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The Hydra Effect of Terrorism and Al Shabab
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By Martha Molfetas, Researcher and Writer currently based in London.

Within days of the targeted killing of Al Shabab leader, Ahmed Abdi Godane, the group had appointed a new leader, Ahmed Umar Abu Ubaidah. In spite of governmental efforts at granting amnesty for Al Shabab militants, and coordinated regional and international military campaigns against Al Shabab, the group is launching new retaliatory attacks. These actions highlight the hydra-effect of terrorist networks and the necessity for a multi-faceted approach to anti-terrorism campaigns. Military arms and missions can only go so far, if we as a global community want to end terrorism, we must address the symptoms that allow for it to flourish rather than relying solely on military tactics.

The group is focused on striking African Union and AMISOM affiliates and the current UN-backed government of Somalia. Since Godane's death, the government of Somalia has granted a 45-day amnesty period to encourage Al Shabab members to embrace peace. Unfortunately, Godane's death depicts the effect of the hydra, and the potential to make martyrs out of terrorist leaders – encouraging retaliation and escalation. Godane's death may create the undesirable effect of fortifying Al-Shabab's message and encouraging further attacks in and around Somalia.

As the transitional government of Somalia was established and began to gain favour with the US and UN, America sent $10 million worth of arms in military aid in 2009 to fight Al-Shabab. This February it was reported that an undetermined per cent of these arms were diverted to Al-Shabab. In spite of capturing arms, Al Shabab has had their forces and geographical reach reduced substantially by successful African Union and AMISOM missions. However, as Al-Shabab has seen a reduction in areas they control within Somalia, they have turned their attention towards neighbouring states involved in anti-terrorism efforts, namely Kenya and Uganda. Last year, Al Shabab killed 67 people at the Westgate Mall attack in retaliation for Kenya's contributions towards AMISOM. Since the targeted killing of Godane earlier this month, Ugandan authorities raided an Al-Shabab cell operating in Kampala. In Germany, potential Al-Shabab affiliates were detained on suspicion of planning an attack. And last week an Al-Shabab suicide bomber targeted an African Union convoy in Mogadishu, killing 12 and wounding 27.

Efforts against Al-Shabab through AMISOM, the government of Somalia, and the African Union have shown what a coordinated effort can achieve to quell terrorist networks with limited resources. These efforts orchestrate how integral local, national, and community driven military campaigns are to terror mitigation – something that has been lacking in other areas where US and international coalitions are the driving force, and little cooperation is made with local or regional bodies. While these efforts have diminished Al-Shabab's presence in Somali communities, they are not addressing the long-term problems that allowed for Al Shabab to form in the first place.

Policies need to attack the symptoms that allow terrorism and insurgency to flourish, rather than focusing solely on the effects of these realities. If we're going to target leaders of terrorist networks and aim to exterminate their presence, we need to do more than wage hard powers against these groups. In order to deter the spread of terrorism and continued recruitment into these networks, human development needs to take a front seat in security policies within these arenas. By purely attacking militarily these threats, we are only temporarily impacting the development and agendas of groups like Al-Shabab. If a two-pronged, long-term approach were initiated that focused on stymieing resources, containing groups, and providing development programmes for communities, groups like Al-Shabab would be few and far. Too often development and security agendas are disassociated from one another, and we've seen time and again history repeat itself in this regard.

More recently, the development and exploits of ISIS/ISIL show how long-term deprivement, conflict, looting, and under-development can allow groups to flourish. When will our security policies and dialogues incorporate more than just air strikes and armaments? We cannot fight the wars of today with tactics from the past. We need a collaborative approach that uses the best practices and resources of international development agencies and militaries, instead of one focused solely on killing terrorist leaders just so they can be quickly replaced. Otherwise, groups like ISIS/ISIL and Al-Shabab will continue to proliferate and pose a threat towards local communities, and our global security.

Author

Martha Molfetas is a Researcher and Writer currently based in London. Her work focuses on conflict, climate change, natural resources, and livelihood development. She completed an MSc in Comparative Politics – Conflict Studies at the London School of Economics in 2011. For more on her work, check out her professional website.

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