



Al-Shabaab Down But Not Out

OE Watch Commentary: The fight against al-Shabaab in Somalia has been going on for several years, and there have been reports that the terrorist group has been losing strength and territory. Nevertheless, it is still able to mount significant operations against the Somali National Army, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and members of the Somali government. As the accompanying excerpted article from *The East African* reports, not only does the group extort money from businesses in rural areas, but it also operates in the capital city, Mogadishu (from where it was forced out in 2011).



Although al Shabaab has been weakened by AMISOM forces and the Somali National Army, it is still able to launch devastating attacks in the country.

Source: Skilla1st via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Djiboutian_forces_artillery_ready_to_fire_on_Al-Shabaab_militants_near_the_town_of_Buula_Burde_Somalia.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0

Since President Farmaajo assumed office two years ago, AMISOM has reportedly not liberated any new territory. One reason for this might be that the nations contributing troops to that mission frequently pursue different strategies and interests, thus presenting less than a unified front. Still another reason might be, with 2020 elections approaching, Farmaajo's government is distracted.

Additionally, Farmaajo has poor relations with the leaders of three regional states, possibly compounding the central government's difficulties in combating the terrorists.

While Somali domestic politics play out, and AMISOM shows its fractures, al-Shabaab has taken advantage of the situation to infiltrate government agencies. The killing of Mogadishu's mayor by one of his staff members who turned out to be a suicide bomber bears testament to that.

Against this already troubling backdrop, the UN has instructed AMISOM to make further reductions in its forces. Reduced donor funding has made such a decision almost inevitable. Some claim that the Somali National Army will be able to fill the void left by AMISOM's withdrawal, but others are worried that al-Shabaab, which already controls many areas at night, might someday be able to control them during the day, too.

End OE Watch Commentary (Feldman)

“There are concerns that Al-Shabaab are gaining ground, with troop-contributing countries pursuing different strategies and interests, and the government of President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo... preoccupied with 2020 elections.”

Source: Fred Oluoch, “Concern that Mogadishu losing control to Al-Shabaab,” *The East African*, 28 September 2019. <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/news/ea/Concern-that-Mogadishu-losing-control-to-Al-Shabaab/4552908-5291106-mup6bd/index.html>

However, Amisom spokesperson, Col Charles Imbiakha told The East African that contrary to the growing belief about a resurgent militant activity, the African peacekeepers have degraded the jihadists' capacity and left them on the run.

There are concerns that Al-Shabaab are gaining ground with troop-contributing countries pursuing different strategies and interests and the government of President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo remains preoccupied with 2020 elections.

The president of Hirshabelle State of Somalia Mohamed Abdi Ware, recently complained that his region has been overwhelmed by the militants.

“We are being overwhelmed by Al Shabaab. We are asking the federal government of Somalia to take action and help us contain the problem,” President Ware told the media in Jowhar town.