plan and execute a major military operation, despite the opposition of Al-Shabaab's decision-making council.[197]

After Al-Shabaab's defeat in Mogadishu, there was widespread discontent with Godane's involvement in military operations, which damaged his status and led others to contest his leadership. Influential leaders called for his resignation and the disbandment of his operationally important intelligence arm.[198] Afterwards, Al-Shabaab's leadership council reasserted itself, and elected to change strategy, which grew as much from necessity as by choice. As Godane's influence in military matters declined, autonomous decision-making in day-to-day military operations increased. In the process, Al-Shabaab matured as an organization and cultivated a new generation of jihadist leaders, steeped in Al-Shabaab's ideological creed and military doctrine. Thus, Al-Shabaab was capable of replenishing the losses from the movement's leadership.[199] In fact, the ranks of unknown mid-level leaders were so numerous and ideologically committed, that Al-Shabaab was able to replace lost leaders with ease.[200] As a result, Al-Shabaab relied on operational level leaders to execute its asymmetric strategy through guerrilla-style attacks against government forces.

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197 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 100.

198 Ibid., 104–105.

199 Bryden, "The Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab," 5.

200 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2060 (2012): Somalia, S/2015/801. New York: United Nations Security Council, 2015, 27.

3. Value of Collective Leadership

Collective leadership is one mechanism that minimizes the impact of leadership decapitation. In terrorist groups, institutionalizing a collective leadership body can minimize the impact of a loss of an individual leader. When a leader is removed from the top of the organization, the collective body is able to maintain continuity and unity, since inspiration or operational guidance is dispensed through multiple important leaders. Although collective leadership enables terrorist groups to act cohesively and settle differences for the benefit of the group, they often do not share the same motivations and ideology of the whole. Yet, Al-Shabaab's diverse, but unified collective leadership structure, has enabled the group to overcome disagreements or disruptions like leadership decapitation.

Al-Shabaab is ruled by collective leadership, with decision-making undertaken by a by a council of senior leadership. The executive Shura is the highest decision-making body of Al-Shabaab, and is dominated by eight to ten members, representing multiple clans and factions of the group.[201] The executive Shura also functions as a mechanism for holding individual members accountable for their actions, including the Emir.[202] The Shura fills important roles within Al-Shabaab, deciding on strategy, ideology, nomination of leadership, and means to reach objectives. The Shura also fulfills the requirement for deciding practical matters, such as negotiating with other actors for financial support, recruiting, or resources.[203] Additionally, the military leadership of Al-Shabaab is under the strong influence of the Shura, and is involved in target selection, incorporation of foreign fighters and providing guidance for military operations.[204] The most significant function Al-Shabaab's collective leadership is maintaining unity of the group under conditions of hardship or internal disagreements. The Shura is critical in settling

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201 At one point the Shura represented all four major clans in Somalia. Al-Qaeda and foreign commanders have secured important positions in the Shura as well.

202 International Crisis Group, "Counter-Terrorism in Somalia," 9.

203 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 58, 100, 78.

204 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2060 (2012): Somalia, S/2013/414. New York: United Nations Security Council, 2013, 53.

disagreements and disputes within the organization, such as power sharing and strategy.[205]

Al-Shabaab has a tradition of problem solving amongst its leadership, allowing it to maintain relative unity. Hansen attributes this unity, as one of the reasons for its ability to withstand divisions and leadership deficits.[206] We can further attribute Al-Shabaab's capacity to withstand leadership attacks in part to this unique ability to unify its diverse subgroups and the continuity through provides in operational and ideological guidance. Demonstrating its capacity to carry on in the face of leadership decapitation, Al-Shabaab announced the appointment of a successor within a week of the airstrike that killed its Emir. Al-Shabaab also proclaimed that the Emir's death would have no effect on the group.[207] The succession of Al-Shabaab's next Emir was introduced without major interruption in part because the group's governing council was able to overcome the disruption.[208] Consequently, Al-Shabaab was most vulnerable to leadership targeting under the conditions it faced during the suspension of the Shura, whereby the leadership was unable to meet to disseminate guidance and settle serious differences in the organization.

4.   The Amniyat and Its Role in Organizational Resilience

In addition to ways the collective leadership of the Shura bolstered Al-Shabaab's resilience to leadership targeting, Al-Shabaab further established additional organizational mechanisms that would safeguard its survival in the face of such tactics. Similar to the Shura, the Amniyat was first established to enforce unity within the organization, and defend itself from leadership disruption. However, the unit serves the

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205 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea. Report S/2013/414, 13.

206 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 9.

207 "Harakat Al-Shabaab Al Mujahideen Statement: What a profitable gain, O' Abu Zubayr! Dhul Qa'dah 1435H," Al-Kataib Media, September 10, 2014, https://archive.org/download/AmkaMagazine/Al-Muhajiroun01.pdf.

208 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, *Report S/2015/801*, 26.

dual purpose of a clandestine assassination force, carrying out complex terror attacks against the SFG.[209]

The Amniyat serves important roles that indirectly allow the group to maintain its operational capability even as the leadership cadre is eroded by airstrikes. The Amniyat is responsible for detecting internal threats and enforcing loyalty to the Emir by integrating functions of a secret police.[210] As previously described, Ahmed Godane strengthened the role and resources of Amniyat as a tool to identify internal threats and consolidate power. The group also protects the senior leadership from fracturing and exhibits a peculiar unifying effect by discouraging dissent, through executions and imprisonment. Next, Al-Shabaab has adapted its military strategy to the demands of asymmetrical warfare on the ground in Somalia. The Amniyat's assassination operations have become increasingly central to its terrorism efforts, especially in Mogadishu, where it targets government officials in order to destabilize the central government and prevent political progress.[211] Even as Al-Shabaab lost territory, the Amniyat maintained a significant operational presence in major urban areas, demonstrating the organization's clandestine capability.[212] The Amniyat's ability to operate effectively in areas under AMISOM or government control severely undermines the stability and political authority in Somalia.[213]

Thus, we see that Al-Shabaab's intelligence wing shields the group from leadership disruption in two distinct ways: First, through its counter-intelligence activities, it suppresses dissenting views and enforces loyalty within the overall leadership core. Second, it operates outside the typical command structure and its clandestine operations avoid the exposure from counterterrorism efforts. The Amniyat's independent operations help explain the lethal capability the group maintains, in spite of the attrition of Al-Shabaab's senior leadership by U.S. targeting. The Amniyat has

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209 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 83.

210 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, Report S/2013/413, 56.

211 Ibid., 50.

212 Bryden, "Reinvention of Al-Shabaab," 7.

213 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, *Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2060 (*2012): Somalia, S/2014/726. New York: United Nations Security Council, 2014, 13.

effectively developed the capabilities necessary to carry out a protracted campaign of assassinations, suicide bombings, and terrorist attacks behind enemy lines.[214] Operating outside the normal command structure prolongs the life of Al-Shabaab, since its operations do not attract the same scrutiny as its leadership.[215] It is likely the current Emir will continue to rely on the Amniyat to maintain loyalty in the face of defections, splitting into competing factions, and overtures by rival jihadist groups.[216] Thus, Al-Shabaab's "secret service," is structured to survive the dissolution of Al-Shabaab in the face of leadership targeting.[217]

B.   AL-SHABAAB'S ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE

As terrorist groups grow and mature, they undergo changes in which leaders are increasingly less important to the organization. After Al-Shabaab's attack at Garissa University that killed 147 students earlier this year, U.S. administration officials claimed the act was out of desperation and further evidence of the group in its last death throes.[218] However, Al-Shabaab's lethality demonstrates how challenging it is to destroy terrorist groups through leadership targeting, despite the ranks of its leadership attrited by intelligence-led airstrikes. The ability to conduct high-profile, sophisticated external terrorist attacks then, are a manifestation of the group's resilience, bolstered by its structural adaptations. Terrorist groups that adapt structural changes make it more difficult to destabilize through leadership targeting. In this section, I describe two structural adaptations Al-Shabaab undertook that increased its resilience against leadership targeting, decentralization and bureaucratization. These adaptations make many terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab exceedingly resilient to leadership targeting.[219]

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214 Bryden, "Reinvention of Al-Shabaab," 11.

215 Ibid.

216 Thomas Joscelyn, "Shabaab's Leadership Fights Islamic State's Attempted Expansion in East Africa," *The Long War Journal*, October 26, 2015, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/10/shabaab-leadership-fights-islamic-state-expansion.php.

217 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, Report S/2013/413, 7.

218 Greg Jaffe, "White House Officials."

219 Jenna Jordan, "Attacking the Leader, Missing the Mark," International Security, Vol. 38, no. 4 (Spring 2014), 15.

1. How Decentralization Increases Group Resilience

Terrorist groups that attempt to overthrow a state need to grow to be successful. They also need to recruit, train, and equip members to grow. One way to deal with successful growth of the organization is to decentralize, by "pushing down operational decision-making into the lower levels of the organization."[220] Some terrorist organizations remain hierarchical at the upper levels, while decentralizing command and control at the operational level.[221] This quasi-bureaucratic structure accommodates the existence of both vertical decision-making hierarchies and horizontal networks that carry out the organization's most dangerous activities.[222] Al-Shabaab organizes along a similar structure, with a strong centralized command and decentralized operational capabilities.[223] As Al-Shabaab expanded and gained territorial control, the leadership made explicit decentralization efforts to empower regional commanders and ensure operations would continue in the face of leadership targeting operations.

Starting around 2011, as leadership targeting and conventional military pressure against the group intensified, Al-Shabaab began to exhibit structural changes required to transition to an asymmetrical warfare strategy.[224] With its lines of communication under pressure and its leadership constantly surveilled by intelligence agencies, Godane decentralized authority within Al-Shabaab, delegating operational authority to regional governors.[225] Decentralizing command and control empowered local leaders and commanders to plan and conduct operations, raise revenues, and—where Al-Shabaab still controls territory—to administer populations under their control.[226] As the group

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220 Freeman, "A Theory of Terrorist Leadership," 670.

221 Jordan, "Attacking the Leader," 15.

222 Michael Kenney, From Pablo to Osama: Counter-Terrorism Lessons from the War on Drugs, Survival, Vol. 45, no. 3, (Autumn 2003), 187.

223 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, Report S/2013/414, 50.

224 Abdulkader Sinno, Organizations at War in Afghanistan and Beyond, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008, 11–19. The author elucidates why groups undergo structural changes depending on pressures by the state. While I did not consult this source beforehand, it is an indispensable theory for understanding adaptations of insurgent or terrorist groups.

225 Bryden, Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab, 7.

226 Ibid., 2.

matured, regional leadership grew in importance, and operational and ideological guidance was maintained at lower levels. Al-Shabaab's military formations were also organized along parallel regional governorates. This decentralized arrangement is well suited to Al-Shabaab's military strategy of guerrilla warfare, by distributing resource burdens to the local level.[227] Decentralizing authority also helped offset the command and control issues the group faced with loss of territory and the requirement to operate clandestinely. As a result, Al-Shabaab's ability to effectively carry out operations became more dependent on its junior leaders and foot soldiers, rather than the Emir.[228]

If leadership targeting operations only aim at top-tier leadership, there is little reason to believe its operational capability will be degraded, given this decentralization of operational command. There is evidence that key regional commanders are the main drivers of Al-Shabaab's external activities including the high casualty attacks at Westgate and Garissa University in 2013 and 2015, respectively.[229] Subsequently U.S. airstrikes have not focused on these operational level leaders, until very recently.[230] As a result, disruptions to Al-Shabaab's core leadership have had little impact on Al-Shabaab's operational capability.[231] Al-Shabaab's decentralized command structure also meant that a successful strike against a senior leader did not necessarily impact its operations elsewhere. This is particularly true in Mogadishu by evidenced by Al-Shabaab's uninterrupted assassination and suicide campaigns against the central government. One further adaptation demonstrates Al-Shabaab's resilience to leadership targeting. Al-Shabaab has organized several affiliates from its bordering neighbors, namely, Al-Hijra based in Kenya. Al-Hijra is responsible for the majority of terrorist attacks against civilians, and signals Al-Shabaab's further penetration into East Africa. Al-Shabaab is able to externally recruit, install support networks, and radicalize non-Somali Muslims attracted to their cause. Furthermore, the merger of Al-Hijra with Al-Shabaab signals its

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227 Bryden, Reinvention of Al-Shabaab, 7.

228 Bryden, Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaab, 5.

229 Tres Thomas, "Is Al-Shabaab Stronger or Weaker?"

230 Slater, Woods and Serle, "Somalia: Reported U.S. Covert Actions 2001–2015."

231 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, Report S/2013/413, 53.

non-Somali elements are an important change in becoming a genuine transnational terrorist organization.

2.   How Bureaucratization Increases Group Resilience

Another way terrorist organizations deal with growth is by bureaucratizing its organizational functions.[232] Terrorist groups that bureaucratize have clear divisions of managerial responsibilities and operational functions, and are more likely to recover from a sudden loss of leadership.[233] Additionally, many terrorist groups organize with a central authority that is composed of multiple individuals, none being singularly important.[234] In addition to its central authority and decentralized structure, Al-Shabaab is organized along functional and regional operational commands, which contribute to its stability.

Newer terrorist groups are more susceptible to leadership decapitation. "Since smaller, younger, and more ideological organizations are less likely to be bureaucratized, they are more likely to succumb to attacks on their leadership."[235] This was evident in the United States' early targeting of Al-Shabaab's leadership, whereby leadership strikes had a devastating impact on the group—effectively disrupting command and control and demoralizing fighters.[236] As terrorist organizations become larger, they specialize and develop diversified functions that increase their stability.[237] Additionally, "bureaucracies enhance their organizational stability and efficiency through diversification, making them more resilient to leadership attacks."[238] Expanding and differentiating helps Al-Shabaab become more resilient in the face of leadership loss, by creating dependable and segregated sources of support. After surviving the initial flurry of leadership targeting efforts, Al-Shabaab recovered and began establishing local governance structures, as it regained control of Southern Somalia. Al-Shabaab bureaucratized by forming function

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232 Freeman, "A Theory of Terrorist Leadership," 670.

233 Jordan, "Attacking the Leader," 11. Jordan refers to this as the "liability of newness."

234 Freeman, "A Theory of Terrorist Leadership," 670.

235 Jordan, "Attacking the Leader," 11.

236 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 47.

237 Jordan, "Attacking the Leader," 12.

238 Jordan, "Attacking the Leader," 11.

specific divisions that oversaw governance, finance, ideology, intelligence, and media operations.[239] Early in Al-Shabaab's trajectory, clear roles and responsibilities were delegated. For example, Al-Shabaab's ministry for religious affairs was responsible for spreading its own brand of Islam, standardizing and routinizing its radical ideology. In this way, ideology is routinized and results in a bureaucratic form of authority.[240] In addition, Al-Shabaab's spokesperson, for example, speaks on behalf of the organization through the Internet, press statements, and interviews to the international media.[241] The existence of distinct political, military and ideological units within a terrorist organization can signal that it has matured and is able to carry out separate and specific organizational functions, such as offering social services or administering legal justice.[242] Like a maturing terrorist organization, Al-Shabaab's decentralized governorates have functional ministries of social affairs and Sharia courts that implements social justice.

Terrorist groups that display bureaucratic characteristics (decentralized authority and diversified organizational functions) are able to recover from disruptions to leadership.[243] For example, if a formal succession process exits, the sudden death or capture of a leader should be less disruptive to the group. As discussed above, within a week of Godane's death, Al-Shabaab had announced a new successor, one that was pre-arranged and agreed upon by the Shura council.[244] U.S. leadership targeting efforts, predicted a fracturing of Al-Shabaab into nationalist and global jihadist wings, but underestimated the level of bureaucratic decision-making within the group that allowed it to survive a breakup. Al-Shabaab's current Emir has also adopted the group's devolved system of command and control, which has helped prevent it from splintering after Godane's death.[245] Al-Shabaab's maturation is also marked by the continued cultivation

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239 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, These ministries are Maktabatu Amniyat (Intelligence), Maktabatu Da'wa (Religious Affairs), Maktabatu I'laam (Information), Maktabatu Gobolad (Interior) and Maktabatu Maaliya (Finance).

240 Jordan, "Attacking the Leader," 15.

241 Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, 113.

242 Jordan, "Attacking the Leader," 13.

243 Ibid.

244 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, *Report S/2015/801*, 26.

245 Bryden, *Decline and Fall of Al-Shabaa*b, 5.

of younger leaders, all steeped in Al-Shabaab's ideological creed and military doctrine, capable of replenishing losses from its upper echelons.[246]

C.   WHY LEADERSHIP DECAPITATION IS UNLIKELY TO WORK

This chapter analyzed theoretical explanations of terrorist leadership and structural adaptations to explain why Al-Shabaab has developed a resiliency to leadership targeting. Like the internal dissentions that preceded Godane's death and subsequent targeting of senior leadership, little overall impact has been made against the operational capability of Al-Shabaab. This is because the important of top-tier leadership importance both operationally and inspirationally has declined as Al-Shabaab has matured as an organization. Through its maturity and growth, Al-Shabaab has become resilient through collective leadership bodies, decentralized operational capabilities, and an independent mechanism to achieve its local and regional objectives. Al-Shabaab's decentralized operations, ideological routinization and its bureaucratic specialization have shielded the group from disruption by leadership targeting operations. Leadership targeting has forced these adaptations to some degree, and Al-Shabaab's decentralization is not without risk. One consequence of further decentralization is the group adapting into an increasingly multi-polar organization, with a large number of autonomous subgroups, making Al-Shabaab even more dispersed and unpredictable.[247] In spite of the risks, Al-Shabaab continues to operate freely across much of southern Somalia, harassing AMISOM forces and maintaining a steady rhythm of assassinations, bombings, and complex attacks against Somali authorities.

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246 Ibid.

247 Ibid.

V. WHO SHOULD BE KILLED TO DEFEAT AL-SHABAAB?

If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.

—Abraham Maslow

The United States faces significant challenges in defeating Al-Shabaab in Somalia. While the United States' leadership targeting strategy has been successful by its own standards of measurement, it does not provide a clear picture of Al-Shabaab's capability. Though airstrikes have eliminated most of the founding members of the group, Al-Shabaab is now as active as ever and has evolved into a transnational terrorist organization. The group continues to operate freely across much of Southern Somalia capable of destabilizing Somali's peacekeeping force. Few think that Al-Shabaab can be defeated through military means alone, yet the United States continues to rely on a strategy of limited airstrikes to fight Al-Shabaab. Given the lack of strategic success, the United States should modify its policy to account for the conditions within Somalia. In this chapter, I suggest how the United States should refine its leadership targeting strategy to effectively disrupt and degrade Al-Shabaab as a terrorist organization.

My concluding analysis highlights four main issues. First, the United States' strategy overestimates the effects of lethal targeting by focusing on symbolically important top-tier leaders. Second, the preference for capture remains largely theoretical and undermines the utility of intelligence-based counterterrorism operations. Third, leadership targeting is rarely synchronized with a broader strategy that can capitalize on gains in both leadership targeting and conventional military operations. Last, this tactic in its lethal form exacerbates a fundamental problem of dismantling terrorist organizations: killing leaders prevents gaining a deep understanding of Al-Shabaab's internal dynamics.

A. TARGETING OPERATIONAL-LEVEL LEADERS

The United States has narrowly focused on decapitating Al-Shabaab leaders to the detriment of its overall strategy. While some decisions are based on politics and policy,

leadership targeting is largely based on a premise that leaders are responsible for the capability of the organization. This approach overlooks the importance of operational level leadership.[248] Al-Shabaab's most lethal unit, the Amniyat, is responsible for much of the external terrorist operations throughout East Africa and arguably more operationally important to than top-tier leaders. Until very recently, operational leadership has not been the focus of its targeting operations.

The United States must broaden its targeting strategy to include mid-tier and operational level leaders who actually organize and lead terrorist attacks. In practical terms, targeting Al-Shabaab's chief of external operations could be more effective than targeting top leadership, because he is capable of executing terrorist attacks throughout the region, and because of the effective assassination campaigns against government officials. Instead of trying to destroy the group, the United States must destroy the group's capability to destabilize Somalia and must disrupt and prevent external terrorist threats.

B.   EMPHASIZING CAPTURE OVER KILL

Al-Shabaab's leaders have been targeted primarily with airstrikes with little interest in retrieving their intelligence. The United States' predisposition for lethal targeting hinders the ability to illuminate the group's leadership network, to interfere with its operational plans, and to disrupt its terror attacks. Furthermore, the use of the tactic forfeits the chance to better understand Al-Shabaab's internal workings, including strategy, decision-making, and leadership dynamics. All are potentially valuable in disrupting and weakening Al-Shabaab. In addition, leadership decapitation often only leads to short-term gains and does not provide the information required to counter the group's future plans.

U.S. leadership targeting should focus on the pursuit and capture of both top-tier and mid-level leaders to disrupt operations, weaken capability, and remove operationally minded leadership. Within a span of four months in 2014, the United States has

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248 While policy revisions are not the focus of this chapter, I suggest the United States could enhance its operations by updating the 2001 AUMF to address specific Al-Qaeda affiliated groups, improve its detention options, and include its allies in a "collective" right to self-defense.

successfully eliminated four top leaders from the Amniyat, who were responsible for external operations and assassinations. This feat stemmed from the capture of the Amniyat's first intelligence chief, who provided intelligence on the group.[249] As described previously, the capture and interrogation of Al-Shabaab's mid-level leaders yielded valuable intelligence, revealing the inner workings of both Al-Shabaab and AQAP.[250] The United States needs to deliberately weigh the costs associated with capture operations versus those associated with the forfeiture of intelligence in lethal operations. Furthermore, the United States should be prepared to assume greater risk in order to fully exploit intelligence from Al-Shabaab's leaders. According to the CIA Director John Brennan, intelligence disrupts terrorist plots, thwarts attacks, and saves lives.[251] If intelligence is valuable enough to prevent the loss of life, surely it is worth taking some measure of risk to obtain it.

C. INTEGRATING LEADERSHIP TARGETING WITH A BROADER MILITARY STRATEGY

Leadership targeting is a necessary component of the strategy to counter Al-Shabaab, but it is not sufficient on its own. Moreover, this targeting approach has been executed in isolation of conventional military operations. Militarily, neither the United States nor its proxy forces have been able to strategically exploit gains in each other's operations. Despite being a larger military force with better weapons and international backing, AMISOM and the SNA are neither organized nor equipped to fight an asymmetric war that could defeat Al-Shabaab.[252] Government forces are often overstretched, under supplied, and out maneuvered by the more agile guerrilla force of Al-Shabaab. The loss of territory is another metric that has been used as an indicator of success against Al-Shabaab. Yet it seems to matter little, since Al-Shabaab elected to

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249 Bill Roggio, "Somali Government Reports Shabaab's Intel Chief Killed in U.S. Airstrike," *The Long War Journal*, December 30, 2014, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/12/somali_government_cl.php.

250 Shane, "Objective Troy," 280.

251 Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks of John O. Brennan."

252 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, *Report S/2015/801*, 29.

cede territory, and adopt a guerrilla strategy to slowly exhaust AMISOM and SNA forces.

Recent AMISOM offensives have offered an opportunity to significantly disrupt and degrade Al-Shabaab's capability. A steady pressure on Al-Shabaab's leadership while they are forced from territory could disrupt ongoing operations. Achieving this objective requires that leadership targeting operations to be integrated in a broad strategy that exploits military gains while denying Al-Shabaab the opportunity to retreat and reorganize. Forcing Al-Shabaab leaders to stay mobile also presents further opportunities to gather more consistent intelligence for further targeting opportunities.

Somalia's counterterrorism forces should be integrated into leadership targeting operations and be provided the intelligence and resources to capture or kill Al-Shabaab's operational level leaders. So far, the U.S. trained Somali Commando units have been used primarily as a quick reaction force and as a personal security force to Somalia's leaders. Furthermore, the tactic of leadership targeting will not tip the scales in favor of the United States and its allies unless strikes are coupled with ground operations and unless resources and intelligence are shared with host-nation forces. The United States' efforts should focus on developing intelligence through capturing Al-Shabaab's terrorist leadership to continually drive the intelligence cycle and affect future leadership targeting opportunities.

D. LEADERSHIP TARGETING BASED UPON KNOWLEDGE OF GROUP DYNAMICS

Despite the success of eliminating Al-Shabaab's leadership, the U.S. policy has been marked by a myopic focus on leadership decapitation, an emphasis on intelligence focused on pattern of life or communication preferences, and unilateral targeting campaigns. This flawed strategy has inadvertently strengthened the position of Al-Shabaab, resulted in in a limited understanding of how the group operates, and has resulted in a decentralized and more autonomous group that is resilient to leadership targeting.[253]

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253 Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea, *Report S/2015/801Report S/2015/801*, 17.

Historically, Al-Shabaab has operated with a heterogeneous leadership core, representing diverse interests and ideologies. Internal disagreements have existed since the group's formation. Moreover, divisions and rivalries have been exposed as the group experienced pressure and setbacks. Likewise, the period of greatest vulnerability occurred when Al-Shabaab consolidated power and underwent a leadership purge. In short, the Emir orchestrated the deaths of former allies, expelled moderate leaders, consolidated power, and weakened its ideological appeal. Yet, the United States failed to capitalize on the period of Al-Shabaab's greatest vulnerability since the group's formation. Therefore, the United States should focus on exploiting divisions within Al-Shabaab, particularly when internal divisions are strongest. Al-Shabaab's former leadership struggles demonstrate how disruptive leadership disputes could be to terrorist organizations, and should be manipulated to weaken the group. If properly understood, the United States should target these divisions to further fracture the group, and improve the likelihood of triggering the group's eventual decline.

The United States has not effectively co-opted potential moderates within Somalia to undermine the influence of Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab has many well publicized internal divisions between more militant, radical leaders and those more politically minded. The United States has failed to exploit openings to "target" potential moderates for defection. The United States missed an opportunity to work with Hassan Aweys, an influential leader who offered to collaborate with the United States against Al-Shabaab. Aweys eventually became Al-Shabaab's spiritual leader, was influential in developing Al-Shabaab's religious appeal, and could have been used to counter the group's Al-Qaeda inspired ideology. Another example of working with moderates is the cooperation with Ahmed Madobe. Madobe is the current President of Jubaland, a regional government in Southern Somalia. He was once a high-value terrorist target to the United States, and narrowly survived a U.S. airstrike in 2007. Madobe was one of the most radical leaders of Al-Shabaab's nationalist faction, but later abandoned his loyalty to Al-Shabaab to become Kenya's preferred ally in Somalia. The United States should target moderate Islamists within Al-Shabaab for defection and factionalization. Additionally, the United

States should focus on protecting moderates who are amenable to politicization and negotiation.

Capitalizing on leadership divisions and protecting potential moderates should be part of the broader effort of leadership targeting against Al-Shabaab. Furthermore, a deep appreciation of the group's internal workings would lead to better decisions regarding who should be captured, who should be lethally targeted, and how divisions and factions within the leadership could be exploited. The United States would benefit from gaining a deeper understanding of the group's leadership dynamics, and better cultural intelligence will lead to better targeting decisions.

E.   PROSPECTS FOR SUCCESS

To truly disrupt and degrade Al-Shabaab, the United States must fundamentally change its targeting approach. Leadership targeting is a powerful tactic in countering terrorist groups, if only a narrow one. The United States must take a more analytical approach to counter the terrorist threat and stabilize Somalia, weighing its benefits and consequences. As terrorist groups evolve from localized networks into transnational threats, the United States must implement a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy not only to disrupt and weaken their capability, but to undermine, and isolate their baleful appeal. The Unites States' focus on top-tier leadership has led to isolated successes, yet long-term objectives have remained elusive. In this thesis, I advocate for the limited use of leadership decapitation, rather exploiting existing divisions and vulnerabilities to undermine, isolate and weaken terrorist leadership. I also have argued that a myopic focus on top-tier leadership has undermined the focus on important operational leadership, and the United States should broaden the focus and means of leadership targeting. Finally, I implore the advocates of leadership targeting to gain of deep understanding of terrorist groups in order to develop leadership targeting strategies that not only precipitate the decline of Al-Shabaab in the short-term, but contributes to long-term strategic success.

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