



ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND SECURITY STUDIES

**ETHIOPIA-SOMALIA RELATIONS AND THE PERSISTENT
THREAT OF AL-SHABAAB**

BY

HAILEMICHAEL TEMESGEN

JUNE, 2025

ADDISABABA, ETHIOPIA

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND SECURITY STUDIES

**ETHIOPIA-SOMALIA RELATIONS AND THE PERSISTENT THREAT OF
AL-SHABAAB**

BY
HAILEMICHAEL TEMESGEN

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES OF
ADDIS ABABA, UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN PEACE AND
SECURITY STUDIES**

ADVISOR
Dr. YONASTARIKU (PhD)

JUNE, 2025

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND SECURITY STUDIES

**ETHIOPIA-SOMALIA RELATIONS AND THE PERSISTENT THREAT OF
AL-SHABAAB**

BY

HAILEMICHAEL TEMESGEN

APPROVED BY BOARD OF EXAMINERS

Name Signature Date

Director of IPSS

Advisor

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

DECLARATION

This thesis titled, **“ETHIOPIA-SOMALIA RELATIONS AND THE PERSISTENT THREAT OF AL-SHABAAB”** is a new contribution of mine. The sources of all the information utilized in the thesis are properly cited, and it has not been presented for a degree at any other institution.

DECLARED BY:

Name of the student: _____ Signature: _____

Date of submission: _____

APPROVED BY

With my endorsement as a university advisor, this work has been submitted to Addis Ababa University's Institute for Peace and Security Studies (IPSS) for examination.

Name of Advisor: _____ Signature: _____

Date of submission: _____

Acknowledgement

First, I would like to thank the Almighty God for His endless grace and guidance throughout the course of this research. My deepest gratitude goes to my humble and supportive advisor, Dr. Yonas Tariku, whose expertise and encouragement were instrumental in the completion of this work. I am also sincerely thankful to my brother, Zerabruk Temesgen, for his unwavering support, as well as to my classmates, whose thoughtful discussions enriched my understanding of the topic. I am also grateful to my friends Ergatawu Wunete and Edilawit Tesfaye for their continuous support, encouragement, and motivation throughout this journey. Finally, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all the key informants who willingly participated in this study and contributed valuable insights that were essential to its success.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement.....	i
ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS.....	iv
Abstract.....	vi
CHAPTER ONE.....	1
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background of the study.....	1
1.2 Problem of statement.....	3
1.3. Research Objectives.....	6
1.3.1 General Objective.....	6
1.3.2 Specific Objectives.....	6
1.4. Research Questions.....	6
1.4.1 General Research Question.....	6
1.4.2 Specific Research Questions.....	6
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	7
1.6 scope of the study.....	7
1.7 limitation of the study.....	7
1.8 organization of the paper.....	8
CHAPTER TWO.....	9
2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE.....	9
2.1 Theoretical framework.....	9
2.1.1 Realism.....	9
2.1.2 Constructivism.....	10
2.1.3 Regional Security Complex Theory.....	12
2.2 Conceptual Framework.....	13
2.2.1 Terrorism.....	13
2.2.3 Forms and Nature of Terrorist Groups.....	14
2.2.3 Counter- Terrorism.....	16
2.2.4 The resilience of terrorist groups.....	16

2.2.5 Challenges and prospect of counterterrorism	18
2.3 Practical literature reviews.....	18
CHAPTER 3	27
3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	27
3.1 Introduction.....	27
3.2 Philosophical Paradigm	27
3.3 Research Approach and Design	28
3.4 Data Sources and Collection Tools.....	29
3.5 Sampling Technique	30
3.7 Data Analysis	31
3.8 Ethical consideration.....	31
CHAPTER FOUR.....	33
4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION.....	33
4.1 Ethiopia-Somalia Relations: Driving factor for Cooperation and Hostility	34
4.2 Al-Shabaab as a Persistent Threat in the Region	41
4.3 The Impact of Al-Shabaab on Ethio–Somali Relations	47
4.3.1 Recent Al-Shabaab movement and future Ethiopia-Somalia relation	52
4.4 Enhancing Ethiopia–Somalia Bilateral Relations for Sustainable Security	58
4.5 The Dual Role of Al-Shabaab in Ethiopia–Somalia Relations	61
CHAPTER FIVE	64
5. Conclusion	64
Reference	67
Appendices.....	76

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAU	Addis Ababa University
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AFRICOM	United States Africa Command
AIAI	Al-Itihaad Al-Islamiya
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AP	Associated Press
APSA	African Peace and Security Architecture
ATMIS	African Union Transition Mission in Somalia
AUSSOM	African Union Support Mission in Somalia
AU	African Union
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CBS	Columbia Broadcasting System
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
CT	Counter terrorism
CSHRD	Coalition of Somali Human Rights Defenders
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
HOA	Horn of Africa
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IR	International Relations
IRA	Republican Army
KII	Informant Interview
KKK	Klux Klan
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ethiopia)
NISS	National Intelligence and Security Service (Ethiopia)
NGO	Governmental Organization
RSC	Regional Security Complex

RSCT	Regional Security Complex Theory
SNA	Somali National Army
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
TFTC	Terrorist Financing Targeting Center
UN	United Nations
UAE	United Arab Emirates
US	United States
VOA	Voice of America

Abstract

This study explores the evolving relationship between Ethiopia and Somalia within the context of the persistent threat posed by Al-Shabaab, a transnational terrorist group that continues to destabilize the Horn of Africa. Drawing on key informant interviews, official government documents, media reports, and scholarly sources, the research examines how Al-Shabaab influences bilateral relations acting simultaneously as a driver of tactical cooperation and a source of strategic mistrust. The findings indicate that although shared security threats have led to joint military operations and intelligence sharing, longstanding territorial disputes, foreign influence, and propaganda-driven mistrust continue to undermine long-term diplomatic progress. The paper concludes that future stability hinges on institutionalized cooperation, economic interdependence, inclusive counterterrorism frameworks, and confidence-building mechanisms.

Keywords: *Al-Shabaab, Ethiopia–Somalia relations, common security threat, persistent threat, counter terrorism, hostility and cooperation.*

CHAPTER ONE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Terrorism is politically driven violence against non-combatants by subnational groups, aiming to influence a wider audience (Klein, 2007). While motives vary, methods like hijackings, bombings, and suicide attacks are common (Sandler, 1992). Beyond immediate casualties and destruction, terrorism causes broader psychological, social, political, and economic harm to targeted societies, amplifying its impact beyond the direct victims (Klein, 2007).

The Horn of Africa, including Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, and Sudan, is viewed by Western nations as a significant source of terrorism (Docking, 2004). This region, marked by instability, serves as a safe haven, fertile recruitment ground, and strategic launching point for terrorists and their affiliates (Din, 2011). While such concerns are valid, this view reflects external perceptions that risk oversimplifying a region where security threats and resilience coexist.

Somalia located at the tip of the Horn of Africa (HOA), borders Kenya to the southwest, Djibouti to the northwest, and Ethiopia to the west, with the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean to its north and east also Somalia has a land area of 637,540 square kilometers (Rooble, 2016). Ethiopia, also in the HOA, borders Somalia and Djibouti to the east, Eritrea to the north, Sudan and South Sudan to the west, and Kenya to the south, spanning approximately 1,127,127 square kilometers (Central Intelligence Agency, 2024).

Interstate relations are shaped by both cooperation and competition, influenced by globalization, economic interdependence, and shifting power dynamics (Bagwell & Staiger, 2005). Major Powers still pursue strategic interests that can lead to rivalry (Mearsheimer, 2001). Thus, modern interstate relations are a balance of national interest and global cooperation (Weiss, 2009).

According to Rooble (2016), the relations between Ethiopia and Somalia have been both peaceful and violent at different periods, also ethnicity and religion have historically shaped Somalia-Ethiopia relations. Another scholar argued the interaction between Somalia and Ethiopia has been shaped by competition over scarce resources, including access to water, grazing land for nomads, and control over gas and oil reserves in the Ogaden region, intensifying territorial disputes (Kendie, 2007). Further, Ethiopia-Somalia relations reflect the broader challenges of state-building in a region defined by fluid borders and contested identities (Clapham, 2017). Somalia's and Ethiopia relation shaped by irredentist policy of Somalia, rooted in the concept of a Greater Somalia, sought to unify Somali-inhabited regions in neighboring Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti under Somali rule. This policy led to border conflicts, including the Ogaden War with Ethiopia in 1977–78, fueled by Somalia's desire to annex the Ogaden region. However, these ambitions strained regional relations and weakened Somalia's political stability (Omar, 2021).

Al-Shabaab's origins trace back to the 1990s in Somalia, following the collapse of the Siad Barre regime. A precursor, Al-Ittihad Al-Islami (AIAI), aimed to create an Islamic emirate, receiving support from Al-Qaeda's Osama bin Laden. After Ethiopian forces pushed AIAI out in the late 1990s, remnants formed Al-Shabaab within the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in the early 2000s (Master & Sergie, 2015). Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG), supported by Ethiopian troops, clashed with insurgent groups like the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). After

Ethiopia's 2006 invasion, the ICU fragmented, and Al-Shabaab emerged. Initially focused on overthrowing the TFG, Al-Shabaab pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda in 2012, advancing a Wahhabi agenda and waging global jihad against non-Muslims (Abioye, 2019). Al-Shabaab has escalated its insurgency with car bombings, guerrilla tactics, and attacks like Westgate Mall (2013) and Garissa University (2015). It exploits grievances and governance failures, maintaining regional jihad and a resilient presence (Menkhaus, 2021).

Since 2018, Ethiopia and Somalia have navigated evolving political dynamics, including insurgent and terrorist threats; Somalia's President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (Farmajo) sought to shift from nationalist rhetoric to deeper ties with Ethiopia (Abdi, 2019). While Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed promoted regional agreements balancing counter-terrorism with economic collaboration (Debisa, 2021). Then January 2024 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Ethiopia and Somaliland has strained Ethiopia-Somalia relations (Voice of America, 2024).

1.2 Problem of Statement.

Terrorist threats often have a significant impact on interstate relations, influencing diplomatic, security, and economic interactions between states. Scholars like Berman and Laitin (2008) and Hegghammer (2013) emphasize how terrorist organizations can drive states to alter their foreign policies, engage in security cooperation, or even engage in conflicts with neighboring countries.

Terrorism has driven collaborative measures such as intelligence-sharing and joint military operations, as seen in global coalitions formed to combat groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda (Kydd & Walter, 2006). Conversely, divergent national interests in counterterrorism often result in mistrust and policy discord, straining diplomatic ties. In Africa, the transnational activities of

terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, AQIM, and Al-Shabaab have not only destabilized individual states but have also influenced regional politics and interstate relations. Terrorism in the region has led to the establishment of multilateral counterterrorism frameworks such as the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), though the coordination of these efforts has often been hampered by competing national priorities and historical grievances (Rotberg, 2005).

The persistent threat of Al-Shabaab exemplifies how terrorism shapes the Ethiopia-Somalia relationship. Emerging from the remnants of the Islamic Courts Union, Al-Shabaab has destabilized Somalia while conducting transnational attacks targeting neighboring states, including Ethiopia and Kenya. Ethiopia has responded with a proactive counterterrorism strategy involving repeated military interventions in Somalia. The 2006 invasion to dismantle the Islamic Courts Union was a watershed moment; showcasing Ethiopia's willingness to address perceived threats preemptively, but it also deepened Somali resentment and reinforced historical narratives of Ethiopian interference (Menkhas, 2007). Despite this, Ethiopia has played a crucial role in multilateral initiatives like AMISOM and ATMIS, seeking to balance national security concerns with regional stability. However, its actions are often perceived by Somali leaders and the public as hegemonic and intrusive, which complicates bilateral relations (Bryden, 2014).

Ethiopia and Somalia have cooperated to counter Al-Shabaab, a persistent security threat in the Horn of Africa. Despite this collaboration, Al-Shabaab remains a formidable challenge due to its adaptability, territorial reach, and financial resources, continuing to destabilize both Somalia and Ethiopia's border regions. This ongoing threat undermines efforts toward regional stability and economic progress (Debisa, 2021).

Al-Shabaab remains a significant threat in the region, exploiting local grievances and external jihadist ties, challenging Ethiopia and its allies across Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopian borders (Elmi, 2024).

Al-Shabaab endurance in Somalia is driven by its manipulation of clan loyalties, local grievances, and its Islamic identity. International interventions often fail to address these factors, while the Somali government lacks the resources to counter its influence. The group's integration into Somali society, its economic networks, and local support contribute to its resilience, creating a strong framework that resists counter-terrorism efforts (Kellar, 2024)

Al-Shabaab has evolved into a transnational terrorist group, linking with other jihadist factions across Africa, exploiting porous borders for recruitment and training. Military responses, such as those by Ethiopia and the AU, have proven ineffective, as they fail to address the underlying conditions driving radicalization (Agbiboa, 2014).

Despite extensive literature on the broader impacts of Al-Shabaab and other terrorist groups on regional stability, there remains a notable gap in empirical research specifically examining the Ethiopia-Somalia context. In particular, there is a lack of focused analysis on how Al-Shabaab directly shapes and influences the dynamics of Ethiopia-Somalia relations.

Therefore, the proposed thesis will address this gap by examining how the threat of Al-Shabaab shaped the dynamics and patterns of relations between Ethiopia and Somalia.

1.3. Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

The overall objective of this study was to explore post 2018 Ethiopia-Somalia relations, focusing on periods of cooperation and hostility in light of the persistent threat posed by Al-Shabaab.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the drivers of cooperation and hostility between Ethiopia and Somalia in light of the two states' counterterrorism endeavors
2. Assess the social, political, and economic conditions that enable Al-Shabaab to sustain its Influence in the region.
3. To identify the challenges and opportunities for strengthening bilateral relations between Ethiopia and Somalia to address mutual security threats.

1.4. Research Questions

1.4.1 General Research Question

How Ethiopia-Somalia relations evolved since 2018 in the context of Al-Shabaab's persistent threat?

1.4.2 Specific Research Questions

1. What is the key factors driving Ethiopia-Somalia cooperation and hostility?
2. Why Al-shabab continued as a threat in the region?

3. How Ethiopia and Somalia enhance their bilateral relations to sustainably address shared security challenges?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study was expected to offer valuable theoretical insights into regional security dynamics and the challenges to state sovereignty in the Horn of Africa. It aimed to examine the interplay between cross-border insurgency and bilateral diplomacy, with a focus on Al-Shabaab's operational resilience and its impact on Ethiopia-Somalia relations. From a policy perspective, the study was intended to propose actionable strategies to enhance regional collaboration, with the goal of mitigating transnational terrorism and promoting long-term stability in the region.

1.6 Scope of the study

This study focused on Ethiopia-Somalia relations and the ongoing threat of Al-Shabaab from 2018 to the time of research completion. However, this did not mean that the study excluded pre-2018 developments. It examined the political, security, and counterterrorism strategies of both countries, analyzing their impact on regional stability and the resilience of Al-Shabaab's activities. The scope included exploring bilateral and multilateral efforts, challenges in cross-border security collaboration, and policy implications for future stability in the Horn of Africa.

1.7 Limitation of the study

In conducting the study, the researcher faced several problems that contributed to its limitations. The first was difficulty in accessing reliable primary data due to ongoing security risks and political sensitivities in both Ethiopia and Somalia. Additionally, the lack of independent reporting in conflict zones may have limited the objectivity and comprehensiveness of the findings.

1.8 Organization of the paper

This study organized into five chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction, covering the background of the study, the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, its scope, and its limitations. Chapter Two focuses on the literature review, presenting relevant theoretical and empirical works. Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, including the design, data collection methods, and analysis techniques. Chapter four presents and analyzes the study's findings, while Chapter Five is conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical framework

In this section, outlines three theories used to analyze Ethiopia-Somalia relations and the Al-Shabaab threat: realism, constructivism, and Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory. Realism focuses on power and security interests, while RSC theory explains regional interdependence in addressing threats. This study mainly applies constructivism, which highlights how identities, norms, and perceptions shape state relations.

2.1.1 Realism

Classical realism, as articulated by thinkers like Hobbes (1985) and Morgenthau (2006), views state as monolithic and rational actors operating in an anarchic international system. In this view, the absence of an overarching authority compels states to prioritize survival, resulting in a competitive environment often described as a war of all against all. Realists argue that power and security dominate state actions, and conflicts are resolved through coercive measures or outright war (Burton, 1990). In the context of Ethiopia-Somalia relations, realism explains Ethiopia's security-centric approach to countering Al-Shabaab, where military interventions and cross-border operations reflect a pursuit of national security and power in the anarchic Horn of Africa region.

Neo-realists, such as Waltz (2001) and Mearsheimer (1994), refine classical realism by emphasizing the structural anarchy of the international system. They argue that states engage in relentless security competition due to the absence of a central authority, which limits trust and cooperation among states. Ethiopia's actions in Somalia, including its role in the African Union

Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), can be interpreted through this lens as efforts to manage security threats and maintain its survival in a volatile regional system. However, neo-realists are skeptical of the role of institutions in fostering lasting stability, highlighting instead the self-interested calculations of states.

2.1.2 Constructivism

Constructivism theory is interested in the function of ideas in IR and the role of collective human consciousness. Its goal is to comprehend international activity through the interplay of agents and intangible ideational structures, including group norms. This is a subset of idealism that emphasizes group actions to combat terrorism. Nicholas Onuf came up with the word constructivism to refer to the socially produced characters in IR (Schild, 2011). This theory was later expanded by Alexander Wendt in his 1992 article: "Anarchy is what states make of it." He questioned realists' and neoliberals' devotion to material power in the article, arguing that human associational structures are largely controlled by shared ideas rather than material forces, and that the identities and interests of purposeful actors are created by these shared ideas rather than being innate (Wendt, 1992). Since 11/9/2001 attacks in the US, traditional IR scholars have been finding it difficult to understand acts of terror. The understanding of major attacks that are driven by multifaceted convictions is rarely significantly advanced by realist or liberalist methods. The best theories to describe organizations like Boko Haram, ISIS, and Al-Shabaab are constructivist ones, Constructivist theories aid in the analysis of how identities and interests might evolve over time. It also highlights the significance of using IR theories to comprehend culture, identity, religion, and ideas (Schild, 2011). The challenge of traditional IR theories in predictions of the post-cold-war era craved a spot for the emergence of Constructivism in order to fill such gap. The social philosophy of international politics is called constructivism. While interests relate to what

actors desire and interactions reveal the true identities of actors, identities, in Alexander Wendt's view, represent who or what actors are and how they have evolved, been sustained, or changed (Wendt, 1987).

According to sociological scholars, terrorism is a social construct. (One person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter.) It is an interpretation of events and their assumed causes. Since terrorism is a social construct, it provides information about policies for such It is possible to frame terrorism as a criminal, a conflict, or an uncivilized evil. While ignoring responses like talks and induced socio-economic changes that can affect the incentives for terrorism, this aids in the development of some counterterrorism strategies, such as immigration policies, military reactions, and judicial measures (Schild, 2011). Because of their militaristic response to terrorism, terrorists' deeds were typically interpreted as war against the West. Terrorism is viewed as a crime and a war. Al-Qaeda, for instance, aims to advance an Islamic identity and defines the interests of all Muslims as unavoidably being in conflict with the West. Persuasion is crucial in this situation, and ideas are important. The state-centric policies in the War on Terror resulted from rationalists' inability to comprehend constructivists' perspective on terrorism (ibid).

Constructivists believe that states will act differently to friends and enemies based on their threat perceptions, their behaviors will be shaped by their shared understanding and collective knowledge of self and the other. Constructivism is another cultural theory that is explained by various anarchist cultures, including Kantian, Hobbesian, and Lockean. The cultural elements could contribute to the explanation of the strategy used to combat terrorism (Wendt, 1999).

Constructivism views terrorism as a social problem that cannot exist, independent of the ideas of the people involved in it. The value that constructivism brings to the fight against terrorism

includes revealing the constantly evolving concept of ideas and identities, generating a variety of ideas, and understanding oneself and others to better comprehend states' reactions to terrorism (Wendt, 1998).

From above explanation Constructivism theory will help understand how shared ideas, identities, and norms influence Ethiopia-Somalia relations amidst the persistent threat of Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab's promotion of an Islamist identity shapes state interactions, policies, and counterterrorism strategies, reflecting the role of collective consciousness and evolving perceptions in shaping international responses to terrorism.

2.1.3 Regional Security Complex Theory

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT, developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver in *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (2003), argues that regional security is shaped by the interdependence of states within a specific geographical area. According to the theory, “a regional security complex consists of a group of states whose security concerns are so interdependent that their national security policies cannot be considered apart from each other” (Buzan&Wæver, 2003, p. 44)

Buzan and Wæver also emphasize the levels of analysis, recognizing that regional security is affected by both local dynamics and external global influences. The theory highlights how regional security is interconnected, with external actors (e.g., the African Union) also shaping the security environment (Buzan&Wæver, 2003),This framework is useful in understanding Ethiopia's security policies in relation to Somalia, especially in the context of shared threats like Al-Shabaab.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

2.2.1 Terrorism

There are no universally accepted, objective definitions of terrorism or terrorists; instead, the term is frequently used to disparage the status of those who do not belong to the prevailing social groups. Thus, it is necessary to assess the different schools of thought about their definitions and features of terrorism in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of what terrorism is. Similar to ideas like freedom and democracy, the term "terrorism" has become a primary term in today's culture and a common narrative (Nimmer, 2011). In post-9/11 American society, terrorism has become an everyday term used to describe everything from gorilla style warfare against U.S. troops overseas to the mass murder of civilians in the name of foreign ideological and political agendas (Razzaq, 2003). But the term "terror" is more than 2100 years old. When the murderers of the Cimbri tribe arrived in 105 BCE, ancient Rome experienced a situation of emergency and panic known as the terror cimbricus. The word "terrorism" was also created to refer to the organized system of terror that governed the acquiescent French populace in the eighteenth century (Roberts, 2002).

According to Laquer (1987), terrorism is the use of violence as a tactic, a means of conflict, or a means of achieving specific goals. The use of violence by a group with a clear chain of command, subnational groups, or non-state entities with the intention of causing psychological harm that extends beyond the immediate victim or target is known as terrorism (Hoffman, 2006). Unlike assassinations, terrorism is a method of repeated violent acts that causes anxiety and is used by state actors or secret individual groups for individual, criminal, or political motives. The primary targets are not the people who are directly targeted by violence. According to Schmidt

and Jongman (1988), the immediate human victims of violence are selected at random or from a target demographic to act as message generators.

Terrorism is defined as planned, politically motivated violence committed against non-combatant targets by subnational organizations or covert state agents (US. Department of State,1996). Although the concept of terrorism has altered throughout time, its ideological, religious, and political objectives have remained mostly constant (Sloan, 2006). In the same way, there isn't a single, definitive definition of terrorism in the Horn of Africa. Therefore, it would be wiser to examine more trends and patterns of how terrorist incidents manifest in order to gain a better understanding and develop a more inclusive, universal definition of what terrorism is. These trends of terrorist incidents in the Horn of Africa would contribute to the bucket definition of terrorism.

2.2.3Forms and Nature of Terrorist Groups

There are several types of terrorist groups and terrorism in general. Among them are those who are religious, separatist, nationalistic, ethnocentric, revolutionary, political, social, domestic, international, or transnational. Due to the extensive media coverage of Islamic extremism, the majority of people are familiar with the category of religious terrorism. The main risk associated with religious terrorist organizations is the inflexibility of their ideologies. Terrorists with religious motivations believe their goals are sacred, unchangeable, and therefore unassailable (Raazaq, 2003).The Separatists are another group of terrorists who use terrorism to gain political autonomy, while they may also be classified as insurgents. The American Civil War's Confederacy serves as an illustration of this. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and other ethnocentric terrorist organizations are driven by the idea of ethnic cleansing the eradication and/or subjection

of all other races and believe in their own supremacy due to innate racial traits (Coutsoukis, 2004).

Similar to separatism, nationalistic terrorism is motivated by a desire for political autonomy; as was the case with the Irish Republican Army (IRA), this desire is typically rooted in a broad cultural idealism. The goal of revolutionary terrorism is to topple the current political system and install a new one that is socially and/or politically stable. It is well known that the United States has taught numerous foreign nationals how to commit revolutionary terrorism as a means of secretly advancing democracy in other countries. The 1980s saw the South American country of Honduras transition to a constitutional democracy thanks to the support of U.S. Special Forces, which trained and helped contras topple their previous regime (Coutsoukis, 2004). Simply put, political terrorism is a wide category that includes all forms of terrorism with political motivations. Terrorism committed against a special interest, such as environmentalists, minority rights, abortion, or animal rights, is referred to as social terrorism. Domestic terrorist organizations fight for different ideologies and operate within their own nation. The KKK, Aryan Nation, and Earth Liberation Front are a few examples of domestic terrorist organizations in the United States (Crawford, 2001).

The labels international and transnational terrorism better capture the operational power, scope, and backing of these organizations. In contrast to transnational terrorists, who operate and concentrate on numerous countries, international groups often concentrate their efforts on a single geographic area. When it comes to current events in Israel and Lebanon, Hezbollah is seen as an international terrorist organization, whereas Al Qaeda may be regarded as a transnational terrorist organization (Razaq, 2003). There are numerous perspectives, ideas, and definitions of terrorism. Although many people in the west instantly link terrorism to right-wing, so-called

Islamic extremism, the truth is that only a small portion of terrorism and terrorist organizations worldwide are of this kind (Crawford, 2001).

Al-Shabaab is primarily a religious terrorist group, motivated by a radical interpretation of Islam. It also exhibits characteristics of international and transnational terrorism, given its operations across East Africa, targeting countries like Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia, and its affiliations with global jihadist networks like Al-Qaeda (Eichhorn, 2022).

2.2.3 Counter- Terrorism

Counterterrorism refers to the proactive security measures implemented by the government in an effort to stop terrorism (Martin, 2003). The long-term goal of counterterrorism is to stop the catastrophic loss of life, property, and infrastructure. According to Lutz (2004), it is linked to tasks like identifying terrorists' hiding places and protecting security forces during attacks. Counterterrorism includes tactics and measures like intelligence collection, law enforcement, and community involvement that are intended to prevent, fight, and lessen terrorism (Sandler, 2018). Addressing the underlying causes of terrorism, which are influenced by political and social settings, must be balanced with meeting urgent security needs (Munroe, 2009).

There are three categories of counter terrorism. The first one entails intelligence, military action, financial controls, diplomatic contacts, and clandestine activity. The second one includes acts to combat terrorist attacks and the lawful use of force. The final one focuses on terror-related behaviors, such as setting up ambushes and defending susceptible individuals (Lutz, 2004).

2.2.3 The Resilience of Terrorist Groups

The resilience of terrorist groups has been widely studied across multiple disciplines, with scholars identifying various factors that contribute to longevity and adaptability.

According to Gaibullov, Piazza, and Sandler (2024), "failed or fragile states provide safe havens that enhance terrorist group survival by reducing government-led counterterrorism efforts and facilitating recruitment." The absence of strong institutions enables terrorist organizations to embed themselves within local communities, fostering long-term resilience.

Decentralized structures play a crucial role in maintaining organizational survival. "Terrorist groups that adopt flexible command structures and decentralized operations can survive counterterrorism measures by shifting tactics and leadership as needed," ensuring that even when leaders are eliminated, the group as a whole remains functional (Callahan et al., 2017).

Corner, Taylor, and Clemmow (2022) emphasize the significance of mental and community-based resilience in sustaining terrorist organizations. "The mental endurance of extremist individuals allows them to withstand external pressures, including arrests, attacks, and ideological challenges." Likewise, strong social ties within radicalized networks prevent disengagement and sustain ideological commitment, reinforcing persistence even under sustained counterterrorism efforts (Mirahmadi, 2016).

Economic conditions further contribute to terrorist resilience. Individuals lacking economic opportunities often turn to extremist groups as alternative means of survival and empowerment. Addressing economic grievances is therefore a crucial component in counterterrorism efforts aimed at weakening terrorist organizations (Keefer & Loayza, 2008).

Lastly, Jacobson (2010) and Bjørge & Horgan (2009) explore the factors leading to disengagement from terrorist groups. "Personal disillusionment, ideological contradictions, and internal organizational conflicts often drive terrorists to abandon their groups." Effective de-

radicalization programs can exploit these vulnerabilities by providing alternative pathways for disengagement and reintegration into society.

2.2.4 Challenges and Prospect of Counterterrorism

Counterterrorism efforts in Africa face numerous challenges but also hold potential for progress. Lelo (2011) emphasizes the critical role of education in addressing terrorism by tackling issues such as limited capacity, underdevelopment, and internal security weaknesses. However, structural flaws in initiatives like Nigeria's de-radicalization program targeting Boko Haram may worsen extremism rather than mitigate it (Onapajo&Ozden, 2020). Reintegration of former Al-Shabaab militants is further complicated by community stigma and distrust (Mercy &Githigaro, 2021). Additionally, Abdi (2021) identifies youth illiteracy, inadequate government support, and financial constraints as barriers to creating effective counter-narratives, while Mali (2021) highlights corruption, mismanagement, poor coordination, low community engagement, and poverty as significant hindrances to the success of prevention programs. These interconnected challenges underline the complexities of counterterrorism, particularly in the Ethiopia-Somalia context and the ongoing threat posed by Al-Shabaab.

2.3 Practical Literature Reviews

According to the literature on the subject, Somalia and Ethiopia have had both calm and violent interactions at various points in time, as illustrated below. Furthermore, the literature demonstrates that a variety of factors, such as colonialism, religion, ethnicity, and geopolitics, have influenced these relationships rather than a single factor.

Some scholars including (Rooble, 2016) believe that the primary factors shape the interactions between Somalia and Ethiopia are ethnicity and religion. According to him, Ethiopia and

Somalia have long engaged in religious and ethnic rivalry that is rooted in Islam and Christianity and goes all the way back to the time of Imam Ahmed Guragn and the Abyssinian emperor LebnaDengel. One of the factors influencing the relationship between Somalia and Ethiopia has been this rivalry. The Ottoman and Portuguese empires have occasionally been drawn into the religious rivalry between the Somalis and the Abyssinian Empire to support the Muslim and Christian parties, respectively.

The Somali Republic shall promote, by lawful and peaceful means, the union of Somali territory and inspire solidarity among the peoples of the world, according to Article 6 of the 1960 Constitution, which reflects this sincerely held belief (Somalia Constitution, 1960). The Greater Somalia Dream served as the inspiration for this reunion concept, which emerged after the country was divided into five sections. The great Somalia dream has been the focal point of Somali foreign policy towards Ethiopia and Kenya since it has frequently produced unease and turmoil in these neighboring nations.

Other scholars, such as Kendie (2007), have a different viewpoint. He contends that the attempt to control the region's limited resources and economic interests have been the main drivers of interactions between Ethiopia and Somalia. These interests include the fight for fresh nomad grazing pastures and water wells, the unease Somalia has over the Juba and Shabelle rivers because they originate in Ethiopia, and above all the discovery of oil and gas in the Ogaden, which has frequently fuelled territorial disputes between Ethiopia and Somalia.

Furthermore, the Scholarly Argument about the nature of the relations between Somalia and Ethiopia does not stop there. There are some scholars who have different view than the two mentioned above; these scholars believe that the geographical features of the two countries

mainly determined Somalia-Ethiopia Relations. According to (Zoppi, 2015) and (Mutua, 1995) the way the European powers divided African states and arbitrated artificial borders caused a lot of tension between African countries. Since Somalia was split into five parts by Colonial powers, Somalis who were dispersed in the region found themselves in countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia. Hence, to bring the territories lost back has been the core of Somalia's foreign policy towards its neighbors particularly Kenya and Ethiopia..

Since independence, the borders between Somalia and its neighbors have sparked Conflicts between Somalis living in Somalia and those living abroad. The Ogadeni Somali in Ethiopia asserts that they belong to the colonialist-divided Somalia nation. The two major Ogaden Wars in 1964 and 1977, as well as the many conflicts between Ethiopia and Somalia, were caused by Somali policies to establish a Greater Somalia that would include Somali ethnic people residing in the "lost land." To date, there has been no resolution to the border disputes between Somalia and its neighbors, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti (Simmons, 1996).

The HarakatShabaab Al-Mujahidin, also known to the international community as Al-Shabaab , is a terrorist organization that emerged through decades of conflict and instability in Somalia. Al-Shabaab advancement as a terrorist organization has evolved in two stages, according to Hansen (Hansen, 2016). The first phase focuses on the early years of those members who were initially affiliated with the Islamic Courts Union but eventually joined Al-Shabaab. This time frame, which Hansen calls the "old Al-Shabaab," spanned 1992 to 2007. The second stage of the organization's creation, the Al-Shabaab, was formed in 2007 when the Islamist Courts Union (ICU) was overthrown. It is composed of young jihadists who want to enforce strict Sharia rule (National Counterterrorism Center, 2014).In Somalia, the ICU was tasked with resolving clan disputes and complaints. Between the late 1990s and the beginning of 2006, the ICU served as a

court for Somali nationals and facilitated economic dealings. Another group within Somalia with military capabilities was the ICU. Armed militias that served as the ICU helped build partnerships and ensure the safety of Somalia's economic community (Ahmed, 2017).

Historically, the ICU was not the only faction operational in Somalia, competing for control. Somalia was a battleground for various groups, including Al-Itihaad Al-Islamiya. Al-Itihaad Al-Islamiya was one of the several factions that fought in Somalia. Between 1984 to the beginning of 1997, the Al-Itihaad Al-Islamiya was active in Somalia. According to Joseph et al. (2018), members of AIAI held the belief that "Islam should be the force that binds and guides the nation and that everyone should follow closely in the path of Allah, and peace will return to a troubled land." In Somalia, AIAI was en route to implement Islamic Sharia law (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019). Due to ongoing conflicts with the country's opposition organizations and then-president Siad Barre and his government, accomplishing this would be difficult. Due to rival factions vying for control, Somalia's civil war broke out in 1991. Similar to the majority of Somali society, the government was dominated by clan-based loyalties prior to the Said Barre rule. Corruption by government officials connected to their various clans led to the Somalia civil war (Joseph et al., 2018).

After the civil war and the fall of the Siad Barre regime, the AIAI focused their attention on whom they believed to be their enemy, Ethiopia, at the time. The military group, which the AIAI viewed as an enemy state, started protecting itself from Ethiopian soldiers and their influence in Somalia, which led to Ethiopia's invasion of the country in 2002. Since the AIAI lost this conflict, the group changed its identity from that of an extremist militant organization to that of a political party. Not every AIAI participant went on to assume this political position. A large number of these individuals joined the intensive care unit and then joined Al-Shabaab. Upon

joining the ICU, AIAI members carried their radical Islamic beliefs with them (Mapping Militant Organizations, 2019).

International tensions increased when the AIAI disbanded and the ICU began to govern itself informally. International attention has been focused on Somalia as a result of the ongoing conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea. From 2004 to 2012, Somalia was ruled by the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which Ethiopia backed. Eritrea provided support to several Somali resistance factions. Consequently, Ethiopia and Eritrea's presence inside Somalia forged direct and indirect relationships. Eritrea directly supplied ICU members and rebel forces with financial support, along with the delivery of arms and ammunition. The UN Monitoring Team believes Eritrea's actions were an effort to gain support within Somalia to fight Ethiopia without physically entering Somalia. Indirectly, members of the ICU, who later transitioned to become Al-Shabaab six members, observed these events (Kellar,2024). Al-Shabaab would take the knowledge and information acquired during their time in the ICU to evade the international community upon their rise to power. Ethiopia directly armed rebel forces inside Somalia, along with a complete invasion of its military forces into the country; individuals in rebel forces had no significant ties to either opposing side but supported whatever side would exchange benefits in return for their cooperation. Somalia became a warfare zone once again (Abdi , 2021).

Somalia's government had been weakened, but the international community was at a standstill with the overflow of violence and corruption and no formal or stable government in power to address the growing security concerns, In 2002, the United States established a CIA mission in collaboration with Ethiopia to recruit warlords to spy for them, as there was no effective way to send aid. In the early 2000s, Somalia lacked government representation, and there was no reporting of activities occurring within the country. The CIA's partnered missions with warlords

had two objectives: the warlords were to assist the CIA in locating Al-Qaeda members who were hiding inside Somalia, and the warlords were to unite in order to eliminate and combat any jihadist organization within Somalia (Joseph et al., 2018, p. 26).

When the ICU attacked the bases where the warlords helping the CIA were stationed with Eritrea's assistance, the CIA's hopes of a successful mission took a turn for the worse. By committing crimes that increased regional violence, recruited warlords, according to Joseph and Kellar, added to the unrest in Somalia. This includes trafficking in weapons and violent crimes against Somali citizens. ICU members opposed this and fought a war against these warlords, thus overthrowing them and starting the process of reestablishing order. Once in power, the ICU successfully “restored order, and within a matter of weeks they had accomplished some positives crime fell, roads and ports were reopened, and long absent, sorely needed services like trash collection began to operate” (Joseph et al;2018 p.28).

In 2004, the ICU battled against Ethiopian forces. The ICU militia forces contained members of the ICU and members who, at this time, pledged their allegiance to Al-Shabaab. The conflict between the ICU and Ethiopia arose from Ethiopia's disapproval of the ICU's presence in Somalia, which it believed was contributing to the growth of Islamist forces near its borders, posing a security risk (Joseph et al., 2018, p. 29). The ICU forces lost the conflict with Ethiopia, but Al-Shabaab gained recognition. Both groups knew they were outnumbered and lacked the weapons that Ethiopian troops had, but because they demonstrated their ability to take on a powerful force, Somalis praised their efforts and gave Al-Shabaab the recognition it needed to establish itself as a legitimate force (Weber, 2015, p.16).

Various scholars have studied Al-Shabaab. Scholars Ken Menkhaus, Aisha Ahmed, and StigJarle Hansen have written about what they believe to be the variables that account for Al-Shabaab's existence and persistence. They use Somali culture and other influences to examine Al-Shabaab's distinctiveness. Al-Shabaab's organizational structure is largely shaped by Somali clan tradition, according to Hansen (Hansen, 2016).

According to Hansen, the reason Al-Shabaab is able to survive in Somalia is because of the country's strong ties to clan structure and culture. Hansen is aware that Al-Shabaab does not function or participate in clan politics, but he points out that the group would be unable to function without its clan affiliations. Through the prism of foreign action, Hansen's initial evaluation of Al-Shabaab and its clan affiliations is scrutinized. The military actions of foreign troops that invaded Somalia increased instability, which was the opposite of what Ethiopia and other foreign powers had hoped would happen. Al-Shabaab, according to Hansen, was created as a result of international interference. According to Hansen, "a fertile environment for recruitment among some clans" was established by the Ethiopian invasion (Hansen, 2016, p.49). Ethiopia's use of excessive military force paved the way for Al-Shabaab to become an avenger for Somali citizens (Hansen, 2016, p. 50). Al-Shabaab then leveraged its built-in tribal links to manage the intricate dynamics of clan grievances. Hansen argues that exploiting clan grievances as a tactic was only seldom beneficial. Al-Shabaab's Hansen claims to play the clan game with "two faces." The first face is clannish, while the second is anti-clannish (Hansen, 2016, p. 80).

Al-Shabab would use clan conflicts to present themselves as mediators. In addition to resolving these conflicts, Al-Shabaab obtained control over territories, which allowed it to expand and develop organized structures. As another approach of fighting clan politics, Al-Shabaab will promote clan elders to leadership posts inside the group who share similar ideas (Menkhaus,

2006, p.31). Hansen believes that the organization's Amniyat network was extremely helpful with this endeavor. Somali residents relied on clan elders to resolve judicial problems; with Al-Shabaab established as a formal government, the organization seemed to have gained support or legitimacy. However, Hansen emphasizes that none of this matter to clans unless Al-Shabaab has local strength (Hansen, 2016, p.89). Hansen makes it clear that the use of clan militias in battle is not unique to Al-Shabaab, but has also been utilized as an offensive measure by AU Troops and other actors such as the United States. Hansen believes that this could help defeat Al-Shabaab (Hansen, 2023). Ken Menkhaus examines Al-Shabaab's success in Somalia, attributing it to the group's ability to exploit the socio-political vulnerabilities of Somalia's economy and governance. He highlights Al-Shabaab's strategic use of media, recruitment, and the weaknesses of the Somali government. Operating in an ungoverned environment has posed both advantages and challenges for the group. Since the defeat of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), Al-Shabaab has governed informally, an ability Menkhaus links to the 1991 Somali civil war. He emphasizes that Al-Shabaab's presence and the struggles of Somali communities stem from state failure. Somali communities, according to Menkhaus, often resort to re-establishing order through traditional authority and customary law (Menkhaus, 2014, p. 144). Menkhaus notes that clan leaders, under Al-Shabaab rule, were constrained and relied on the group to address community issues (Menkhaus, 2014, p. 147). Despite Al-Shabaab influence, Menkhaus is skeptical about the group's long-term sustainability, predicting its decline over time. This contrasts with Hansen and Anderson, who view Al-Shabaab as an escalating threat to Somali security.

Ahmed complements this analysis by exploring the intersection of Islamists and economic activity in unstable regions. He argues that Islamist groups navigate security markets effectively, offering affordable security solutions to businesses in conflict zones. Ahmed explains that

Islamists transcend ethnic and tribal divisions, leveraging Islam to foster trust and facilitate business (Ahmed, 2014, p. 2). He concludes that the rational interests of business elites contributed to the rise of Islamist power, particularly in Somalia. Together, Menkhaus and Ahmed highlight how socio-political dynamics and economic strategies have shaped Al-Shabaab rise and influence in Somalia.

These all above scholars all agree on one point:the conflict in Somalia and Al-Shabaab's resilience are motivated by the self-interests of Somali individuals, governments, and groups. These people include clan leaders, business elites, and government officials. These people develop direct and indirect relationships with Al-Shabaab and their affiliates out of self-interest. AMISOM, clans, and local authorities had direct relationships, which included cooperative agreements. These exchanges gave operational support and the ability to give protection to local Somali communities, but they also allowed for partiality and corruption. Indirect linkages form as a result of unforeseen events such as social interactions and sociopolitical and economic instability. Indirect and direct relationships are crucial to Somalia's conflict because they facilitate the effectiveness of international intervention and highlight the impact that these relationships have on terrorist organizations like Al-Shabaab. Al-Shabaab navigates these indirect and direct relationships and manipulates them to its advantage. To further elaborate on this point, I was examined various primary and secondary sources to uncover Al-Shabaab resilience. Instability creates channels where troops tasked with combating the threat of Al-Shabaab become entangled in Somalia's local and political problems.

CHAPTER THREE

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The main goal of this study is to examine Ethiopia-Somalia relations and the role of counterterrorism efforts in addressing the persistent threat of Al-Shabaab. Ethiopia and Somalia consider Al-Shabaab as a major security challenge, impacting both national stability and regional dynamics. The terrorist group continues to pose threats from border areas to key strategic locations. Therefore, this study relies on data collected, analyzed and interpreted to explore the perceptions, strategies, and security measures shaping Ethiopia's response to the Al-Shabaab threat.

This chapter discusses the philosophical paradigm, research approach and design, sampling techniques, data sources and collection tools, data analysis methods, and ethical considerations.

3.2 Philosophical Paradigm

This study is grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, "Interpretivism is an epistemological position that requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action."(Bryman,2016). This approach emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through human interactions and shaped by cultural, historical, and social contexts (Schwandt, 1994).

In the context of Ethiopia-Somalia relations and the threat of Al-Shabaab, the interpretivist paradigm allows for an exploration of how different actors perceive and respond to regional security issues (Creswell, 2013). Unlike positivist approaches, which seek objective truths,

interpretivism recognizes that security policies, counterterrorism strategies, and diplomatic relations are influenced by subjective interpretations and political narratives (Neuman, 2014).

Additionally, as Bryman (2016) argues, the value of interpretivism in social science is essential to comprehend institutional activities in sociopolitical circumstances. Through the use of these philosophical frameworks, which seek to understand social reality through the subjective meanings individuals assign to their experiences, this study will assess and shed light on the perceptions and narratives that shape Ethiopia's security strategies and regional stability, offering a more thorough comprehension of the persistent threats posed by Al-Shabaab.

3.3 Research Approach and Design

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the socio-political complexities surrounding Ethiopia-Somalia relations and the persistent threat of Al-shabaab. Qualitative research is particularly useful in understanding decision-making processes and providing detailed insights into human experiences and perceptions. It also facilitates an interpretative approach, allowing the researcher to extract meaning from collected data (Richards, 2006).

The qualitative approach enables respondents to share comprehensive insights into the research problem, unlike quantitative methods that focus on numerical data. It encourages an open-ended approach, which fosters a deeper understanding of the issue. Furthermore, qualitative research recognizes the subjectivity inherent in social studies and embraces multiple perspectives in interpreting findings (Ronald et al., 2007).

According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research involves methods that allow the researcher to interpret, analyze, and predict phenomena through self-reflection and contextual understanding.

As a result, the data collected in this study will be assessed through subjective interpretation to uncover insights into Ethiopia's security strategies and counterterrorism efforts against Al-Shabaab.

This study employs a case study approach to provide a detailed and contextual analysis of Ethiopia-Somalia relations and the associated security threats. A case study, as defined by Kumar (2011), is a research design in which a single case serves as the foundation for drawing broader assumptions through an in-depth investigation. This method is particularly suitable when examining complex socio-political phenomena, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of Ethiopia's counterterrorism efforts and their implications for regional security.

Additionally, this study adopts an exploratory research design to assess Ethiopia's counterterrorism strategies against Al-Shabaab and to understand how security policies shape regional stability. Exploratory research is often used when the goal is to investigate an issue that has not been extensively studied, providing deeper insights into emerging security challenges (Kothari, 2004). Although Al-Shabaab violence and counter terrorism efforts against it have been extensively studied, there's little published work on Ethiopia strategies. Therefore, the exploratory design is a better fit to investigate the subject.

3.4 Data Sources and Collection Tools

To obtain relevant data, this study relies on both primary and secondary sources. Creswell (2013) emphasizes that qualitative research should incorporate multiple data sources, including document reviews, observations, and interviews, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This study employed qualitative data collection methods, including Key Informant Interviews (KII), and document analysis, to gather rich and in-depth information.

According to Rees (1996), qualitative research seeks to explore human experiences and perceptions through extensive engagement with participants in their natural settings. It produces detailed descriptive data that enhance our understanding of individuals' emotions and attitudes. Focus groups and interviews are commonly used in qualitative research, as they allow for an interactive discussion where participants can clarify and elaborate on their perspectives. Rees (1996) further asserts that the essence of qualitative research is to capture people's thoughts and experiences from their own viewpoints rather than imposing the researcher's interpretation.

Regarding key informants, their profile includes intelligence officers, diplomats, military officials, researchers, and civil society representatives. This diverse group of informants provides a comprehensive perspective on Ethiopia-Somalia relations and the challenges posed by Al-Shabaab.

To enhance the depth of analysis, document review is integrated alongside interviews. This includes government policy papers, counterterrorism laws, regional security agreements, and intelligence reports from organizations such as IGAD and the African Union. Media reports, academic research, and NGO publications will also be examined to provide a well-rounded understanding of how Ethiopia's counterterrorism strategies are perceived and implemented. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is essential in qualitative research as it helps validate findings by incorporating official records and expert analyses.

3.5 Sampling Technique

This study will adopt purposive sampling to select key informants with direct experience or expertise in Ethiopia-Somalia relations and counterterrorism. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are chosen based on their knowledge and

relevance to the research questions, ensuring the data collected is rich and context-specific (Patton, 2015). This method allows the researcher to gather insights from individuals directly involved in regional security policies and counterterrorism efforts.

Given the specialized nature of the topic, expert sampling is also used to identify participants with in-depth knowledge of Ethiopia-Somalia relations and counterterrorism. Expert sampling is particularly useful in studies where the required information is limited to a select group of professionals (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

3.7 Data Analysis

This study will use thematic analysis to systematically analyze data collected from interviews and documents. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is particularly suited for interpretivist research, as it focuses on understanding the meanings and narratives constructed by participants, ensuring a rich and detailed exploration of the subject matter.

Additionally, discourse analysis is applied to examine how language and narratives are used by various actors to frame Ethiopia-Somalia relations and Al-Shabaab's activities. Discourse analysis is a critical tool for uncovering underlying assumptions, ideologies, and power dynamics present in policy documents, media reports, and interview responses (Fairclough, 2013). This approach enhances the study's depth by providing insights into the ways in which language shapes perceptions and influences political and security discourses.

3.8 Ethical consideration

This research adheres to key ethical principles to ensure participant safety, dignity, and rights. Informed consent will be obtained, and confidentiality strictly maintained, especially given the

sensitive nature of national security and terrorism. Personal data will be anonymized and securely stored.

An official request will make for interviews and document access, with all questions designed to be neutral and non-offensive. Findings are presented objectively, without bias or misrepresentation. While recognizing Al-Shabaab as a terrorist threat to regional security, the research remains committed to academic neutrality.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the data presentation and analysis of the research. Since the objective of this study is how the Al-Shabaab threat shapes the relationship between Ethiopia and Somalia, it is crucial to the research objective because it examines how a non-state actor like Al-Shabaab acts as both a threat and a catalyst driving cooperation in some areas, while simultaneously fueling mistrust and military confrontations in others. Interviews were conducted with key informants, including intelligence officers, military personnel, diplomats, regional experts, representatives from the African Union, and other relevant individuals. In addition to the firsthand accounts obtained through these, the chapter incorporates additional data from document reviews such as government reports, regional security publications, and credible media sources to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Accordingly, the data presentation and analysis of the above source are discussed in the following four sections/themes, namely: the drivers of cooperation and hostility between Ethiopia and Somalia, Al-Shabaab persistent threat in the region, its impact on bilateral relations, recent movement of al-Shabaab and the prospect of Ethiopia and Somalia relation, and opportunities for enhancing sustainable collaboration between the two states.

The future of Ethiopia–Somalia relations will largely depend on how the threat of Al-Shabaab evolves whether through its containment, escalation, or increased territorial control. A rise in Al-Shabaab's strength could lead to heightened tension and unilateral security actions, while successful counterterrorism efforts may open opportunities for deeper cooperation between the two states. Additionally, the roles of regional administrations like Puntland and Somaliland will

be critical, as their positions toward the federal government and counterterrorism efforts will influence both the trajectory of Al-Shabaab and the broader regional security environment.

4.1 Ethiopia-Somalia Relations: Driving factor for Cooperation and Hostility

A history of rivalry and cooperation has been characterized Ethiopia and Somalia's relationship. Although political tensions, mistrust, and mutual suspicion have frequently fueled animosity between the two countries, there have also been instances of practical cooperation, particularly when it comes to addressing shared security challenges such as terrorism, border instability, and regional threats. The way European powers divided African states and arbitrated artificial borders caused a lot of tension between African countries (Zoppi, 2015). According to an informant, a historian and geopolitical expert from Addis Ababa University, historical memory plays a foundational role in shaping threat perceptions. The “Ogaden War” remains a reference point for Ethiopian security institutions, while Somali irredentist discourse continues to claim the Ogaden as a rightful Somali territory.¹ An informant analyst of Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) in Somalia Desk stated;

One of the primary drivers of hostility between Ethiopia and Somalia has always been rooted in territorial disputes, especially over the Ogaden region. The memory of the 1977–78 “Ogaden War” is still present in national narratives on both sides. Ethiopia views the region as an integral part of its national territory, while some Somali political actors have continued to advance irredentist rhetoric, calling for the unification of all Somali-inhabited territories²

¹ KII – 04, March 10 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

² KII – 01, February 17 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Even after the formal end of the "Ogaden War" in 1978, relations between Ethiopia and Somalia remained fraught with tension, descending into what can be characterized as a protracted stalemate. Following its defeat in the Ogaden, the Ethiopian Derg regime, recognizing growing instability within Somalia, began to back anti-Barre factions and various separatist movements, shifting from a strategy of containment to one of active destabilization (Al Jazeera, 2020, August 5). Ismail Abdi horn of Africa institute researcher argues historical grievances especially the unresolved legacy of the Ogaden War and competing territorial claims remain a persistent source of hostility (Ismail, 2024).

Foreign powers, particularly Gulf countries, are fanning the flames of rivalry in Somalia and deepening tensions with Ethiopia, which has its own ambitions on the Red Sea. The growing entanglement of Middle Eastern actors notably the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey in the Horn of Africa's already fragile political landscape reflects strategic rivalries and competing alignments. These powers, each pursuing their own geopolitical interests, have created layers of proxy competition that have intensified mistrust between Ethiopia and Somalia (Crisis Group, 2019, September 19).

In recent time, the change of leadership dramatically changed the Ethio- Somalia relations. However, both tried to resume formal bilateral relationships. On May 15, 2022, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected President, succeeding Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo, Premier Abiy's ally (Roba&Selam, 2021). According to an informant from African Union, Coordinator of the East Africa Desk, Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department, leadership transitions have significantly shaped the nature of Ethio-Somali relations, often marking the line between cooperation and hostility. Under previous administrations, there were efforts albeit limited toward diplomatic engagement and regional collaboration. However, the current leadership in

both countries has brought more assertive and nationalistic agendas. For example, Ethiopia's move to sign the January 2024 MoU with Somaliland reflects Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's bold regional strategy, while President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's government has responded with strong opposition, emphasizing sovereignty and territorial integrity. This shift from cautious cooperation to open diplomatic tension underscores how leadership change can act as a critical driver of hostility in the Horn of Africa.³

In 2024 interview, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud accused Ethiopia of attempting to annex "part of Somalia's territory" by signing a sea access deal with Somaliland, which Somalia considers its own. He asserted that Somalia will not yield to pressure on the breakaway region, and emphasized that Ethiopia's actions were a blatant violation of Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This stance reflects the deep-seated tensions between the two nations over territorial claims and regional autonomy (Al Jazeera, 2024, February 17). Former Somali Foreign Minister Ambassador Yusuf emphasizes the sovereignty issue as the most sensitive trigger. Referring to the 2024 Ethiopia-Somaliland MoU, He explains, *Somalia perceives Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland as a direct challenge to its unity and territorial integrity. No cooperation can succeed if that red line is crossed* (Yusuf, 2024).

According to the informant, who is an Intelligence Expert at the Counterterrorism Department of the Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), the biggest challenge to Ethiopia-Somalia relations is mutual suspicion. Somalia often interprets Ethiopia's engagement as politically motivated either as an attempt to assert regional dominance or to influence Somalia's internal politics. On the other hand, Ethiopia views Somalia's internal fragmentation

³Interview with SalvatorNkeshimana(PhD) African Union, Coordinator of the East Africa Desk, Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department (07 March, 2025).

as a potential threat, particularly through the activities of radical groups or the formation of destabilizing alliances. Thus, despite maintaining formal diplomatic relations, deep-rooted nationalist and strategic rivalries persist between the two nations.⁴ Based on the above, we infer Ethio–Somali hostility is driven by a legacy of rivalry rooted in the Ogaden conflict, ongoing territorial disputes, and leadership shifts that revive nationalist agendas. Foreign involvement by actors like the UAE, Qatar, and Turkey deepens mistrust, while unresolved grievances continue to hinder diplomatic progress.

Despite the prevailing pattern of hostility, there have been instances of cooperation between the two countries. The shared threat of Al-Shabaab, particularly in the post-2006 period, led to a degree of security cooperation, with Ethiopian forces participating in the African Union Mission in Somalia/ African Union Transitional Mission in Somalia (AMISOM/ATMIS) and conducting joint operations against the militant group. Furthermore, the rise of Abiy Ahmed as Prime Minister of Ethiopia in 2018 initially ushered in a period of improved diplomatic relations, characterized by a focus on regional integration and cooperation. However, proved to be short-lived, as new sources of tension emerged (Tigire, & Kefale, 2025).

Security interdependence tends to be more intense within regions than between them. This happens because neighboring states are more likely to affect each other's security through geographic proximity, historical ties, and shared threats. As a result, regions form relatively autonomous security subsystems where the main concerns and interactions are localized, even though external powers can still influence them (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). One of the key driving factors for cooperation between Ethiopia and Somalia has been the two countries' shared interest

⁴ KII – 02, February 18, 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

in addressing security challenges. The first and most prominent of these is the joint effort to combat extremist and terrorist groups operating in Somalia. Ethiopia has long perceived the presence of such groups, particularly Al-Shabaab, as a direct threat to its national security. This perception has been shaped by several cross-border incidents, including hotel bombings, assassination attempts, and other terrorist activities linked to Somali-based extremists. As a result, Ethiopia has actively participated in regional and international security operations aimed at stabilizing Somalia (Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation, 2017).

The second external driver has been Ethiopia's support for rebuilding a functioning central government in Somalia. Beyond security concerns, this effort is partly rooted in historical ties and a sense of gratitude. During the armed struggle that eventually led to the fall of the Derg regime, Somalia extended crucial support to Ethiopian opposition groups. This historical solidarity created a lasting impression on Ethiopian policymakers in the post-1991 period, encouraging a policy of constructive engagement and support for Somalia's peace-building and state-rebuilding processes (ibid).

Cooperation between Ethiopia and Somalia is primarily driven by mutual security concerns, particularly the shared threat of Al-Shabaab, which compels both countries to work together despite deep-rooted political tensions. Key informants consistently emphasized that terrorism, particularly from Al-Shabaab, has become a critical point of convergence for both governments. A senior intelligence analyst from Ethiopia's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) explained that operational coordination, especially along the Ethiopia–Somalia border, has become essential in tracking militant movements and preventing cross-border attacks. “Al-

Shabaab doesn't respect borders," he stated, "so we can't afford to work in silos if we want to ensure regional stability."⁵

According to the informant, highlighted the AU's ongoing efforts to sustain dialogue and promote cooperative counterterrorism initiatives, noting that shared threats demand shared solutions, particularly within frameworks like ATMIS and its successor, AUSSOM.⁶ As one diplomat from the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained, bilateral cooperation is as much about fighting terrorism as it is about aligning on trade and development goals through IGAD and AU platforms.⁷ Ethiopia and Somalia have worked closely together in response to regional humanitarian crises, such as the 2017 East Africa drought. Both nations, in collaboration with international partners like the United Nations, World Food Programme (WFP), and African Union (AU), coordinated the distribution of humanitarian aid to alleviate the effects of food insecurity, water shortages, and displacement. Ethiopia, as a host country, provided refuge to Somali nationals fleeing the drought and conflict, ensuring access to critical resources. Additionally, through regional frameworks like IGAD, the two countries have developed long-term strategies aimed at improving drought resilience and managing cross-border refugee populations (ibid).⁸

Media reports support this perspective. The Guardian (2024) noted that Ethiopian forces operating within ATMIS have conducted joint raids against Al-Shabaab hideouts with Somali National Army (SNA) units. This operational collaboration has reportedly disrupted supply chains and prevented multiple planned attacks along the Ethiopia–Somalia border.

⁵ KII – 01, February 17, 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

⁶ Interview with Salvator Nkeshimana (PhD) African Union, Coordinator of the East Africa Desk, Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department (07 March, 2025).

⁷ KII – 05, March 19, 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

⁸ ibid

Documents from the AU Peace and Security Council support these claims, indicating that both countries remain active in AU Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) frameworks, attend joint planning meetings, and contribute to continental counterterrorism strategies. Reuters (2024) and AP News (2025) both report that Somalia responded by threatening to expel Ethiopian troops from ATMIS and by recalling its ambassador. This sequence of events demonstrates how unresolved sovereignty issues can destabilize even functioning security partnerships. From the above data, it is evident that the security threat posed by Al-Shabaab is a major driving factor for cooperation between Ethiopia and Somalia.

In March 2022, Ethiopia and Somalia commenced formal discussions to establish a bilateral trade agreement. The primary objectives were to reduce informal cross-border trade and enhance economic ties. Both nations agreed to form a joint trade committee to facilitate business forums, expert exchanges, and experience-sharing programs, aligning with broader regional integration efforts such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) (Fana Broadcasting Corporate, 2022, March 16). Another time report By January 2023, Ethiopia and Somalia had signed agreements to bolster cooperation in tourism, trade, and transport sectors. These agreements aimed to improve infrastructure connectivity and facilitate the movement of people and goods between the two countries, thereby strengthening economic ties and regional integration (Fana Broadcasting Corporate, 2023, January 10). The reports indicate that the economic, trade, and tourism sectors are key driving factors for cooperation between Ethiopia and Somalia.

Both Ethiopia and Somalia face challenges with porous borders that facilitate the smuggling of goods like kchat and livestock. In response, both countries have increased cooperation in border security and law enforcement. Joint border patrols, intelligence sharing, and coordinated

enforcement efforts have been established to tackle illegal trade routes. For example, in Ethiopia side in 2022, Ethiopia's Ministry of Trade revoked several business licenses for kchat exporters involved in illicit trade, demonstrating the country's focus on formalizing and regulating the trade (Addis Standard 2022).

Research indicates that Ethiopia loses between \$250 million and \$300 million annually due to the informal export of live animals through its eastern borders, with Somalia being a primary destination. Approximately 86% of this trade occurs informally, bypassing official channels and regulations (Ethiopian News Agency 2023, December 27). On kchat also Ethiopia's formal kchat export sector has faced substantial losses due to illegal trade. In the 2022/23 fiscal year, the country earned \$248.2 million from kchat exports, a decrease of \$144 million from the previous year. This decline is attributed to illicit traders bypassing official checkpoints and selling kchat at lower prices in Somalia's border towns (Capital Ethiopia, 2023, November 13). For minimizing these lose Ethiopia and Somalia collaborates to combat and regulate cross-border illegal trade.

4.2 Al-Shabaab as a Persistent Threat in the Region

Understanding why Al-Shabaab continues to pose a significant threat in the Horn of Africa is critical to analyzing the dynamics of Ethiopia–Somalia relations and the broader regional security landscape. Despite sustained military offensives, international interventions, and counterterrorism frameworks, the group remains operationally resilient and ideologically influential. This persistence demands closer examination because it directly shapes policy decisions, regional alliances, and bilateral cooperation between Ethiopia and Somalia. Al-Shabaab survival is not solely due to military capacity but is also rooted in structural challenges, including weak governance, socio-economic marginalization, regional rivalries, and ideological narratives.

Gaibulloev, Piazza, and Sandler (2024) argue failed or fragile states provide safe havens that enhance terrorist group survival by reducing government-led counterterrorism efforts and facilitating recruitment. Long-term resilience is fostered by terrorist organizations' ability to integrate into local communities when there are weak institutions in place. Similar to this, according to an informant from Africa Union East Africa Desk Coordinator, Somalia's ongoing governance vacuum has provided fertile ground for the group's survival: In many parts of southern Somalia, Al-Shabaab provides more predictable governance than the federal government. They run courts, schools, and collect taxes with consistency that the state cannot match. According to the informant;

Look, let's be honest, one of the main reasons Al-Shabaab continues to survive is because of the deep-rooted fragility of the Somali state. I mean, how do you expect to eliminate a militant group when the government can barely control its own territory? In many rural areas, there's zero presence of the federal government. No administration, no security forces, nothing, that vacuum, it gives Al-Shabaab free room to operate, recruit, and even tax people. They become the authority by default not necessarily because people love them, but because there's no alternative. They're smart too; they use that fragility to their advantage. They exploit clan divisions, bribe local leaders, and offer a sense of 'order, even if it's through fear and violence. But still, in the absence of a functioning state, that's enough for some communities, until Somalia rebuilds strong, inclusive, and legitimate institutions, this group will always find a way to survive, no matter how many drone strikes or military offensives are launched.⁹

⁹ Interview with SalvatorNkeshimana (PhD) African Union, Coordinator of the East Africa Desk, Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department (07 March, 2025).

The Hiraal Institute, Somalia's independent security think tank, argues in its group report that clan rivalries remain one of the critical factors contributing to Al-Shabaab continued survival and operational resilience in Somalia. The government's strategy of arming clan-based militias to counter the group though intended to support local security has unintentionally deepened inter-clan tensions. These rivalries have diverted attention and resources away from the fight against Al-Shabaab, as militias often prioritize local disputes over confronting the militant threat. In some areas, disaffected clans have even cooperated with or tolerated Al-Shabaab as a counterbalance to rival clans or state forces, further complicating stabilization efforts. This fragmentation has weakened the overall security architecture, allowing Al-Shabaab to exploit local grievances and re-establish influence in contested territories (Hiraal Institute, 2024, May 15).

Al-Shabaab has effectively capitalized on clan rivalries to advance its influence in central Somalia, particularly in the Hiiraan region. In May 2024 inter-clan fighting between the Hawadle and Abgaal clans, which left six people dead near the border of Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle, was reportedly instigated by Al-Shabaab. According to local authorities, the militant group deliberately fueled tensions between these previously peaceful communities to destabilize the region and undermine coordinated efforts against its insurgency. This strategy not only weakens local governance structures but also diverts attention from anti-terror operations, allowing Al-Shabaab to regroup and expand its operational space (Hiiraan Online, 2024).

According to an informant the Intelligence Expert from NISS Counterterrorism Department, "They collect millions of dollars annually through illegal taxation, extortion, and controlling

supply chains, especially the livestock trade and charcoal smuggling.¹⁰ This view aligns with findings in the UN Security Council Report (2023), which estimates Al-Shabaab annual revenue at over \$100 million, making it one of the world's most economically self-reliant terrorist organizations. The group's financial networks extend into urban centers, including Mogadishu, where businesses pay "protection fees" even in government-controlled areas.

Al-Shabaab receives significant financial support from a transnational network of business entities and individuals operating across the Horn of Africa, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Cyprus, Kenya, Uganda, and Finland. According to a March 2024 report by the U.S. Department of the Treasury, this network includes companies like Haleel Group and Qemat Al Najah General Trading, which launder and transfer millions of dollars through branches in Somalia, Kenya, and Cyprus. Some entities, like Crown Bus Services in Kenya, have also been used for logistical support. In response, the U.S. government designated 16 individuals and entities under Executive Order for materially assisting Al-Shabaab, blocking their assets and prohibiting any financial dealings with them. This action highlights how foreign actors and legitimate-looking businesses are deeply involved in sustaining Al-Shabaab's operations beyond Somalia (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2024, March 11).

Recent analyses highlight that civilian harm caused by international forces and government actions in Somalia has inadvertently contributed to Al-Shabaab's resilience. The European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) notes that grievances stemming from clan discrimination, abuses, and corruption of local authorities have been reported as key motives for joining the organization. Such grievances, often exacerbated by civilian casualties, erode public trust in the

¹⁰ KII – 02, February 18 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

government, creating an environment where Al-Shabaab can exploit these sentiments to gain support (European Union Agency for Asylum, 2023).

Annual Human Rights Report by the Coalition of Somali Human Rights Defenders (CSHRD) offers critical insight into how civilian casualties contribute to the persistence and survival of Al-Shabaab. The report details how military operations particularly indiscriminate drone strikes, shelling, and armed clashes involving both international forces and Somali government troops resulted in the deaths of at least 370 civilians across regions such as Raaskambooni, Hiiraan, and Galkayo. These incidents not only cause widespread human suffering but also undermine the legitimacy of the Somali government and its allies in the eyes of the population. This dynamic enables the group to maintain support and legitimacy in affected communities, not through ideological appeal, but as a response to state failure and insecurity (Coalition of Somali Human Rights Defenders, 2024).

The Historian and Geopolitical Expert from AAU contextualized Al-Shabaab rise within the historical continuum of Somali resistance movements. Al-Shabaab is the latest iteration of Somali Islamist mobilization. If you study Somali history, movements like these gain legitimacy by filling voids created by external intervention and internal collapse. This long view reflects a broader understanding that defeating Al-Shabaab requires more than security solutions it requires structural transformation.¹¹

The Officer from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted Ethiopia's specific vulnerability due to geographic proximity and shared ethnic communities: "Our Somali region shares familial, cultural and commercial ties with areas controlled by Al-Shabaab. This complicates intelligence-

¹¹ KII – 04, March 10 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

gathering and border control. The threat is not just military, it's social and political. This highlights why Al-Shabaab influence extends beyond Somalia's borders into Ethiopia and Kenya, making it a regional, not merely national, challenge.¹²

According to one of my key informant from ministry defense one of the major challenges in countering Al-Shabaab is the lack of effective coordination among regional and international actors. During his time in AMISOM and now within Ethiopia's Defense Ministry, the officer observed how fragmented efforts have allowed Al-Shabaab to exploit gaps between national security systems. Each country whether Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, or others often operates based on its own priorities, with limited intelligence sharing and weak joint operational planning. This disunity undermines the overall impact of counterterrorism efforts. A more integrated regional security framework, built on trust and consistent collaboration, is essential for dismantling Al-Shabaab network and preventing their cross-border movements.¹³ Al-Shabaab tells to the people that the Somali government is an agent of foreign invaders that Ethiopia is an occupier, and that Western support is part of a crusade against Islam. This narrative is powerful. It speaks to communities that feel ignored, disrespected, or abused by their own state. When they provide justice, services, or even a sense of dignity in areas the state has abandoned, they become more than a terrorist group they become an alternative authority (ibid).¹⁴

Media reports reinforce these insights. VOA News (2023) and BBC Africa (2024) reported recent incursions by Al-Shabaab into Ethiopian territory, including an attempt to establish footholds in the Somali region during Ethiopia's internal political turbulence. These

¹² KII – 05, March 19 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

¹³ KII – 05, March 19 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

¹⁴ ibid

developments underline the group's opportunism and ability to exploit regional instability, including interethnic conflicts, refugee movements, and porous borders

4.3 The Impact of Al-Shabaab on Ethio–Somali Relations

Understanding the impact of Al-Shabaab on Ethiopia–Somalia relations is essential for grasping how regional security threats shape bilateral diplomacy, military cooperation, and geopolitical tensions. As a persistent and adaptive terrorist organization, Al-Shabaab has not only destabilized Somalia internally but has also played a direct role in influencing Ethiopia's foreign and defense policy toward its neighbor. By analyzing the group's influence on political decisions, joint security operations, and mutual perceptions of sovereignty and intervention, this chapter provides insight into the broader patterns of hostility and collaboration that define Ethiopia–Somalia relations today. The analysis draws on key informant interviews, government and intergovernmental reports, and academic literature to offer a comprehensive understanding of Al-Shabaab's role in reshaping bilateral relations in the Horn of Africa.

Constructivist theory, as articulated by Alexander Wendt (1999), emphasizes that states behave differently toward friends and enemies based on their perceptions of threat, which are shaped by shared understandings and collective identities. In this context, the way Ethiopia and Somalia perceive Al-Shabaab as a common security threat has become a significant factor influencing whether their relationship tends toward hostility or cooperation.

According to the informant claimed that Al-Shabaab is not just a terrorist group. It's also become a geopolitical factor shaping the Ethio–Somali relationship. On the one hand, their operations have forced both countries to collaborate. For instance, we've significantly increased intelligence exchange and joint border monitoring in recent years. That level of coordination wouldn't have

happened without the constant threat Al-Shabaab poses to both sides of the border. "But on the other hand, this cooperation is not free of complications. In Somalia, there's a deep sensitivity about foreign intervention especially when it comes from Ethiopia. So, while we may be working together operationally, politically there's a lot of mistrust. Al-Shabaab exploits that mistrust. Every time Ethiopia takes action whether it's deploying troops or making independent security arrangement Al-Shabaab turns around and uses it in their propaganda, telling Somalis that we're trying to dominate or occupy their land. ¹⁵*So yes, ironically, the group forces us to cooperate, but they also deepen old suspicions. The historical memory of conflict, especially the "Ogaden War" and past interventions, is still very present in Somali political consciousness. Al-Shabaab taps into that with skill. That's why I say they are both a threat and a driver.* They push us closer in terms of tactical coordination, but they keep us apart when it comes to building long-term strategic trust. ¹⁶

Al-Shabaab has also deepened political suspicion between Ethiopia and Somalia. The group thrives on narratives of occupation and sovereignty violations claims it amplifies through propaganda when Ethiopian forces are perceived as operating unilaterally or in violation of Somalia's territorial integrity. The Intelligence Expert from NISS emphasized this, who stated: "Every time we act inside Somalia even when coordinated it becomes fuel for Al-Shabaab.¹⁷ Al-Shabaab as foreign aggressors to recruit youth and rally clan support," This dynamic came into sharp relief during the fallout from the 2024 Ethiopia-Somaliland MOU, when Somalia's federal government viewed Ethiopia's engagement with Somaliland as a direct threat to its sovereignty. In response, Somali leaders accused Ethiopia of undermining national unity accusations that Al-

¹⁵ KII – 01, February 17 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

¹⁶ KII – 04, March 10 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

¹⁷ KII – 02, February 18 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Shabaab quickly weaponized in its messaging. The Eurasia Review (2024) and AP News (2024) both reported that Al-Shabaab increased its recruitment campaigns following the diplomatic fallout, capitalizing on heightened nationalist sentiment and distrust toward Addis Ababa.

Former AMISOM Officer, now stationed in Ethiopia's Ministry of Defense explained: Al-Shabaab used this diplomatic fallout in its propaganda to further discredit both Mogadishu and Addis Ababa, painting the Ethiopian military as occupiers and the Somali government as weak collaborators. From this we understand the presence and operations of Al-Shabaab have played a significant role in both shaping and complicating the relationship between Ethiopia and Somalia. As a transnational jihadist group with regional aspirations, Al-Shabaab does not merely represent a security challenge it also functions as a political disruptor and a symbol of contested narratives in the Horn of Africa. From this perspective, the group's influence extends beyond Somalia's borders and has deeply affected how Ethiopia views its neighbor, interacts with Somali leadership, and engages in regional diplomacy and counterterrorism.

In the interview conducted by Somali-British journalist Jamal Osman, Sheikh Ali Dhere, Al-Shabaab's spokesperson, expressed a deeply adversarial stance toward Ethiopia, framing the country not only as a geopolitical rival but also as an existential threat to Somalia's Islamic identity. He portrayed Ethiopia's military presence in Somalia as an act of aggression rather than peacekeeping, accusing it of undermining Somali sovereignty and advancing a broader anti-Islamic agenda. From his perspective, Ethiopia represents part of a hostile alliance determined to suppress Islam and dominate Somali territory. Al-Shabaab, he asserted, views armed resistance against Ethiopia as a religious duty, justified by what he sees as Ethiopia's continued occupation and hostility toward the Muslim population (Osman, 2013, November 27). This shows Al-Shabaab propaganda consistently portrays Ethiopia as a religious, ideological, and military

aggressor, framing its presence as an occupation. This narrative fuels nationalist and Islamist sentiment, especially among the Somali public and diaspora, and fosters deep suspicion within Somali society even among government officials thereby reinforcing hostility in Ethio–Somali relations.

The African Union Peace and Security Council (2023) has echoed these concerns, noting in its quarterly briefing on Somalia that Al-Shabaab is capable of executing cross-border operations and has done so with increasing frequency in the last five years. The group has also been reported to maintain sleeper cells in Ethiopian border towns and has expanded its recruitment to include ethnic Somalis in Ethiopia, thus blurring the distinction between domestic and external threats.

The AU's 2024 AUSSOM transition report confirmed that while Somali National Army (SNA) units have taken over security duties in some former AMISOM-controlled zones, their limited operational capability has allowed Al-Shabaab to regroup and reinforce its presence. Ethiopia, as a major troop contributor to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM and now AUSSOM), has taken the brunt of operational costs and casualties, fueling domestic debates about whether the country is overcommitted without reciprocal political support from Somalia.(African Union, 2024).

These tensions intensified after Ethiopia signed a controversial Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Somaliland in early 2024, granting Ethiopia access to the Red Sea via the Port of Berbera. Somalia's federal government denounced the agreement, interpreting it as a violation of Somali sovereignty. The Former AMISOM Officer, now stationed in Ethiopia's Ministry of Defense (March 24, 2025), explained: Al-Shabaab used this diplomatic fallout in its propaganda

to further discredit both Mogadishu and Addis Ababa, painting the Ethiopian military as occupiers and the Somali government as weak collaborators.

Media reports, such as from Reuters (2024), confirm that Al-Shabaab propaganda increasingly frames Ethiopia as a neo-colonial force in Somalia, especially in its narratives distributed via Al-Kataib Media Foundation. This has created additional challenges for Ethiopian peacekeepers and complicated bilateral diplomatic efforts. The Officer from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered a strategic assessment: "Even when we try to cooperate with Somalia on counterterrorism, Al-Shabaab makes sure the political environment is too toxic. For example, after our joint operation in Bakool in 2023, they released videos blaming us for civilian casualties, undermining both countries' credibility."¹⁸

From a historical and academic perspective, the Historian and Geopolitical Expert from Addis Ababa University contextualized the group's impact within Ethio–Somali history. Al-Shabaab has successfully tied its struggle to Somali nationalist grievances and religious narratives, effectively reviving older irredentist themes. While the Ethiopian state sees it as a terrorist group, many in Somalia especially in rural areas see them as defenders of Somali autonomy. That difference in framing deeply affects how the two states approach security cooperation.¹⁹ These insights are supported by think tank reports such as those from the International Crisis Group (2023), which argue that Al-Shabaab acts as both a combatant and a spoiler in peace-building. By inciting violence during moments of diplomatic negotiation such as Ethiopia–Somalia border talks or AU regional security summits Al-Shabaab ensures that trust between the two nations remains shallow.

¹⁸ KII – 05, March 19 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

¹⁹ KII – 04, March 10 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

4.3.1 Recent Al-Shabaab movement and future Ethiopia-Somalia relation

Since 2018, Al-Shabaab has increasing cross-border attacks along the Ethiopia–Somalia border, and expanding its influence in southern and central Somalia, challenging both Ethiopian and Somali governments. The group has increasingly expanded its operations into Kenya through its regional unit, JayshAyman, which has been responsible for a campaign of attacks in northern Kenya. These operations exploit local grievances and ethnic tensions, especially in Mandera, Wajir, and Garissa counties, where the group has established operational cells and recruitment networks (sahan AFRICA, 2019). In Somalia’s capital, Mogadishu, Al-Shabaab has maintained a steady tempo of attacks targeting civilian and government sites. Notable incidents include a massive truck bombing at a busy checkpoint in January 2019 that killed more than 100 people, and a December 2019 car bombing near a tax collection center that left at least 90 civilians dead (shinn, 2021). In June 2023, the group launched 19 attacks in northeastern Kenya up from just one per month earlier in the year signaling a sharp escalation (Critical Threats, 2023).

Al-Shabaab's shift in focus towards targeting civilians, rather than high-ranking leaders and strategically important cities, has become evident. On February 27, 2025, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed visited Mogadishu, Somalia, under tight security. Shortly before his arrival, mortar shells were fired toward Aden Adde International Airport, with at least one shell reportedly landing in the area. Although there were no reported casualties, the incident highlighted the continued threat of violence in the region (Reuters, 2025). The Somali capital was placed on lockdown ahead of Abiy’s visit, with roads closed and movement restricted to secure the area (Eastleigh Voice, 2025). No group officially claimed responsibility for the mortar attack, but Al-Shabaab is suspected due to its history of similar operations targeting high-profile figures and locations (Garowe Online, 2025).

On March 18, 2025, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud survived an assassination attempt in Mogadishu carried out by the militant group Al-Shabaab. The attack took place near the presidential palace as his convoy was heading to Aden Adde International Airport. A roadside bomb exploded, killing at least four people including journalist Mohamed Abukar Dabashe and injuring others. President Mohamud was unharmed and proceeded with his visit to the Middle Shabelle region to oversee military operations against the insurgents (Hiiraan Online, 2025). Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the bombing, stating that the presidential convoy was their target as it left the palace (Reuters, 2025). The Somali government denounced the bombing as a "cowardly act" and reiterated its determination to continue fighting terrorism (TRT Afrika, 2025).

Al-Shabaab militants in April 2025 intensified their offensive in central Somalia, capturing the strategic town of Adan Yabaal. This town, located approximately 245 kilometers north of Mogadishu, had previously served as a base for Somali government forces. The attack commenced with explosives, followed by ground assaults on multiple fronts. While Al-Shabaab claimed to have captured the town, Somali military officials reported continued fighting and partial control (Reuters, 2025, April 16). In response to the escalating threat, the Somali government has deployed additional security forces, including police and prison guards, to bolster military efforts. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who recently visited Adan Yabaal, emphasized that the loss of a single town does not equate to defeat in the ongoing war (ibid).

Al-Shabaab has intensified its insurgency in Somalia through a series of military offensives, urban attacks, and symbolic assaults on government and civilian targets. In recent months, the group has launched a large-scale offensive in the central regions, including Middle Shabelle, and

temporarily seized control of the Wargaadhi military base after heavy fighting with Somali forces (AP News, 2025).

U.S. intelligence uncovered communications between Yemen's Houthis and Al-Shabaab militants, indicating a growing threat to East African stability. According to a February 2025 UN report, representatives from both groups met twice in Somalia in July and September 2024, during the Red Sea crisis. Experts suggest that the Houthis (Ansar Allah) agreed to provide Al-Shabaab with weapons and technical expertise in exchange for support in piracy and ransom activities in the Gulf of Aden and off the Somali coast (Bojang, 2025, March 19).

The United States' decision to stop supporting the Danab force in Somalia has been a point of contention in recent years. The Danab force, a highly trained Special Forces unit established with American assistance, has been instrumental in countering the threat posed by Al-Shabaab, an extremist group operating in Somalia. However, shifts in U.S. foreign policy, including budgetary constraints, changing strategic priorities, and concerns over human rights, have led to a reevaluation of U.S. military engagement in the region (Reuters, 2024, April 26).

Alongside physical attacks, Al-Shabaab has escalated its propaganda efforts, utilizing platforms such as Twitter, Telegram, and traditional media to amplify its ideological messaging and recruit followers. These communication strategies have been particularly successful due to the weak and fragmented counter-narratives from Somali authorities and international coalitions, allowing the group's narratives to dominate in local and regional media spaces (United Nations Security Council, 2023).

In an interview with a key informant from the African Union specifically, the Coordinator of the East Africa Desk within the Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department a question was

posed about whether Al-Shabaab could potentially take full control of Somalia and how such a development might impact Ethio–Somali relations. Referencing Al-Shabaab recent territorial gains, including their offensive in central Somalia and the capture of Adan Yabaal, the informant was asked whether the group has a realistic chance of seizing national control, and how that might influence bilateral dynamics. The informant responded that if the international community continues to react with the same weak and inconsistent approach, Al-Shabaab might indeed have a credible chance at taking over Somalia. The group's attacks have become increasingly frequent and sophisticated, and if this trend continues, it could result in their dominance over major parts of the country, including potentially the central government. Regarding Ethiopia–Somalia relations under such circumstances, the informant emphasized that outcomes would likely depend on mutual interests. He noted that cooperation might even improve if both sides perceive strategic benefits. As an example, he cited Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham in Syria despite being a designated terrorist group, once they began governing territory and acting like a state, some countries started to engage with them discreetly. Similarly, if Al-Shabaab were to gain power, there remains a possibility that Ethiopia and Somalia could still find common ground for collaboration, depending on the broader geopolitical context.

Conversely, The United States intensified its military operations against Al-Shabaab in Somalia. On April 16, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), in coordination with the Federal Government of Somalia, conducted airstrikes targeting advanced conventional weapons aboard a flagless vessel and a smaller supporting vessel inside Somalia's territorial waters. These weapons were en route to Al-Shabaab militants and posed an imminent threat to both U.S. and partner forces. AFRICOM's initial assessment indicated no civilian casualties resulting from the strike (U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs, 2025, April 18). Additionally, on April 17, joint Somali-U.S.

airstrikes resulted in the deaths of 12 al-Shabaab militants in central Somalia. These strikes occurred shortly after Al-Shabaab's assault on the strategic town of AdanYabaal, approximately 245 kilometers north of Mogadishu. The town had previously served as a base for Somali government forces. The airstrikes also destroyed a ship carrying weapons intended for the al-Qaeda-linked group (Somali Dispatch, 2024, April 28). These operations reflect a broader escalation in U.S. counterterrorism efforts in the region. Under the current administration, there has been a notable increase in airstrikes against terrorist groups in Somalia, including both al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia.

In 2025, President Donald Trump authorized a series of precision airstrikes against Al-Shabaab and ISIS operatives in Somalia. These strikes targeted senior Al-Shabaab and ISIS leaders and their recruits, who were reportedly hiding in caves and planning attacks against the United States and its allies. The operations, conducted by U.S. Africa Command, were coordinated with the Somali government and resulted in the elimination of several terrorists without civilian casualties also he said Somalia will not hide place for any terrorist group (CBS News, 2025). Efforts to disrupt Al-Shabaab financial networks have also intensified. The U.S. Treasury's Terrorist Financing Targeting Center (TFTC) has taken measures to restrict the group's access to global financial systems (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2025).

Turkey has been actively involved in supporting Somalia's security forces through training and infrastructure development. A significant aspect of this cooperation is the establishment of Camp TURKSOM in Mogadishu, Turkey's largest overseas military base. The camp is designed to train and house approximately 1,000 Somali soldiers at a time, with a long-term goal of training over 10,000 personnel. Since its inception, more than 5,000 Somali trainees have graduated from the

facility, including members of the elite Gorgor (Eagle) commando unit, who are trained to combat terrorist groups like al-Shabaab (Anadolu Agency, 2021).

In support of ongoing counterterrorism efforts, a Senior Intelligence Analyst at Ethiopia's National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) stated in an interview that Al-Shabaab is unlikely to gain control over Somalia or establish a functioning government. He attributed this to the sustained and coordinated efforts of neighboring countries such as Ethiopia and Kenya, alongside international partners including the United States, so these combined military and diplomatic interventions will continue to undermine Al-Shabaab capacity to dominate Somalia. He emphasized that these external interventions, both military and diplomatic, would prevent Al-Shabaab from achieving full control. According to him, the coordinated efforts of regional and global actors would continue to challenge the group's ability to dominate Somalia, making it highly unlikely for them to establish a government.²⁰

From the points raised, it is evident that Al-Shabaab has intensified its attacks and shifted its tactics. The group no longer targets only civilians but now focuses on high-level government officials and strategic urban centers. This indicates a significant evolution in their operational approach and ambitions. Another key issue is the declining attention from the international community. Since the administration of President Donald Trump, support for counterterrorism efforts in Somalia has diminished. Financial aid was frozen, and assistance has been largely reduced to occasional airstrikes rather than a comprehensive strategy. Meanwhile, the role of the Turkish government in Somalia has grown substantially. Turkey has increased its military support and training for Somali forces. Although the African Union Mission in Somalia

²⁰ KII – 01, February 17, 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

(ATMIS) continues to operate, its capacity and influence appear limited compared to earlier years.

Considering all these developments, the perspective of Dr. Salvator appears convincing Al-Shabaab may indeed have a realistic chance of taking control of Somalia. The international presence and pressure on the ground have weakened compared to previous years. Al-Shabaab continues to recruit actively within Somalia and is reportedly forging connections with groups such as the Houthis in Yemen. Should Al-Shabaab come to power, there remains a possibility for Ethiopia–Somalia relations to remain cooperative. As Dr. Salvator noted, primarily prevailing national interests would shape such relations. History demonstrates that even when a group is labeled a terrorist organization, pragmatic relations can emerge driven not by ideology but by geopolitical necessity and shared interests.

Even if Al-Shabaab will gain control over central government institutions in Somalia, governing the entire country would remain a significant challenge. This is due to the strong presence of federal member states, each with its own administration and degree of autonomy. These regional governments are unlikely to accept Al-Shabaab's authority, posing a major obstacle to national governance. This tension presents a compelling area for research, particularly in examining the limits of militant group governance in fragmented states like Somalia.

4.4 Enhancing Ethiopia–Somalia Bilateral Relations for Sustainable Security

Enhancing Ethiopia–Somalia bilateral relations is central to achieving sustainable regional security, particularly in the face of persistent threats such as Al-Shabaab and underlying geopolitical tensions. Historically, interactions between the two states have been characterized by mutual suspicion rooted in territorial disputes, ideological divergence, and asymmetric power

dynamics. However, after December 2024 Ankara agreements have witnessed renewed diplomatic and strategic overtures aimed at building cooperative frameworks. These efforts must be consolidated and expanded through institutionalized diplomacy, trust-building mechanisms, economic interdependence, and inclusive security arrangements.

According to the Officer from Ethiopia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs One of the reasons bilateral cooperation often falters is the lack of long-term institutional frameworks. Most engagements are reactive crisis-driven responses that dissolve when the urgency fades.²¹ This insight is consistent with findings from the African Union Peace and Security Council (2023), which emphasizes the importance of transitioning from ad hoc counterterrorism efforts to comprehensive bilateral security pacts that integrate military, diplomatic, and civil society dimensions.

A foundational step in strengthening bilateral ties lies in developing transparent and consistent diplomatic channels. The fallout from Ethiopia's MoU with Somaliland in 2024 underscores the fragility of trust between Addis Ababa and Mogadishu. A Senior Intelligence Analyst at the Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) explained, "We've seen how one misstep like the Somaliland agreement can derail months of progress. What we need is a platform where both parties can express concerns without defaulting to accusations. That's where regional institutions must step in and offer a more structured environment for dialogue."²² In this regard, structured dialogue facilitated by neutral actors such as IGAD, the African Union, or third-party mediators like Turkey as demonstrated in the 2025 Ankara Talks is crucial. These platforms can help prevent crises from escalating and create pathways for conflict resolution around contentious issues such as maritime access and territorial integrity. AU Coordinator of

²¹ KII – 05, March 19 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

²² KII – 01, February 17 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

the East Africa Desk highlighted this during his interview: Sustainable peace is built on predictability. Both states must commit to long-term diplomatic engagement, not just reactive exchanges after security incidents.²³

According to a key informant, beyond political dialogue, expanding economic interdependence is another pillar for sustainable relations. Ethiopia's need for sea access and Somalia's interest in foreign investment and regional trade can be leveraged to foster mutually beneficial agreements. The development of shared infrastructure projects, such as cross-border roads and energy corridors, could create tangible interdependencies that lower the cost of conflict.²⁴ The World Bank (2023) reports that regional infrastructure integration increases trade and reduces the likelihood of armed conflict by promoting shared prosperity

An Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs officer explained said that the Somali economy needs anchor partnerships, and Ethiopia has the market and labor force to drive demand. If we create supply chains that cross the border, local economies become the first line of defense against militancy.²⁵

Cultural diplomacy and people-to-people ties also play an important role. As the Historian and Geopolitical Expert from Addis Ababa University observed, the two societies are not foreign to each other. They've shared migration, trade, and intermarriage for centuries. Grassroots engagement through educational exchange, interfaith dialogues, and joint civil society forums can help rebuild trust where politics has failed.²⁶

²³ Interview with SalvatorNkeshimana (PhD) African Union, Coordinator of the East Africa Desk, Political Affairs, Peace and Security Department (07 March, 2025).

²⁴ KII – 05, March 19 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

²⁵ KII – 05, March 19 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

²⁶ KII – 04, March 10 , 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

From a security standpoint, enhancing bilateral counterterrorism efforts will require deeper intelligence cooperation, cross-border threat assessments, and synchronized law enforcement operations. Ethiopia and Somalia already collaborate under regional frameworks like AUSSOM, but these efforts are often hampered by mutual distrust and inconsistent resource allocation. The Former AMISOM Officer emphasized, "We need joint command centers, not just military deployments. Intelligence fusion cells that operate in real time would transform our capacity to prevent attacks and dismantle cells."²⁷

However, this vision cannot materialize without political will. Both governments must insulate security cooperation from political disputes and commit to confidence-building measures such as information transparency, rules of engagement protocols, and third-party verification mechanisms. Senior Intelligence Analyst at NISS concluded, "We must shift from transactional cooperation where we only talk when there's a crisis to strategic engagement that aligns national interests. Security is not a favor; it's a shared responsibility."²⁸

4.4.1 The Dual Role of Al-Shabaab in Ethiopia–Somalia Relations

This section presents the study's key findings, showing how Ethiopia–Somalia relations shaped by historical conflict, geopolitical rivalry, and Al-Shabaab's dual role as both a destabilizer and a driver of tactical cooperation. Drawing on interviews, literature, and policy documents, it reveals a fragile balance of mistrust and necessity, where non-state actors like Al-Shabaab reshape regional diplomacy beyond traditional state-centered security frameworks.

First, the legacy of conflict, especially the Ogaden War and Somalia's irredentist claims over Ethiopia's Somali Region, continues to serve as a foundational driver of hostility. The Ethiopian

²⁷ KII – 02, February 18, 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

²⁸ KII – 01, February 17, 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) and scholars at Addis Ababa University noted that this conflict left a legacy of deep mistrust, which shapes policy decisions to this day. National identities in both states have been partially constructed in opposition to one another, reinforcing competing territorial narratives and undermining long-term diplomatic trust.

Second, the role of external actors, including Gulf States and Egypt, has exacerbated bilateral tensions by supporting competing factions and pursuing divergent strategic objectives in the Horn of Africa. As several informants pointed out, regional dynamics have turned Somalia into a geopolitical battleground where alliances and rivalries are frequently realigned. Ethiopia's controversial 2024 Memorandum of Understanding with Somaliland viewed by Somalia as a violation of sovereignty further intensified hostility and gave Al-Shabaab an opportunity to exploit nationalist sentiment and portray Ethiopia as an occupying force.

However, the study also finds that Al-Shabaab functions paradoxically as both a destabilizer and a unifying threat. On one hand, the group's cross-border operations have compelled Ethiopia and Somalia to engage in tactical security coordination, particularly in intelligence sharing and joint military responses under frameworks such as AMISOM and AUSSOM. On the other hand, Al-Shabaab propaganda consistently undermines this cooperation by framing Ethiopia's interventions as neo-colonial incursions, thereby reinforcing Somali political sensitivities and complicating trust-building efforts.

Another significant finding is that governance gaps in Somalia are central to Al-Shabaab persistence. Weak state institutions, clan divisions, and socio-economic marginalization have allowed the group to operate as a de facto authority in several regions. Informants from the African Union and the Hiraal Institute underscored how Al-Shabaab offers services, justice, and

security in areas where the federal government is absent gaining legitimacy not through ideology alone but as an alternative to state failure.

Moreover, the study reveals that mutual security dependence has become a key driver for cooperation, despite deep political rifts. Both Ethiopia and Somalia recognize that defeating Al-Shabaab requires collaboration, but their efforts are undermined by a lack of institutionalized frameworks, inconsistent diplomatic engagement, and recurring leadership changes. Informants warned that without mechanisms for long-term strategic engagement, cooperation will remain reactive and fragile.

In sum, the findings suggest that the Ethiopia–Somali relationship is best understood not as a binary of conflict or cooperation but as a fluid continuum shaped by history, identity, external influence, and shared threats. Al-Shabaab has amplified both the urgency for coordination and the barriers to trust. Therefore, any sustainable improvement in bilateral relations will require a deeper reckoning with historical grievances, consistent diplomatic platforms, regional mediation, and inclusive governance reforms in Somalia. So its urgent need for both countries to move beyond reactive counterterrorism and invest in long-term, institutionalized cooperation that addresses root causes like weak governance and regional fragmentation otherwise, the cycle of instability will persist.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the relationship between Ethiopia and Somalia in light of the persistent threat posed by Al-Shabaab. The core objective was to assess how Al-Shabaab has influenced both hostility and cooperation between the two nations, and to examine the structural, political, and social factors that sustain the group's regional presence. Through qualitative methods including key informant interviews and document analysis the study further aimed to evaluate opportunities for strengthening bilateral relations in the face of mutual security challenges.

The findings confirm that Al-Shabaab has become more than a security threat; it is a defining force in Ethiopia–Somalia diplomacy. The group's persistent attacks, propaganda, and ability to exploit governance vacuums have both deepened mistrust and necessitated tactical cooperation. Historical grievances, especially over the Ogaden conflict, continue to shape nationalist sentiments and foreign policy decisions. However, the research also found signs of constructive engagement through shared counterterrorism operations, economic agreements, and humanitarian coordination demonstrating that despite ongoing tensions, avenues for long-term collaboration remain open.

The enduring presence of Al-Shabaab has redefined the contours of regional security and diplomacy in the Horn of Africa, particularly between Ethiopia and Somalia. What began as a localized insurgency has evolved into a transnational actor that challenges the sovereignty, stability, and foreign policy calculations of multiple states in the region. In this shifting

landscape, the Ethiopia–Somalia relationship has emerged as both a site of tension and a potential platform for strategic realignment.

At its core, this research has demonstrated that Ethiopia–Somalia relations cannot be adequately understood through the lens of traditional diplomacy alone. Rather, they exist within a more fluid framework shaped by shared threats, historical grievances, political transitions, and regional competition. Al-Shabaab, as a persistent and adaptive actor, plays a paradoxical role exacerbating mistrust while simultaneously compelling tactical cooperation. This dual role emphasizes the complex interplay between non-state threats and interstate relations in fragile regional contexts.

The increasing scale and sophistication of Al-Shabaab’s operations exemplified by coordinated attacks on leadership targets and border regions as of April 2025 signal a dangerous shift. These actions not only expose weaknesses in national governance and border control but also test the political will and strategic depth of both countries. Ethiopia and Somalia are thus locked into a relationship that is as much about mutual risk as it is about shared opportunity.

While Somalia’s internal fragmentation and Ethiopia’s domestic challenges continue to complicate coherent policy responses, the emergence of new regional actors both state and non-state emphasize the urgency of a recalibrated bilateral approach. The involvement of Gulf States, Turkey, the United States, and armed non-state groups like the Houthis highlights an increasingly congested and competitive strategic environment.

Nevertheless, the prospect of a complete Al-Shabaab takeover remains limited due to internal Somali resilience and lingering international commitments. This precarious balance, however, is unlikely to hold without a fundamental shift in how Ethiopia and Somalia manage their

interdependence. Their future security will depend not on episodic cooperation, but on sustained, institutionalized mechanisms of collaboration that outlast immediate threats.

Ethiopia–Somalia relationship is being reshaped by a shared struggle against a common enemy. If both states can move beyond short-term calculations and embrace a longer-term vision of joint security, they may yet transform vulnerability into strategic strength. The alternative a fragmented response to an adaptive threat would only serve to deepen instability and prolong regional insecurity.

Reference

- Abdi, A. (2019). President Farmajo's Election: A Brief Hiatus or Hype in Ethiopia's Regional Hegemonic Ambition. *Academic and Applied Research in Military and Public Management Science*, 18(2), 5–16.
- Abdi, M. A. (2021). The role of counter narrative in response to youth radicalization in Garissa Township Sub County, Garissa County, Kenya (Doctoral dissertation, Africa Nazarene University).
- Abioye, F. (2019). Terrorist groups in Africa. *Africa Development/AfriqueetDéveloppement*, 44(3), 5–30.
- Agbibo, D. E. (2014). Ties that Bind: The Evolution and Links of Al-Shabab. *The Round Table*, 103(6), 581–597.
- Ahmed, A. (2014). The security bazaar: Business interests and Islamist power in civil war Somalia. *International Security*, 39(3), 89–117.
- Anderson, D. M., & McKnight, J. (2015). Understanding Al-Shabaab: Clan, Islam and insurgency in Kenya. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 9(3), 536–557.
- Anderson, N. (2016). Why victories in battle have not yet finished the war against Al-Shabaab. *Survival*, 58(4), 51–62.
- Bagwell, K., & Staiger, R. W. (2005). Enforcing trade agreements in the presence of renegotiation. *Journal of International Economics*, 70(2), 239–262.

- Berman, E., & Laitin, D. D. (2008). Religion, terrorism and public goods: Testing the club model. *Journal of Public Economics*, 92(10–11), 1942–1967.
- Bjørgero, T., & Horgan, J. (2009). *Leaving terrorism behind: Individual and collective disengagement*. Routledge.
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Bryden, M. (2013). *Somalia redux?: Assessing the new Somali federal government*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bryman, A. (2001). *Social research methods*. Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods (5th ed.)*. Oxford University Press.
- Buzan, B., & Wæver, O. (2003). *Regions and powers: The structure of international security*. Cambridge University Press.
- Callahan, J., Smith, R., & Jones, L. (2017). Decentralized networks and terrorist resilience: A strategic analysis. *Terrorism Studies Journal*, 12(3), 45–67.
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2024). *Ethiopia*. The World Factbook.
- Chris, B., & Ainley, K. (2005). *Understanding international relations (3rd ed.)*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- Clapham, C. (2017). *The Horn of Africa: State formation and decay*. Hurst Publishers.
- Constitution of Somalia.(1960). Article 6, paragraph 4.
- Corner, E., Taylor, H., & Clemmow, C. (2022). Psychological endurance in extremist organizations. *Radicalization Studies Review*, 18(2), 112–128.
- Coutsoukis, P. (2004). Terrorism and insurgency: A comparative analysis. *Global Security Review*, 12(1), 45–60.
- Crawford, J. (2001). Domestic terrorism in the United States. *Journal of Homeland Security*, 4(2), 123–135.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Debisa, N. G. (2021). Security diplomacy as a response to Horn of Africa's security complex: Ethio-US partnership against al-Shabaab. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 7.
- Eichhorn, H. L. (2022). *Islamist Terrorist Organizations in Africa: A Comparative Study of Al-Shabaab and Boko Haram* (Doctoral dissertation, Naval Postgraduate School).
- Elmi, A. A. (2024). *ENGAGING AL-SHABAAB IN SOMALIA*.
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4.
- Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Routledge.
- Folarin, S. (2012). *Introduction to International Relations*. Covenant University.

- Gaibulloev, K., Piazza, J. A., & Sandler, T. (2024). State fragility and terrorist group survival: The role of governance. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 68(1), 89–105.
- Gaibulloev, K., Piazza, J. A., & Sandler, T. (2024). Terrorist group resilience and the role of state fragility. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 68(2), 233–258.
- Hansen, S. J. (2016). *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The history and ideology of a militant Islamist group*. Oxford University Press.
- Hassan, M. (2012). Understanding drivers of violent extremism. *CTC Sentinel*, 5(8), 18–20.
- Healy, S. (2009). *Somalia and the Horn of Africa: Crisis and conflict*. International Crisis Group.
- Hegghammer, T. (2013). The recruiter's dilemma: Signalling and rebel recruitment tactics. *Journal of Peace Research*, 50(1), 3–16.
- Hirt, N. (2019). Commentary: UN Security Council Resolution 2444 (2018) and the Lifting of Sanctions Against Eritrea. *Ethiopian Yearbook of International Law*.
- Ingiriis, M. H. (2023). Al Shabab's Insurgency in Somalia. *Insurgency, Terrorism, and Counterterrorism in Africa*, 63.
- Jacobson, M. (2010). Terrorist disengagement and de-radicalization programs: The role of ideology. *International Security Review*, 24(4), 88–109.
- Jackson, R. (2001). *The global covenant: Human conduct in a world of states*. Oxford University Press.
- Juanita, E., & Peter, S. (2007). *International Relations: The Basics*. Routledge.

- Kellar, K. R. (2024). Examining the Factors that Contribute to the Survival and Resilience of the Al-Shabaab Terrorist Organization.
- Keefer, P., & Loayza, N. (2008). Terrorism, economic inequality, and political instability. *Economic Perspectives on Conflict*, 22(3), 75–99.
- Kendie, D. (2007). Towards resolving the Ethiopia-Somalia disputes.
- Kim, J. (2016). The effects of collective anger and fear on policy support response to terrorist attacks. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 156(5), 455–458.
- Klein, A. (2007). The costs of terror: The economic consequences of global terrorism. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Facts and Findings.
- Kumar, R. (2011). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Kydd, A. H., & Walter, B. F. (2006). The strategies of terrorism. *International Security*, 31(1), 49–80.
- Lelo, S. M. (2011). Counterterrorism through education of populations: The case of African countries. In *Counterterrorism in Diverse Communities* (pp. 249–260). IOS Press.
- Lutz, J. M., & Lutz, B. J. (2004). *Global terrorism*. Routledge.
- Mali, F. S. (2021). Factors affecting the performance of PVE programs in Africa: Case of Lamu County, Kenya (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).
- Maru, M. T. (2019). The Al-Shabaab menace and Ethiopian security concerns. *African Security Review*, 28(3), 251–267.

- Masters, J., & Sergie, M. A. (2015). *Al-Shabab*. Council on Foreign Relations.
- Martin, G. (2003). *Understanding terrorism: Challenges, perspectives, and issues*. Sage Publications.
- Mearsheimer, J. J. (1994). *The tragedy of great power politics*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Menkhaus, K. (2003, 2006, 2007, 2014, 2021). Various works on Somalia. *African Affairs, Review of African Political Economy, International Security, and Routledge Handbook of US Counterterrorism*.
- Mercy, N. J., & Githigaro, J. M. (2021). Communities' perceptions of reintegration of Al-Shabaab returnees. *Journal of Deradicalization*, 71–109.
- Mirahmadi, H. (2016). Community resilience and radicalization. *Counterterrorism Policy Review*, 14(1), 55–72.
- Miller, L. H. (2018). *Global Order: Values and Power in International Relations*. Routledge.
- Morgenthau, H. J. (2006). *Politics among nations: The struggle for power and peace* (7th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Munroe, R. (2009). *Counterterrorism strategies: Balancing security and civil liberties*. Routledge.
- Mushtag, N. (2019). AMISOM: Challenges of influence and disengagement. In *War and Peace in Somalia*. Oxford University Press.
- Mutua, M. (1995). Conflicting conceptions of human rights. *American Society of International Law*, 90, 487–490.

- Naderifar, M., Goli, H., &Ghaljaie, F. (2017).Snowball sampling.Strides in Development of Medical Education, 14(3), e67670.
- Neuman, W. L. (2014). Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (7th ed.). Pearson.
- Omar, M. A. (2021). Somali Irredentism: Causes and impacts on Somalia’s political stability (1960–1991).
- Onapajo, H., &Ozden, K. (2020).Deradicalization in Nigeria. Security Journal, 33(3), 476–492.
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., &Wynaden, D. (2001).Ethics in qualitative research. Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 33(1), 93–96.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). Qualitative research & evaluation methods (4th ed.). Sage.
- Raazaq, A. (2003). Religious terrorism: Ideology and impact. International Journal of Terrorism Studies, 5(4), 89–102.
- Rees, C. (1996). Qualitative research and its place in nursing.Chapman & Hall.
- Ribetti, M. (2007).Motivations of violence in intra-state conflicts. Small Wars & Insurgencies, 18(4), 699–720.
- Richards, L. (2006). Handling qualitative data: A practical guide.Sage.
- Rooble, M. A. (2016). Ethiopia's foreign policy towards Somalia (1991–2015).
- Ronald, C. B., Bernard, H. R., & Ryan, G. W. (2007).Analyzing qualitative data: Systematic approaches.Sage.

- Rotberg, R. I. (2005). *Battling terrorism in the Horn of Africa*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Sandler, T. (1992). *Collective Action: Theory and Applications*. University of Michigan Press.
- Sandler, T. (2018). *The political economy of terrorism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Schwandt, T. A. (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches. In *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 118–137). Sage.
- Schild, D. (2011). *Constructivism and terrorism: A case of Al Qaeda*. University of Johannesburg.
- Shinn, D. H. (2011). Ethiopia and Somalia: Security cooperation. *African Security Studies*, 10(2), 233–245.
- Simmons, A. (1996). Somalia: A regional security dilemma. In *Africa in the New International Order* (p. 16). Lynne Rienner.
- Stake, R. E. (2000). The case study method. In *Qualitative Research Methods* (pp. 48–56). Sage.
- Syokila, M. A. (2020). *Impact of multi-agency counterterrorism on youth radicalization in Mombasa* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).
- Tigire, M., & Kefale, A. (2025). Ethiopia–Somalia relations post-2018. *Journal of African Security and Diplomacy*, 12(1), 34–57.
- Tigire, T., & Kefale, A. (2025). Political tensions in Ethio–Somali relations. *Horn of Africa Policy Review*, 6(1), 23–41.
- U.S. Department of State. (2009). *Country Reports on Terrorism*.

- UNSC Monitoring Group.(2011, 2016).Reports on Somalia and Eritrea.
- USAID. (2009). Guide to the drivers of violent extremism.
- Voice of America. (2024). Somalia-Ethiopia tensions escalate; UN urges diplomatic resolution.
- Waltz, K. N. (2001). *Man, the state, and war: A theoretical analysis*. Columbia University Press.
- Wendt, A. (1987, 1992, 1998, 1999). *Key writings on constructivism*. International Organization, Review of International Studies, Cambridge University Press.
- Weiss, T. G. (2009). *What's wrong with the United Nations and how to fix it*. Polity Press.
- Wepundi, M. J. (2020). *Role of Regional Organizations in Countering Terrorism – IGAD* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nairobi).
- Williams, P. D. (2017). *Assessing AMISOM effectiveness*. George Washington University.
- Yin, R. K. (2003, 2018). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Sage.
- Zoppi, M. (2015). Greater Somalia and colonial borders. *Journal of African History, Politics and Society*, 1(1), 43–64. Also: *African Geographical Review*, 34(1), 62–76.

Appendices

Appendix: A

1. Interview Guide (Key Informants)

This semi-structured interview guide/questionnaire is designed to gather insights from government officials, security experts, policymakers, researchers, and civil society representatives regarding Ethiopia-Somalia relations and counterterrorism efforts.

1. How do you describe the overall security landscape in the Horn of Africa, and what are the key terrorism-related challenges facing the region?
2. What are the main drivers of cooperation between Ethiopia and Somalia in counterterrorism efforts?
3. What factors contribute to hostility or tensions between the two states, despite the shared security threat?
4. How historical events, political dynamics, and security have interests influenced bilateral relations?
5. How do you assess the impact of regional and international actors (e.g., IGAD, AU, and UN) on Ethiopia-Somalia counterterrorism cooperation?
7. What are the key social, political, and economic conditions that allow Al-Shabaab to maintain its influence in the region?

8. What role does cross-border movement, recruitment, and financing play in Al-Shabaab continued presence?
9. What are the key challenges preventing stronger Ethiopia-Somalia security cooperation?
10. What opportunities exist for improving bilateral security collaboration?
11. What policy recommendations would you propose to foster long-term security cooperation between Ethiopia and Somalia?

The participant of the interview includes:

Key informant profile and interview date

Code	Title / Position	Organization	Interview Date	Location of interview
KII	Senior Intelligence Analyst	Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS)	February 17, 2025	Addis Ababa
KII	Intelligence Expert – Counterterrorism Department	Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service	February 18, 2025	Addis Ababa
KII	AU Official, Coordinator of the East Africa Desk, Political Affairs, Peace and Security	African Union (Dr. Salvator Nkeshimana)	March 7, 2025	Addis Ababa
IV	Historian and	Addis Ababa University	March 10, 2025	Addis Ababa

	Geopolitical Expert, African Studies Department			
V	Senior Officer, on Department of Regional Security	Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	March 19, 2025	Addis Ababa
VI	Former AMISOM Officer, now Defense Foreign Affairs Department	Ethiopian Ministry of Defense	March 24, 2025	Addis Ababa

Appendix: B

This appendix lists key media articles, institutional reports, and expert insights used to support and contextualize the research findings.

Addis Standard. (2022, May 29). Ethiopia: Ministry revokes 830 business licenses of kchat exporters due to misuse, illegal activities.

African Union. (2024). AUSSOM transition progress report: Security handover and operational challenges. African Union Peace and Security Department.<https://au.int/en/peace-and-security>

African Union Peace and Security Council.(2023). Quarterly briefing on Somalia.<https://au.int/en/peace-and-security>

Anadolu Agency. (2021, January 6). Turkey provides commando training to Somali soldiers. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkey-provides-commando-training-to-somali-soldiers/2099383>

AP News. (2024). Somalia accuses Ethiopia of violating sovereignty over Somaliland MoU. <https://apnews.com/>

AP News. (2025, April 23). Militants again battle for control of key Somali town. <https://apnews.com/article/14850858cde0d18aa57453cf5c09d988>

Bojang, S. J. (2025, March 19). Could the Houthi partnership with Al-Shabaab provoke US response? The Africa Report.

Capital Ethiopia. (2023, November 13). Illegal kchat trade hard hits Ethiopia with \$144 million loss. <https://capitalethiopia.com/2023/11/13/illegal-khat-trade-hard-hits-ethiopia-with-144-million-loss/>

Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation. (2017). Ethio–Somali historical relations and policy engagements. Addis Ababa.

Coalition of Somali Human Rights Defenders. (2024). Somalia: Annual human rights report 2024. <https://cshrds.org/somalia-annual-human-rights-report-2024/>

Crisis Group. (2019, September 19). Averting proxy conflict in the Horn of Africa. International Crisis Group.

Critical Threats. (2023). *Salafi-Jihadi movement update special edition: Al-Shabaab increases attacks on Somalia's neighbors*. Critical Threats Project.

Eastleigh Voice. (2025, February 27). Mortars fired into Mogadishu airport as Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed arrives for state visit.

Ethiopian News Agency. (2023, December 27). Ethiopia loses \$250-\$300 million annually to informal livestock exports through eastern borders. <https://www.ena.et/en/?p=27936>

European Union Agency for Asylum. (2023). Country guidance: Somalia – Persons fearing recruitment by Al-Shabaab. <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-somalia-2023/33-persons-fearing-recruitment-al-shabaab>

Fana Broadcasting Corporate. (2022, March 16). Ethiopia and Somalia begin discussions to establish a bilateral trade agreement. <https://www.fanabc.com/english/ethiopia-and-somalia-begin-discussions-to-establish-a-bilateral-trade-agreement/>

Fana Broadcasting Corporate. (2023, January 10). Ethiopia and Somalia sign agreements to enhance cooperation in tourism, trade, and transport. <https://www.fanabc.com/english/ethiopia-and-somalia-sign-agreements-to-enhance-cooperation-in-tourism-trade-and-transport/>

Garowe Online. (2025, February 27). Ethiopian PM arrives in Mogadishu to warm welcome amid nearby mortar attack.

Hiiraan Online. (2024, April 20). Inter-clan fighting kills six people along Hiiraan-Middle Shabelleborder. https://www.hiiraan.org/news4/2024/Apr/195923/inter_clan_fighting_kills_six_people_along_hiraan_middle_shabelle_border.aspx

Hiraal Institute. (2024, May 15). Escalation and adaptation: Clan dynamics and Al-Shabaab strategy. <https://hiraalinstitute.org/escalation-and-adaptation/>

International Crisis Group. (2022). Horn of Africa: Security fragmentation and regional rivalries.

International Crisis Group. (2023). Al-Shabaab as a spoiler: How terror obstructs peace in the Horn of Africa.

Ismail, A. (2024, March 15). Drivers of hostility and cooperation in Ethiopia-Somalia relations [Expert interview].Horn of Africa Strategic Studies Institute.

Osman, J. (2013, November 27). Exclusive: Al-Shabaab Spokesman Sheikh Ali Dhere Interview [Video]. Channel 4 News. <https://www.channel4.com/news/al-shabaab-video-exclusive-jamal-osman-somalia>

Reuters. (2024). Al-Shabaab uses Ethiopia-Somaliland port deal to fuel regional tensions. <https://www.reuters.com/>

Reuters. (2024). Somalia threatens troop expulsion after Ethiopia-Somaliland deal. <https://www.reuters.com>

Reuters. (2024). Somalia warns Ethiopia over troops following Somaliland deal.

Reuters. (2024, April 26). U.S. withdrawal from Somalia's Danab forces criticized.

Reuters. (2025, February 27). Mortar attack during Ethiopian PM Abiy Ahmed's visit to Somalia.

Reuters. (2025, March 18). Somali president escapes Al-Shabaab assassination attempt in Mogadishu.

Reuters. (2025, April 16). Al-Shabaab seizes strategic town of AdanYabaal.

Roba, H., & Selam, D. (2021). Leadership transitions and regional diplomacy in the Horn of Africa. Addis Ababa University Press.

Sahan Africa. (2019). *Al-Shabaab as a transnational security threat*. In C. Bryden (Ed.), *War and Peace in Somalia*. Oxford University Press.

Shinn, D. H. (2021). *Neither desperate nor stronger: The adaptation of Al Shabaab*.

The Guardian. (2024). Joint Ethio–Somali anti-terror ops disrupt Al-Shabaab logistics. <https://www.theguardian.com/>

TRT Afrika. (2025). Somali government condemns bombing targeting president

United Nations Security Council. (2023). *Letter dated 6 October 2023 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council*. United Nations.

.U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs. (2025, April 18). U.S. airstrikes destroy weapons bound for Al-Shabaab.

U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2024, March 11). Treasury designates transnational Al-Shabaab money laundering network. <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2168>

U.S. Department of the Treasury. (2025). TFTC targets Al-Shabaab financial networks.

United Nations Security Council.(2023). Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea.

VOA News. (2023). Al-Shabaab cross-border incursions into Ethiopia. <https://www.voanews.com/a/africa/al-shabaab-cross-border-attacks-ethiopia/7217892.html>

Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. Cambridge University Press.

World Bank.(2023). Economic interdependence and conflict prevention in the Horn of Africa.<https://www.worldbank.org/>

Yusuf, F. (2024, April 5). Ethiopia-Somaliland MoU and its implications for Somalia-Ethiopia ties [Expert interview]. Somali Political Forum.