Comparing Somalia's al-Shabaab and Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army

A toxic mix of religion, politics and violence

'The conventional army loses if it does not win. The guerrilla wins if he does not lose.'

– Henry Kissinger

INTRODUCTION

Somalia's Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, or the Movement of the Striving Youth, hereafter 'al-Shabaab', and Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) could, in principle, be regarded as soldiers of the same struggle. Both of these militant groups claim to be engaged in a liberation struggle; both have a comparable goal of implementing religious law (Islamic rule in Somalia and the Ten Commandments in Uganda); and both have been adept at using guerrilla tactics against establishments that are protected by the Uganda People's Defence Force. Moreover, both groups are designated by the US as terrorist organisations. Although they differ in terms of their precise military abilities and strategies, both have a strikingly destructive nature and the capacity to evolve and adapt to new situations despite being under constant threat.

Of particular concern is the cumulative trend in the Horn of Africa and the continent as a whole whereby insurrection groups such as al-Shabaab and the LRA espouse vicious patterns of violence buttressed by spiritual tactics. The question is, do these groups have any legitimate cause or are they fanatical extremists bent on spreading anarchy? If – as is frequently stated – no religion supports violence as its mission, then what is the logic of violence and the function of religion in these groups' activities? What are the similarities between al-Shabaab and the LRA in terms of their mode of operation and survival tactics?

This paper considers these and other issues with the aim of providing a comparative interpretation of how these two groups organise themselves and operate, and what motivates those who join them. The broader objective is to provide an information base against which to understand and better respond to these issues. The paper concludes with some observations on options for responding to insurgency in general.

The main sources of data are the author's field research in East Africa, secondary sources in the public domain and personal insights on the subject. The paper does not purport to provide any privileged insights from the two militant groups discussed.

AL-SHABAAB AND THE LRA: ORIGINS AND MOTIVES

The conflicts in Somalia and northern Uganda have historical roots. A comprehensive examination of their origins would necessitate a historical analysis, which this paper does not provide; instead, its scope is to compare al-Shabaab and the LRA in terms of their motives and the fusion of religion, politics and violence, and to point out some of the disparities in the international responses to the groups.

In Somalia the upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism must be seen in the broader context of decades of economic mismanagement and poor governance. The emergence of al-Shabaab in early 2007, however, was specifically fuelled by patriotic militancy against the abrasive counter-insurgency tactics used by the Ethiopian forces against the Islamic Courts Union (ICU).[1] Al-Shabaab, a self-proclaimed 'Islamic' guerrilla army, sought to wage war against the Western-backed Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which they branded a 'puppet' regime, and its Ethiopian backers, the 'invaders', and turn Somalia into an Islamist state. Al-Shabaab rallied around Islamism and nationalism to form the vanguard of resistance to the Ethiopian forces and the TFG. The withdrawal of Ethiopian forces

Map 1 Map of the Horn of Africa

Source http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/txu-oclc-417699531-horn_of_africa_2009.jpg
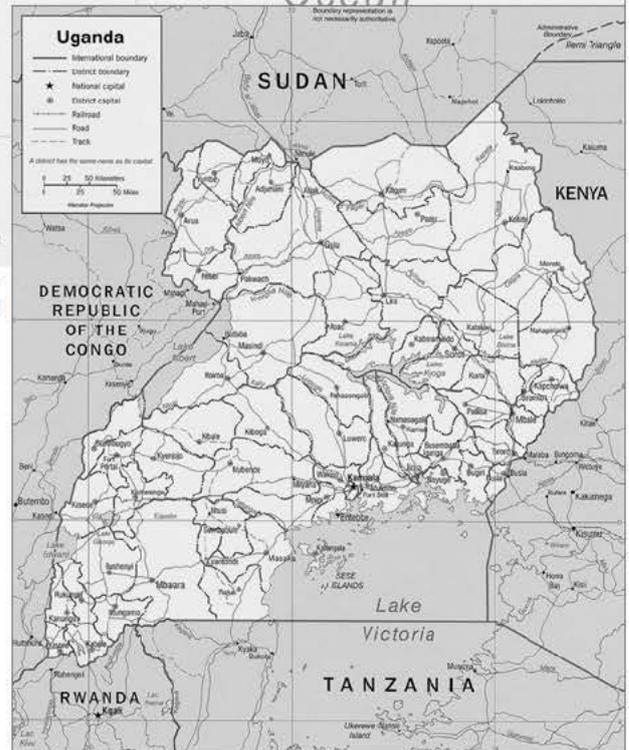
Source http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/uganda_pol_2005.jpg

between December 2008 and January 2009 shifted al-Shabaab's target to the TFG and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces.

The LRA, on the other hand, emerged entirely out of Uganda's internal circumstances. Historically, Uganda's economic power rested in the southern part of the country for a number of reasons, including colonial-era policies, whereas most of the military elite and key political figures came from the north.[2] This situation partitioned the country's northern and southern regions into different economic zones. A large area of the country south of Lake Kyoga was designated as land for growing cash crops and industrial zones, while the territory north of Lake Kyoga was designated as a labour reserve. The fragmentation was compounded by the economic-cum-administrative policy that left the civil service dominated by the Baganda ethnic group from the south, while the army was controlled by the Acholi and other northern ethnic groups. This policy created economic disparities between Uganda's north and south. These fractures were inherited by post-colonial regimes, which, however, did little to rectify the situation. Motivated by the perceived bias against and marginalisation of his northern region,[3] Joseph Kony and his LRA, a self-proclaimed Christian guerrilla army, instigated an armed rebellion against the Ugandan government in the mid-1980s. This was after President Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Movement, then perceived as a southern rebel group, had overthrown the government of Tito Okello, a northerner. A handful of fighters from the north resisted the takeover and continued to fight.[4]

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The LRA initially operated in northern Uganda and parts of southern Sudan, but relocated to the forests of the Garamba Reserve in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in October 2005 and, as discussed later, subsequently dispersed into the Central African Republic (CAR) and parts of southern Sudan after a joint military operation in 2008–2009 by Ugandan, DRC and southern Sudanese forces backed by the US. This offensive was codenamed Operation Lightning Thunder.

A common factor in al-Shabaab and the LRA is the central role played by religion in their activities. Both groups have claimed to foster the noble cause of reinstating religious values. Al-Shabaab has sought to establish a theocratic state based on Sharia law; the LRA started off by seeking to establish a theocratic state based on the Ten Commandments and Acholi tradition. One might argue that the LRA is a Christian al-Shabaab, and al-Shabaab a Muslim version of the LRA. Besides their similar goals of implementing versions of religious law, both groups utilise religion, brainwashing and indoctrination to enlist support. And both groups employ terror, including amputations and other acts of violence, to advance their cause. There is a popular image that both al-Shabaab and the LRA are radical groups that operate on a fundamentalist, if not duplicitous, religious agenda. Supporters of al-Shabaab, however, perceive that the brutality, such as amputation, is not motivated by pure malice and the deliberate desire to humiliate, as is the case with the LRA, but by religious conviction and in the name of Sharia law. Supporters of al-Shabaab attempt to validate their position by claiming, for example, that the group does not condone immoral actions, such as rape, which the LRA has pursued indiscriminately.

Nevertheless, the two groups display a number of differences. For instance, the LRA now seems to have abandoned its political agenda and is no longer interested in rallying popular support, unlike al-Shabaab. The LRA's primary motivation now seems to be the daily survival of its members, which it achieves by means of terror and pillaging. The two groups also have different levels of ability and sophistication. Despite its susceptibility to clan politics, internal divisions and shifting alliances, al-Shabaab still controls much of southern and central Somalia.[5] The LRA, on the other hand, since 2006 has abandoned its struggle for control over territory and left northern Uganda as a result of increasing pressure from the Ugandan defence forces. One thing is certain, however: both groups are still given to violence and often destructive methods of pursuing their cause, and have succeeded in creating violence and fear within and beyond their claimed boundaries.

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

Both al-Shabaab and the LRA have some form of hierarchical leadership, although few details are known about the groups' inner operations. Al Shabaab's leadership,

in particular, is said to be neither unitary nor very cohesive, and at lower levels it functions largely under autonomous commands.

Unlike the LRA, al-Shabaab has both Somali nationals and a contingent of foreigners in its leadership structures.[6] The foreigners within the group's leadership include Sheikh Muhammad Abu Fa'id, a Saudi citizen who also serves as al-Shabaab's top financier and 'manager'; Abu Musa Mombasa, a Pakistani national who serves as the group's chief of security and training; Omar Shafik Hammami, known by the pseudonym Abu Mansoor Al-Amriki, a US citizen who serves as a military commander, recruiter and propagandist; and Mahmud Mujajir, a Sudanese citizen who is said to serve as al-Shabaab's head of recruitment of suicide bombers. Aside from the foreigners in its leadership ranks, the group has recruited foreign jihadists from Afghanistan, Yemen, the US, the UK and even Sweden.[7]

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Within the group's command structures, local leaders include Sheikh Ibrahim Haji Jama Mee'aad 'al-Afghani' (Abubakar al-Seyli'i), who, reports suggest, has replaced Ahmed Abdi Godane as the Amir, or commander, of al-Shabaab.[8] Al-Afghani is also the governor of Somalia's Kismayo administration. His deputy is said to be Sheikh Mukhtar Robow 'Abu Mansoor' – one of the group's key strategists and the regional commander in charge of Bay and Bakool. Others are Sheikh Fuad Mohammed Khalaf 'Shangole', said to be the third most important leader, and Sheikh Ali Mohamud Raghe 'Dheere', who was instrumental in the establishment of the ICU in 1996 and is currently the group's official spokesman.

At the local level, al-Shabaab's operations are coordinated by village and religious leaders responsible for independent cells and with control over distinct geographic areas; and these cells have their own political

and military commanders. The operational autonomy of the cells allows each commander to pursue his own military strategy and administrate the areas independently. This decentralisation also makes the group difficult to eliminate. The lack of clear command and control structures has allowed al-Shabaab to survive the killing of some of its commanders, such as senior operatives Abu Talha al-Sudani in 2007, Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan in 2009 and Fazul Abdullah Mohamed in June 2011. The localised nature of al-Shabaab's leadership has allowed the group to manage clan disagreements by keeping them under control. Indeed, the community-level operations seem to be a fundamental element in al-Shabaab's strategy to sustain its activities. The group is always trying to expand its local-community infrastructure and support.[9] On the other hand, in a number of cases this autonomy has led to poor discipline within the group's ranks, which, in turn, has resulted in cruel actions taken against ordinary civilians. Bruton states that al-Shabaab has many factions and that sometimes it is illiterate children rather than radical leaders who often commit disturbing acts of violence, including beheadings, amputations and the extraction of teeth for gold fillings.[10] Al-Shabaab's military forces are estimated at between 3 000 and 7 000, with most of its rank and file said to be from Somalia's central and southern regions, although it has also enlisted a number of foreign jihadists from various countries, as mentioned earlier.

In short, al-Shabaab's leadership, despite differences over clans, tactics and ideology – and particularly between those who seek a closer alignment with foreign jihad organisations and those who want to pursue a narrower Somali agenda – seems to have been better organised in managing its internal divisions compared with the internationally backed TFG. Al-Shabaab is said to always take clan sensitivities into consideration, and although its strict interpretation of Islam and notions of justice are questioned by sections of Somali society, there are those who argue that it has contributed to the reduction of corruption and crime in areas it controls.

The LRA, on the other hand, operated with lethal effectiveness during its peak largely due to the group's clear command structure and the ability of its leader, Kony, to assert and maintain control over his top leadership and rank-and-file fighters. Under Kony's leadership, the LRA has been operating in small subgroups in the weakly governed border zones adjacent to the CAR, the DRC, Sudan and South Sudan. Over the past several years, however, the LRA has lost a number of its top leaders in battle or through defection.[11] The group's second in command, Vincent Otti, is said to have been killed in late 2007 on Kony's orders, and Raska Lukwiya, the third-highest ranking leader of the group, was shot

dead in a battle with the Ugandan military in August 2006.[12] There are conflicting reports about another commander, Okot Odhiambo. Some reports suggest he too was killed, in April 2008, although the latest report of the Geneva-based Small Arms Survey[13] suggests that he, along with Brigadiers Caesar Achellam, 'Nixman' Opuk Oryang and Dominic Ongwen – who, together with Joseph Kony, form the LRA's high command – is still at large. Joseph Kony has stayed on as the militia's 'absolute leader' and controls all facets of its life in the bush. Many in the group believe Kony possesses mystical powers. This leadership structure is different from al-Shabaab's, which has managed to build autonomous local administrations that follow clan factions – although these lower structures sometimes operate independently. The size of the LRA's force has reportedly dwindled from its peak of an estimated several thousand fighters in 2003 to roughly 200–400 fighters today.[14]

Both groups' potential to cause destruction lies in their flexibility as organisations with multiple cells that fight elusively, without trying to defend terrain. Depending on their leaders' dictates, the groups remain largely free to do as much or as little fighting as they choose, when and where they choose. They can, therefore, harass their opponents, who have superior strength, through ambushes and then disperse into the civilian population. Like many militant groups around the world, however, neither al-Shabaab nor the LRA has ever publicly spelt out a clear political agenda other than a loosely articulated vision of a society that abides by religious tenets. Perhaps given that they are not organised political parties, such a programme should not be expected.

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REGIONALISATION OF THE PROBLEM

Both al-Shabaab and the LRA have managed to extend their activities beyond their own national borders, thereby creating regional problems. The impact of their activities has been particularly pronounced for immediately neighbouring countries because of the proxy wars involved.

In the case of al-Shabaab, there has been increasing concern about its expanding reach and the fact that the group has been actively recruiting nationals from neighbouring countries and beyond to fight its cause. Although Bronwyn Bruton has argued that al-Shabaab is not a transnational terrorist organisation,[15] the 2010 attack at a sports club in Kampala, Uganda, in which nearly 70 football fans watching a World Cup soccer match were killed, conveyed a message to the international community that the group was able to avenge its grievances outside Somalia's borders. The group said that the attack aimed to punish Uganda for sending troops to Somalia through AMISOM. This was the first attack carried out by al-Shabaab outside Somalia. Burundi, the only other country with peacekeeping troops in Somalia, apparently escaped similar attacks at the time because suspected al-Shabaab suicide bombers were intercepted at the Rwandan–Burundian border. And, as observed later, the decision by Kenya to launch a military incursion into Somalia in October 2011 raises the possibility of increased cross-border al-Shabaab attacks, particularly on Kenyan soil, as already witnessed in the grenade explosions that subsequently took place in Nairobi, Kenya.

To extend its geographic scope, al-Shabaab has gone on a recruitment drive. It is aggressively trying to recruit non-Somali expatriates in neighbouring countries and Somalis from as far away from its home territory as the US, Canada, UK, Sweden, and the Netherlands – as well as hardened fighters from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Al-Shabaab has also openly aligned itself with al-Qaeda's ideology in an attempt to garner more support.[16] Broadly speaking, al-Shabaab has in the past espoused transnational goals, including seeking to establish an Islamic caliphate in Africa, but recently this has featured less prominently. In light of the large scale of the Somali diaspora and the increasing enlistment of foreign fighters to al-Shabaab's ranks, it remains unclear whether the group's objective is still only about establishing Sharia law in Somalia. Before its withdrawal from Mogadishu in August 2011, al-Shabaab had suffered defeats at the hands of AMISOM forces, and some argue the lull in transnational jihad rhetoric is partly because the group is going through a period of decline and is more preoccupied with local issues.

As regards the LRA, since being pushed out of northern Uganda in 2006 the group has been hopping over borders, terrorizing civilians for its own survival in the DRC, South Sudan and Uganda. In the recent past, most of the victims of the LRA attacks have been civilians in the Eastern and Western Equatoria regions of South Sudan. In March 2010, Ugandan intelligence reported that Kony was in the southern Darfur region

of Sudan, hoping to receive support from his former benefactor, the government of Sudan, although it is now said that he has crossed back into the Central African Republic (CAR), where his remaining few forces are. With his fighters so scattered and mobile, it is difficult to pin down his exact whereabouts.

There are subtle differences in motives behind the regionalisation of conflict by the two groups. Unlike al-Shabaab, the LRA has never expressed transnational ambitions nor does it harbour or support international terrorists like al-Shabaab.

ROLE OF RELIGION AND LOGIC OF VIOLENCE

As observed earlier, both al-Shabaab and the LRA have exploited religion to advance their causes. Both groups have used religious teachings to justify or explain their political, and sometimes violent, acts or to gain recruits. For both groups, the spiritual discourse has acted as a medium through which political grievances are framed. Both groups are led by clerical heads – the LRA is led by Kony, the self-declared 'spokesperson' of God and a spirit medium, while al-Shabaab's leadership structure, referred to earlier, is composed of sheikhs and imams.

> The LRA's doctrine, based on the Ten Commandments and an emphasis on Acholi tradition, has meant that the LRA adheres to a unique spiritual order that is not questioned

Al-Shabaab, like the ICU before it, believes that religious governance is the solution to Somalia's ills. It uses religion to generate the support of a Muslim people 'invaded by non-Muslim powers'.[17] Indeed, leaders of al-Shabaab have not missed an opportunity to manipulate pejorative religious statements and buzzwords, such as *jihad* and fighting for the Muslims against invader 'infidels', to their advantage. They often use mosques to call for jihad, which is seen as obligatory. This *jihad* rhetoric has attracted support from external transnational networks of Islamic militants. The group also raises revenue through taxes, as discussed later, which is often justified as a religious duty.

As for the LRA, Kony's leadership is based on claims of personal revelations from God and mystical charisma. Little is known about his past, other than that he is a former altar boy from Gulu, northern Uganda, who claimed to have had a vision while working in the fields. Kony believes that he is a prophet sent by God to purify the people of Uganda and create a bastion of peace. Kony originally called his group the Uganda People's Democratic Christian Army (UPDCA). The name was later changed to Uganda Christian Democratic Army (UCDA), and finally, in late 1991, to the LRA. The group has combined apocalyptic spiritualism with opportunistic politics and warlordism. For instance, Kony's decision to continue fighting the government of Uganda was unpopular with the LRA, and commanded little public support. With a lack of support from his own region and virtually no material resources, Kony's group took to looting people's homes for supplies and abducting young people to serve as fighters, servants and 'wives'.[18] The group's physical violence against civilians was extreme, its aim to instil terror in the population and dissuade them from collaborating with the government.[19]

The LRA's doctrine, based on the Ten Commandments and an emphasis on Acholi tradition, has meant that the LRA adheres to a unique spiritual order that is not questioned. Kony projected himself as a character that possessed a number of spirits and introduced rules within the organisation that had to be strictly obeyed. Those who did not respect Kony and the Ten Commandments risked being rendered vulnerable on the battlefield.[20] The spiritual order, therefore, constructs a perception of 'fearlessness and omnipotence'.[21] It is a tactic that Kony used to maintain control and internal cohesion and to psychologically motivate combatants. The group is even said to have strong norms or sanctions prohibiting sexual violence against civilians, despite public reports suggesting otherwise.

Although religion is core to both al-Shabaab's and the LRA's activities and public diplomacy, this is not to suggest that the actions of the two groups can be attributed only to religious zeal. Both the LRA and al-Shabaab have been driven by real local grievances, and their main political agenda has been to dislodge internationally recognised governments in their countries. The question, however, is, how do these groups reconcile religion with violence? Are their followers mere psychopaths bent on spreading anarchy?

Not all followers of the LRA and al-Shabaab are senseless, irrational individuals twisted by hatred. Most of them, including the Somali suicide bombers, are rational, educated people. Frequently, their actions are products of a context-specific rational world. Given their political grievances, these groups view themselves

not as attacking others, but as defending themselves against marginalisation (in the case of the LRA) and foreign domination (in the case of al-Shabaab). Religion becomes a rallying point for what these groups see as a crisis of weakness and despair. Followers, in their despair, find hope and consolation in the promise of religious victory. The understanding is that because God is on their side, it is impossible that their cause will fail. This provides the two groups with an eschatological dimension. In other words, the use of violence is but a small part in a process of cosmic conflict that may endure for centuries, but the end of which cannot be in doubt.[22] In both northern Uganda and Somalia, there are large numbers of followers who generally interpret their political and moral situation along similar lines. It is easy for groups that feel marginalised, like the LRA, or threatened, like al-Shabaab, to generate acts of violence in the name of religion. Their violence is identified with the forces of good, while their opponents are demonised. In Somalia, there is even an increasing trend by al-Shabaab to sanctify suicide bombers and give them the status of martyrs.

For both the LRA and al-Shabaab, however, religion should only be seen as one incidental factor underpinning primarily geopolitical grievances. Their violent actions stem from political, not religious, conflict. Religion is only utilised as a mobilising factor. It is for this reason that some people believe that these groups have been abusing religious arguments to justify their acts. Professor Juergensmeyer argues that 'religion is not innocent. But it does not ordinarily lead to violence. That happens only with the coalescence of a peculiar set of circumstances – political, social, and ideological – when religion becomes fused with violent expressions of social aspirations, personal pride, and movements for political change.'[23]

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RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Recruits have joined the two groups for different reasons and under different circumstances. Al-Shabaab usually recruits its members through religious socialisation, obligatory conscriptions and by means of economic incentives. The group is said to identify people inclined to be sympathisers from Islamist groups. Recruitment in this case may be considered voluntary in the sense that the recruits are not openly compelled to join. The group will often entice new members by showing them an alternative way of life that makes the recruit more able to share his religion with new friends. Calls for conscription are often made in Quranic schools and other educational institutions. The economic appeal behind al-Shabaab's recruitment strategy was evident following the July 2010 bombings in Kampala – the majority of those arrested were found to be non-Somalis. Out of a total of 32 arrested suspects, there were 14 Ugandans, ten Kenyans, six Somalis, one Rwandan and one Pakistani. It is said that some of these fighters are lured by salaries; figures are estimated at between $60 and $200 a month for low-ranking officers.[24] It would appear salaries are paid on the 28th day of the month. New conscripts from Kenya have mainly been from non-Somali up-country youth and recent converts to Islam. These recruits go through indoctrination and training, and are ultimately given terrorist assignments to carry out. It seems that poverty, youth alienation and very high levels of youth unemployment in East Africa are the main reasons that some of these young men leave their countries to join al-Shabaab, which previously seemed to have enough money to remunerate them. Those who join al-Shabaab have to provide their identity and background details, including the telephone numbers of relatives. There are many internal regulations and any diversion of al-Shabaab's money to personal needs is said to incur the death penalty.

The LRA, on the other hand, conducts its recruitment mainly through raids and abductions. The LRA's activities were fairly limited from the organisation's inception until 1994. Then things changed between 1994 and 1995, when Khartoum began supplying Kony with weapons and land to build bases in direct response to the Ugandan government's support for the then Sudan People's Liberation Army. This support enlarged and invigorated the LRA, and rebel attacks and abductions escalated dramatically after 1996, and lasted for about ten years until the group relocated to Garamba in 2005 and subsequently scattered into the CAR and parts of southern Sudan after Operation Lightning Thunder in December 2008.[25] At the height of this campaign, youths were typically taken by small roving groups of LRA rebels conducting raids on homesteads. For instance, from their Sudanese bases, rebels could venture into Uganda for weeks at a time in groups of roughly 15 to 20 fighters. Raiding parties had two aims: to raid homes along their paths for food and recruits, and, less often,

to ambush government forces. Abduction parties were under instruction to release only young children and older adults, but to keep all adolescent and young adult males.[26] The varied rates of female abductions were determined in part by commanders' demand for 'wives', whereas the demand for male abductions was steady. Analysis of LRA abduction by Beber and Blattman[27] suggests a second reason that younger abductees were preferred: they were less likely to run away. The younger the age at abduction, the more likely it was that an abductee (male or female) would be loyal to the LRA, the less likely they were to run away of their own volition and the more difficult it was, they reported, to escape. Younger abductees may also have been more easily indoctrinated. There are parallels here between the LRA and al-Shabaab's strategy of enforcing discipline and ideological commitment through screening, socialisation and indoctrination.

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ASYMMETRIC WARFARE

Both al-Shabaab and the LRA have largely avoided direct confrontation with regular military forces and instead resorted to unconventional guerrilla tactics. These two groups realise that they have neither a technical nor a tactical advantage to fight a direct war with better-equipped regular forces. By using unconventional warfare tactics, they certainly have an operational advantage insofar as they fight elusively, without trying to defend terrain against concerted attacks.

In its early years of insurgency, al-Shabaab employed traditional guerrilla-style tactics, such as isolated bombings and targeted killings of government and security officials. In recent years, however, the group has increasingly used suicide-bombing tactics, not previously employed. This has been attributed to the presence of foreign elements within the group.[28] Al-Shabaab is also said to have infiltrated the TFG's security and often know in advance every move that the TFG and AMISOM plan against them. Al-Shabaab fighters also have duplicate camouflage uniforms, making it difficult for the AMISOM forces to differentiate between them and the Somali government troops. For its part, the LRA has abandoned its military warfare in Uganda, and now continues to prey on weaker targets in the civilian population, despite its dwindling numbers. Like al-Shabaab, the LRA gleans intelligence about the forces pursuing it while discouraging civilians from giving those forces intelligence in return. The strategy, particularly for al-Shabaab, seems to be to pursue a constant campaign of concealed attacks and inflict continual casualties among their superior opponents, demoralising them and eroding any semblance of legitimacy they might enjoy.

OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

This section focuses on al-Shabaab because it has more extensive financial and logistical support than the LRA.

Al-Shabaab, like all other radical groups, has various channels of military and financial support, which have developed over time. Al-Shabaab previously got some of its military hardware from the defecting TFG security forces. The group is also said to have received military and financial support from a number of governments in the region, including Eritrea's,[29] which has been fighting a proxy war with Ethiopia in Somalia. The Eritrean government has categorically denied these accusations.[30] The situation, nonetheless, mirrors the case of the LRA, which was said to have received protection, facilities for training and supplies from the government of Sudan, which was involved in a proxy war with Uganda. There are also reports that the secessionist government of the north-western Somaliland region has been supporting al-Shabaab and that its president, Ahmed M. Mahamoud Silanyo, was elected in June 2010 in large part because of support from a broad-based network of Islamists, including al-Shabaab.[31]

Unlike the LRA, which acquires its financial and operational support largely through forced labour, raids and the confiscation of goods, al-Shabaab has, significantly, created links with the local community and external contacts to sustain itself. Al-Shabaab's local financing is mainly through community-based support structures, such as mosques, local religious leaders and local community networks, which provide the group with much of its financial, logistical and operational requirements. The group is said to follow the Wahhabi Muslim edicts, which encourage financial jihad as a doctrine, to motivate local Somalis to make contributions.[32] In other words, Somalis can join the jihad by donating or supplying the fighters' needs, such as food and temporary shelter. Al-Shabaab enjoys a level of sympathy among local communities, especially in places where it brings some form of justice and does not abuse ordinary citizens. Some southern and central

Somalis believe that al-Shabaab is a genuine movement fighting to liberate Somalia from foreign occupation and the foreign proxy, the TFG. These people, therefore, feel they are making legitimate political and financial contributions, as well as giving moral support to al-Shabaab's operations. Contributing to jihad has many aspects whose common denominator is direct and indirect support of the Somali Islamic holy war through self-sacrifice. The group has also developed links with certain businessmen in southern Somalia who sell their products, such as charcoal, to the Middle East through the ports of Baraawe and Kismayo. Al-Shabaab, therefore, operates differently from the LRA, which for some time now has been exploiting the inability of the DRC, South Sudan and the CAR to control their border areas, and using small, fast-moving groups of fighters to attack unprotected villages to restock with food and clothes, and seize new recruits.

Al-Shabaab has seemed to show little interest in affiliations with Somali pirates and vice versa

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Al-Shabaab has several other means of raising resources beyond those already mentioned. There are allegations that it receives support from charitable organisations in countries such as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Examples cited include the World Assembly for Muslim Youth and the International Islamic Relief Organization. It also receives support from Somali businesses in the Gulf states, Europe, the US, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore.[33] Somalis in the diaspora also send contributions through money-transfer companies, such as Hawaala. Sipus has examined the manner in which al-Shabaab relies on remittances and business creation within the migrant diaspora to fund its operations.[34] He observes that the organisation appeals to Somalis not because of their affinity with the organisation, but for economic and social reasons. Not only does al-Shabaab provide financial incentives for support, it also promotes 'the vision of the *ummah*, a unified Islamic state under shari'a law',[35] which attracts a level of popular support among Somali people both inside and outside the country.

Despite allegations linking al-Shabaab to piracy, the connection remains unclear. On the whole, however, al-Shabaab has seemed to show little interest in affiliations with Somali pirates and vice versa. This, explains Cohn, is largely due to clan differences. The pirates come from Somalia's Majourteen clan (also spelt

Majeerteen, Majerteen, Macherten, or Majertain), a sub-clan of the Darod in Puntland and Somaliland, in the central and northern parts of the country; members of al-Shabaab are mainly from the Haber Gedir sub-clan of the Hawiye clan, among others, which are mainly based in Mogadishu and southern Somalia.[36] According to Cohn, the pirates are said to prioritise their clan affiliations above any ideological alliance. But it is also probable that the lack of links between the two groups is because of al-Shabaab's strict interpretation of Sharia law, which regards piracy as a vice that runs contrary to the tenets of Islam. Indeed, a number of pirate groups are said to have formed alliances against Islamist groups in places like Hobyo, roughly 100 kilometres up the coast from Xarardeere (a pirate town).[37] And it is revealing to note that over the last three years, al-Shabaab has never authorised pirates to use the ports it controls. This does not rule out the possibility that this situation may change, especially as al-Shabaab continues to face economic challenges, or the possibility of al-Shabaab benefiting indirectly from piracy, given that Somali pirates often share their ransoms with relatives and members of their communities.

PARADOX OF EXTERNAL RESPONSES

There are a number of salient parallels in the way actors have responded to al-Shabaab and the LRA, and the resulting contradictory outcomes. The case of Somalia, in particular, reflects a textbook situation of what one might call the paradox of external intervention. The irony today is that international efforts to prevent Islamic groups from seizing political power in Somalia have been exploited by al-Shabaab, not only in its discrediting of the moderate Islamic TFG (which was seen as the best prospect for stability when it took over in early 2009), but also in promoting its members as 'freedom fighters' and expanding their support. Indeed, al-Shabaab was radicalised and brought into prominence as a popular Islamist guerrilla movement following Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in December 2006. The withdrawal of Ethiopian forces between late 2007 and early 2008 meant that al-Shabaab's legitimacy was threatened, and to retain the support of the people, the group shifted its focus to the TFG and AMISOM forces, and started providing services normally offered by the state in some areas that it controlled. Since 1991, most external interventions in Somalia have encountered resistance from locals, who view them as motivated by selfish interests and which only aggravate the situation in the country. Hence, the current internationally backed TFG has failed to create a broad-based government and looks like a Western proxy imposed upon

the people. As long as al-Shabaab maintains popular support, it will retain all of its strategic advantages of mobility and legitimacy in its own eyes and in the eyes of the people, and it will be very difficult for any regular forces to eliminate it. A viable solution to dealing with al-Shabaab lies in winning over Somalia's civilian population (see the section below, 'Options for responding to counter-insurgency').

A viable solution to dealing with al-Shabaab lies in winning over Somalia's civilian population

External interventions to deal with the LRA have not fared any better. In 2006 Kony embarrassed a UN covert operation comprising US-trained Guatemalan special operatives who were meant to capture or kill him. The LRA slaughtered all the Guatemalans, beheaded the commander, set out into the DRC's Garamba National Park and took all their weapons, including heavy machine guns and grenade launchers.[38] Five LRA soldiers are said to have died in the operation. Some reports indicate that the so-called Guatemalan disaster resulted in the deaths of about 40 elite counter-insurgency troops, although others put the death toll at eight.[39] In late 2008, the governments of the DRC, CAR and Uganda again launched a major military deployment, Operation Lightning Thunder, against the LRA forces. The operation forced LRA militia to disperse into other parts of the DRC, but failed to achieve its military objective of defeating the LRA. In retaliation, the LRA reportedly killed an estimated 1 000 people in the DRC and southern Sudan; more than 180 000 were displaced in the DRC.[40] There have been various other efforts, especially by the US, to deal with the LRA. These include the 2008 initiative to train the Ugandan military in counter-terrorism; the passing of the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act in 2010, which required the US government to develop a regional strategy in support of multilateral efforts to eliminate the LRA threat; and, more recently, the deployment of about 100 combat-equipped troops to the east and central African regions to help and advise governments that are struggling with the LRA. The US also seems to be changing tactics by stepping up intelligence operations and using third parties to deal with al-Shabaab and the LRA. The US no longer seems keen to establish a large combatant military presence to deal with the two militant groups. Lauren Ploch observes that the Obama administration is confronted by many of the same problems that vexed its predecessors – 'balancing the risks of an on-the-ground presence' against the risks of using third parties to carry out the American strategy.[41]

The question of external intervention in Somalia was compounded by Kenya's incursion, codenamed Operation Linda Nchi (Swahili for 'protect the country'), on 16 October 2011. Until then, Kenya was the only state in East Africa and the Horn of Africa that had neither invaded, nor been invaded by, another country. The move by Kenya, East Africa's biggest economic power, followed the kidnappings of foreign tourists and aid workers that Kenyan officials blamed on al-Shabaab. Known more for its mediating role in the region and never having been at war since its independence in 1963, Kenya's military adventure left many wondering whether it would end up in retreat and failure like the previous interventions by the US and Ethiopia. For a country with a struggling economy and half its population living below the poverty line, Kenya's war in Somalia will certainly be an expensive affair given the country's limited resources. Furthermore, many people maintain that Kenya's military, despite its sophistication by regional standards, is inexperienced in dealing with the guerrilla-style warfare adopted by al-Shabaab. So far, Kenya's incursion has not raised the ire of Somalis, besides al-Shabaab, as was the case with Ethiopia's invasion in 2006. This is possibly because of the large number of Somalis in Kenya, who, firstly, view Kenya as having been hospitable to their families, and, secondly, believe Kenya's grievances in relation to the abductions are justified. Indeed, for decades, Kenya has offered asylum to Somalia's refugees fleeing from the political turmoil in their motherland. Most of these immigrants are now Kenyan citizens, having acquired their citizenship through either legal or illegal channels. The lack of demonstrations may also be explained by the fact that there are Somalis who do not agree with al-Shabaab's philosophy and activities. However, this situation could easily change should there be an increase in cases of civilian casualties as a result of Kenya's military attacks. Al-Shabaab would be sure to capitalise on such cases to inflame Somali emotions and rally support.

Although some Kenyans are happy that, for once, their country is flexing its muscles by using military power, Kenya would be better advised to pursue a quick solution, and hand over gained territory to the Somali government forces and other loyal troops. A long incursion is not only likely to be costly, but also more prone to end in failure.

In practical terms, the military campaigns against al-Shabaab and the LRA have inflicted substantial damage on these groups. A number of al-Shabaab leaders have been eliminated, and the military pressure on the LRA, aside from pushing the group out of

northern Uganda, has led to defections and dwindling numbers. The groups have, nonetheless, managed to evolve and adapt to new situations despite being under constant threat. The elusive guerrilla fighters have exploited to their advantage the shortcomings of state security forces and the constraints of international efforts to respond to unconventional wars, partly because of their costly nature.

> The issue in Somalia is that, in the political domain, external interventions have provided a propaganda tool to groups opposed to foreign involvement

This paper, however, does not take the simplistic view that suggests that external intervention in the case of the LRA and in Somalia has done more harm than good. While it may be true that some of the actions, particularly in Somalia (including US support for the warlords[42] and Ethiopia's incursion in 2006, which drove the ICU out of power), may have been ill-considered, there are many other examples, including funding of peace initiatives and humanitarian interventions in both northern Uganda and Somalia, that have served a very noble cause. The issue in Somalia is that, in the political domain, external interventions have provided a propaganda tool to groups opposed to foreign involvement. This is not new in Somalia. For some time now, various sides to the Somali conflict have employed propaganda tactics, including the use of disinformation, in an effort to shape the trajectory of events or sway popular support and international opinion. There are genuine grievances by Somalis against various foreign incursions into their country. However, propaganda has been added to these grievances, providing fuel to sway the Somali public to side with the Islamic militants, with whom it previously had little in common. As Bruton has observed, Somalia's history shows very clearly that in the absence of international intervention, the country was well 'inoculated' against extreme elements such as al-Shabaab.[43]

OPTIONS FOR RESPONDING TO COUNTER-INSURGENCY

Looking at the case of al-Shabaab and the LRA, most responses have involved armed suppression using a combination of conventional military operations and other means, such as assassinations and propaganda warfare. These military operations have not been effective in eliminating the problem of insurgency because they often ignore, or fail to address, the gaps the led to the emergence and radicalisation of these groups. Insurgents often thrive on societal problems, and in a society where these problems are widespread and pronounced, it is easier for groups such as al-Shabaab and the LRA to mobilise and radicalise their followers. Both al-Shabaab and the LRA emerged out of real grievances and historical injustices: high levels of social marginalisation and fragmentation, in the case of northern Uganda; and the question of poorly governed, or ungoverned, areas and the abrasive and cruel counter-insurgency tactics deployed by the Ethiopian forces, in the case of al-Shabaab. These issues have been aggravated by perceived cultural threats, often rooted in deeply held, existential notions of domination. These are evidenced by northern Uganda's marginalisation, in the case of the LRA, and incursions by Ethiopia and the West, constituting an oppressive international order, in the case of al-Shabaab. These issues have acted as catalysts to radicalise members of the two groups. Therefore, effective responses call for a deeper understanding of these structural and historical grievances and mistrust. However, this should not rule out the option of constructive modes of engagement, where necessary, regardless of the sensibilities they may offend. In Somalia, for instance, if the Islamist movements of the past, particularly the ICU which created a semblance of order in Somalia, had been constructively engaged, it is plausible that Somalia might today be making meaningful progress towards long-term stability.

CONCLUSION

Evident from this paper is that both al-Shabaab and the LRA emerged out of specific circumstances, and any meaningful responses will also have to deal with those circumstances, namely the structural 'push and pull' factors that underline local grievances. Unfortunately, those states that have responded to groups such as al-Shabaab and the LRA have for too long viewed them largely in terms of threats to their own security. Rarely is the question asked whether these groups have any legitimate grievances. Violence of whatever form in society points to dislocations in the broader social fabric of that society. Therefore, a short-sighted approach that relies only on eliminating 'suspected terrorists' may not work if the structural conditions that motivate individuals to join these groups are not addressed. As

witnessed in the case of al-Shabaab, those eliminated are often easily replaced.

The key to successful counter-insurgency is winning over the local population. This calls for an integrated socio-economic and political approach designed to address the local population's needs and make them feel secure. And the local community needs to accept there may be occasions when the reasonable use of force is required against those disturbing their harmony. A victory, therefore, is not about the destruction of the insurgent fighters, but winning the hearts and minds of the local population. External actors can, therefore, only succeed in seizing the moral and political legitimacy from insurgents by addressing the local population's grievances. Relying on military responses alone will simply strengthen the appeal of militant groups and introduce new cycles of terrorism. Success in dealing with insurgency must be assessed by the extent of the community's support for the intervention.

NOTES

1   The ICU was a group of Somali Islamic law courts (Sharia courts) that united in 2006 to form a rival administration to the Western- and African-backed TFG. Labelled by the US as a terrorist group with links to al-Qaeda, the ICU was eventually rooted out in December 2006 by *Ethiopians* with the support of the US. During its six-month period in power, the ICU managed to create a semblance of order and nationhood in Somalia.

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ABOUT THIS PAPER

This paper argues that both al-Shabaab and the Lord's Resistance Army emerged out of comparable contexts and were motivated by real grievances. These two groups have coalesced around collective frames of injustices. The paper holds that while their methods and activities cannot be rationalised, they can be understood by entering the two groups' frame of mind. Unfortunately, those responding to them have for long seen the groups in terms of threats to their (the intervenors') own security rather than in terms of local grievances. The paper maintains that for interventions to be effective, they need to deal with local grievances and cultural sensitivities. A victory, therefore, is not about the destruction of the insurgent fighters but rather the winning of the hearts and minds of the local population.

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