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# Defence Against Terrorism Analysis Quarterly (DATA-Q)

*Terrorism, in all its forms and manifestations, is the most asymmetric threat to the security of all citizens and to international peace and prosperity.*

*“Terrorism is an acute and global threat”*



## LETTER FROM THE DEPUTY

Dear Colleagues, distinguished academics, and readers from all walks of life,

COE-DAT proudly presents the second issue of our brand-new magazine, the *Defense Against Terrorism Analysis Quarterly* (DATA-Q). As our Director noted last quarter, our world is a world of rapid change, our age an age of liquid modernity...and this magazine is our humble effort to grapple with the fluid nature of the face of terrorism, both now and on the horizon.

In this issue, you'll be introduced to two thought pieces on what are essentially hybrid threats. The first, penned by our own Colonel Oğuzhan PEHLİVAN, is a novel consideration of what it means to face a "hybrid" threat – in this case, the twin (and irrevocably entwined) threats of terrorism and ecological degradation. "Where Should Our Focal Point Be" asks us to ponder the effects of food and water scarcity, rampant malnutrition, and ineffective governance in the Sahel, and, most especially, the effects those phenomena are having on both terrorism and counter-terrorism in the region. I hope that you will be as fascinated as I am to read that the author – a lifelong, dedicated, and decorated Army officer – believes fervently that hybrid regional threats require hybrid regional solutions. He urges us to consider paths beyond applications of hard power within national boundaries; I can't help but feel that Joseph Nye (author of *The Future of Power*) would wholeheartedly agree.

The second article, "Countermeasures Against Terrorism and Hybrid Threats", by Professor Giray SADIK, is a condensed discussion of his much more in-depth research published in 2021. Here, the author gently returns us to a more traditional understanding of "hybrid threat", entreating his audience (and policymakers in NATO) to begin considering counter-terrorism policy in concert with hybrid warfare strategies. His work is timely, indeed...as the world gazes in horror at the destruction in Ukraine, national policy machines struggle to wrestle simultaneously with both peer and terrorist threats. If you would like to see a more detailed treatment of the data he presents here, I highly recommend checking out Volume 26, Issue 1 of the Turkish Center for Strategic Research's *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs*.

As always, we owe special thanks to the staff of COE-DAT – and especially the Knowledge Department – for their tireless effort, patience, and constructive criticism. We hope these articles will whet your appetite for projects we are already planning for 2024...keep watching our site for lengthier publications on climate change, the Ukraine conflict, and the effects those events are having on terrorism and counter-terrorism both.

At COE-DAT, we very much believe that we will win the struggle against terrorism with collective cooperation and common sense. You, dear reader, are now one of us. Welcome.

Regards,

Shawn YOUNG  
Colonel (OF-5), USAF  
Deputy Director, COE-DAT

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Colonel PEHLİVAN graduated from the Turkish Military Academy as an Infantry Officer in 1996 and from the Infantry School in 1997. He served as platoon leader; company, battalion and deputy brigade commander prior to his assignment at COE-DAT. He also got PhD in Sociology at Hacettepe University in 2017. His studies mainly focus on family sociology, culture, immigration, terrorism, counter terrorism, military decision models. Colonel PEHLİVAN is married to Serpil PEHLİVAN, with a son named Burak Kağan PEHLİVAN.



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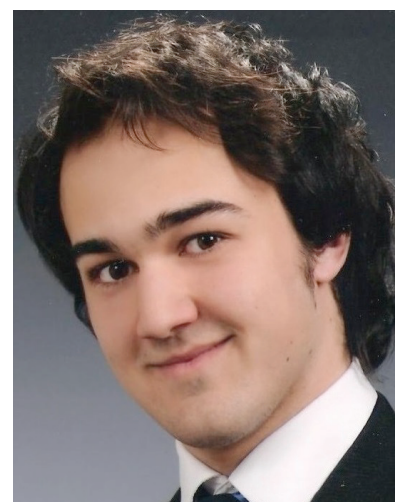
## PROFESSOR CEM KARADELI

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# DATA-Q



## Defence Against Terrorism Analysis Quarterly

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## FUTURE CHALLENGES OF EMERGING DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGIES (EDT) IN TERRORISM

Oğuzhan PEHLIVAN<sup>1</sup>



**Source:** New technologies, and artificial intelligence aid the fight against global terrorism, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/09/1045562>, Accessed 04 May 2023.

Big data, artificial intelligence (AI), autonomous systems, and quantum technologies are just a few of the technological advancements that are transforming the globe and NATO's operations. For NATO and its allies, these and other emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs) present hazards as well as opportunities. In order to develop and implement new technologies, set universal standards for responsible use, and keep NATO at the technical forefront, the Alliance collaborates with partners in the public and private sectors, academia, and civil society.<sup>2</sup>

EDT is a brand new term and there is still no common definition for it. However, it may include never encountered conventional, non-conventional, and technological developments. For example, according to the latest report published, 3D printing, 5G and improved connectivity, AI and machine learning, automation and robotics, cyber security advances, edge computing, virtual and augmented reality, headless tech, the rise of "As-a-Service" computing, the work-from-home revolution, voice-activated searches have been enumerated

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<sup>2</sup> Emerging and Disruptive Technologies, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_184303.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_184303.htm), Accessed 01 May 2023.

as the new EDTs.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, blockchain, cloud services, nanotechnology, big data, cybersecurity, quantum computing, hyper-personalization, chatbots, smart cities, computational chemistry, fingerprints, and biometrics may also be added to the long-drawn-out list day after day.<sup>4</sup>

Numerous technologies that have the potential to fundamentally change our economic, social, and even personal lives have emerged over the past ten years. The issues they raise present policymakers with difficult challenges because they are, in many respects, novel. Given that technological developments are still in their early stages and have uncertain futures, how should governments respond to the problems? More importantly, if EDTs were captured by terrorist organizations, how would governments shape their security environment to defend against these threats?

Initially, besides the benefits provided by EDTs in our daily life, technological disruption must be regarded as a policy problem. One issue with emerging disruptive technologies is directly related to their hi-tech nature and the limited understanding that most social actors have regarding how it functions and why, as well as what are the potential applications and effects of their deployment. In other words, the policy environment with regard to developing technologies is characterized by information asymmetries across agents and at various societal and governmental levels.<sup>5</sup> Fundamentally, there is a lot of ambiguity surrounding how policies will be implemented and how regulations will be implemented in these industries.<sup>6</sup> In addition to uncertainty and knowledge asymmetries, technology disruptions have varying effects on various societal groups. The adoption of developing technologies and the disruptions they cause may benefit some sections of society while harming others. And disagreements between winners (like technology entrepreneurs and venture capitalists) and losers (like workers in disrupted industries) or those who are positively or negatively impacted can be intense, widespread, and complex. Regulators must bargain and strike a balance between the economic interests of the agents driving these advances and those of the people and groups affected by their results. Regulators are frequently forced to choose between reducing the possibility of type 1 and type 2 errors, i.e., overregulating benign technologies or underregulating those that are challenging to regulate when approving “new” technologies, regulating a technology, or deciding whether the state should intervene.<sup>7</sup>

Terrorism is a historical reality and a problem in our modern world that is ever-evolving. The real challenge of EDTs in accordance with terrorism may be beyond our expectations. We have to prepare ourselves for new kinds of emerging threats. This article aims to draw attention to the possible future menaces in terms of terrorism.

Terrorists currently use new technologies, especially in the development of weapons. Cronin scrutinized the chronological technological evaluation of terrorism from dynamite to an AK-47 rifle and concluded that there is a lack of a comprehensive strategic approach to the development and regulation of technology for three reasons. First, many of the innovations have emerged in the US, and Americans tended to be techno-optimists. Second, the 9/11 attacks and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan led to an urgent focus on the rapid deployment of new offensive and defensive capabilities. And finally, little progress has been made in governance over emerging technologies because of the intent of generating profits for private companies, such as Google, Facebook, and Microsoft, contrary to securing peace.<sup>8</sup>

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3 Top Disruptive Technologies to Watch Out for in 2022, <https://www.simplilearn.com/top-disruptive-technologies-article#:~:text=Here%20is%20a%20list%20of,Artificial%20Intelligence%20and%20Machine%20Learning>, Accessed 01 May 2023.

4 Disruptive Technologies: Breakthroughs that changes our life, <https://www.repsol.com/en/energy-and-the-future/technology-and-innovation/disruptive-technologies/index.cshhtml>, Accessed 01 May 2023.

5 Taeihagh, A., Ramesh, M., & Howlett, M. (2021). Assessing the regulatory challenges of emerging disruptive technologies. *Regulation & Governance*, 15(4), 1009-1019.

6 Walker W.E., Marchau V.A.W.J., & Kwakkel J.H. (2013). Uncertainty in the Framework of Policy Analysis. In: Thissen WAH, Walker WE (eds) *Public Policy Analysis: New Developments*, pp. 215–260. Springer, New York.

7 Waring P., Bali A., & Vas C. (2020). The Fourth Industrial Revolution and Labour Market Regulation in Singapore. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 31(3), 347–363

8 Cronin, A. K. (2019). *Power to the people: how open technological innovation is arming tomorrow's terrorists*. Oxford University Press.

Financing is another technique underpinned by the development of EDTs. Since its inception in 2008, the use of Bitcoin has multiplied globally, providing individuals in countries where the official banking industry is tainted by corruption or, whether as a result of geography or systemic conflict, ceases to exist altogether, with benefits never before experienced. However, law enforcement officials and intelligence services around the world are seriously concerned about this widespread popularity.<sup>9</sup> Since at least 2014, when Daesh declared it would incorporate this asset class into its fundraising campaigns, terrorist organizations have started to use cryptocurrency.<sup>10</sup> According to Whyte, while there is currently little evidence to suggest that terrorists will gain disproportionately from using cryptocurrencies, there are special opportunities for money laundering and generating income.<sup>11</sup>

These are the visible side of the iceberg; however, EDTs have been changing at an incredible pace. New innovations are added to their numbers every day such as chatbots and the internet of things. The most significant point that has to be thought about is the possibility of the usage of EDTs by malevolent people like terrorist group members. Recently, some of the biggest names in technology drew attention to the same point with different perspectives. First, Geoffrey Hinton, the godfather of AI, resigned from his duty at Google for the fear of potential risks and harm, which can be faced in the near decades. “I console myself with the normal excuse: If I hadn’t done it, somebody else would have,” Hinton told the *Times* in an exclusive interview. “It is hard to see how you can prevent the bad actors from using it for bad things.”<sup>12</sup> Second, under the leadership of Elon Musk, several of the biggest names in technology urged artificial intelligence labs to halt the development of the most potent AI systems for at least six months due to “profound risks to society and humanity.” They signed the letter, which was published by the Future of Life Institute, a nonprofit backed by Musk. The letter recommended that the moratorium cover AI systems “more powerful than GPT-4.” Additionally, it recommended that independent experts use the suggested pause to work together to create and put into place a set of shared protocols for AI tools that are risk-free “beyond a reasonable doubt.” According to the letter, the delay should be in place for AI systems “more powerful than GPT-4.” Furthermore, it advised independent experts to use the suggested pause to work together on creating and implementing a set of shared protocols for AI tools that are safe “beyond a reasonable doubt.”<sup>13</sup>

Undoubtedly, we have no enchanted crystal ball in our hands to guess all future challenges of EDTs. However, the statistics about EDTs elucidate the future challenges on this issue. Geographically speaking, according to Analytics Insight, North America holds a 47% market share of the global artificial intelligence market. At a projected CAGR of 29.2%, the AI market in the region is expected to increase from US\$20 billion in 2019 to US\$71.9 billion in 2023. The global market for big data will grow at a CAGR of 10.9% from US\$179.6 billion in 2019 to US\$301.5 billion in 2023. With a 59% global market share, North America is the dominant region. In the area, the big data market is anticipated to increase from US\$106.8 billion in 2019 to US\$192.0 billion in 2023. The global robotics market is anticipated to increase at a CAGR of 10.9% from US\$47.8 billion in 2019 to US\$80.2 billion in 2023 and Asia Pacific is the world’s largest region for robotics, accounting for 49% of the market. A CAGR of 13% is anticipated for the region’s robotics industry, which is expected to increase from US\$23.7 billion in 2019 to US\$43.7 billion in 2023.<sup>14</sup>

9 Fletcher, E., Larkin, C., & Corbet, S. (2021). Countering money laundering and terrorist financing: A case for bitcoin regulation. *Research in International Business and Finance*, 56, 101387.

10 Shetret, L. (2022). *The Uses of Cryptoassets in Terrorism Financing*. (Ed. Nicholas Ryder) Countering Terrorism Financing, Ankara, Center of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism, 93-120. [https://www.tmmm.tsk.tr/publication/researches/14-Countering\\_Terrorism\\_Financing.pdf#](https://www.tmmm.tsk.tr/publication/researches/14-Countering_Terrorism_Financing.pdf#) (NATO COE-DAT Research Project, 2022.)

11 Whyte, C. (2019). Cryptoterrorism: Assessing the utility of blockchain technologies for terrorist enterprise. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 1-24.

12 Geoffrey Hinton, a pioneer in artificial intelligence, resigns from Google over ethical fears, <https://venturebeat.com/ai/geoffrey-hinton-a-pioneer-in-artificial-intelligence-resigns-from-google-over-ethical-fears/>, Accessed 03 May 2023.

13 Elon Musk and other tech leaders call for pause in ‘out of control’ AI race, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/03/29/tech/ai-letter-elon-musk-tech-leaders/index.html>, Accessed 03 May 2023.

14 Analytic Insight predicts the market size of the top 6 disruptive technologies, <https://www.analyticsinsight.net/market-size-analysis-top-6-disruptive-technologies/>, Accessed 03 May 2023.



Terrorist organizations now have new options thanks to emerging technologies. Future terrorists might deploy numerous drones—either in mass or in concert with one another in simpler or more complex ways—to harm, potentially on a large scale. UAVs are increasingly being used in terrorist attacks. Since 2016, there have been 76 terrorist assaults employing this innovative technique, resulting in 50 fatalities and 132 injuries. Although the use of UAV-related explosives currently seems less lethal than conventional explosive attacks, advancing technologies and swarming capabilities, growing ability to carry larger payloads, and the possibility of CBRN weapons dispersion by UAVs will likely increase UAV lethality in the future, necessitating more proactive CTM specialists.<sup>15</sup> CBRN and biological terrorism, suicide bombing, airpower, and other terrorist innovations are still ongoing tactics and techniques in terms of technology development.<sup>16</sup>

According to one recent research, terrorists use the Internet to communicate, disseminate their propaganda, fund their organizations and attacks, educate would-be terrorists, and plan and carry out operations both offline and online. Chances for terrorists online will emerge with the Metaverse's (also known as Web3) development, along with hurdles to take advantage of those chances. There may be opportunities for recruitment and assault planning, as well as the possibility of new targets. To secure user safety and stop the use of the Internet for terrorist goals, stakeholders will undoubtedly require a new set of rules, regulations, and capabilities.<sup>17</sup>

Applications of new technology may help lessen maritime security risks. National and international legislation, however, is not updated at the same rate as the advancement of technology in ships and other seagoing vessels. The benefits that innovative solutions might provide to the marine business and to the entire world in terms of maritime security are being delayed by the slow reform of regulations and legislation.<sup>18</sup>

In a nutshell, the adoption of new technologies is essential for maintaining and developing a country's infrastructure and economy. Understanding the elements that influence the adoption of technology helps national policymakers to pinpoint such factors.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, we frankly recognize that states have demonstrated more capacity to prevent acts of terrorism than any individual or group throughout history. States should be aware EDTs that are crucial to long-term economic and strategic interests, and the international community should establish a system that encourages interoperability. Nevertheless, they simultaneously need to establish public/private partnerships in order to struggle against the possible threats stemming from the negative usage of EDTs, especially by malicious people like terrorist group members.

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15 Barten, D. G., Tin, D., De Cauwer, H., Ciottone, R. G., & Ciottone, G. R. (2022). A counter-terrorism medicine analysis of drone attacks. *Prehospital and disaster medicine, 37*(2), 192-196.

16 Kallenborn, Z., Ackerman, G., & Bleek, P. C. (2022). A Plague of Locusts? A Preliminary Assessment of the Threat of Multi-Drone Terrorism. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1-30.

17 d'Argenlieu, E. (2022). Terrorist use of the Metaverse: new opportunities and new challenges. *Technology*.

18 Ávila-Zúñiga-Nordfjeld, A., Liwång, H., & Dalaklis, D. (2023). Implications of Technological Innovation and Respective Regulations to Strengthen Port and Maritime Security: An International Agenda to Reduce Illegal Drug Traffic and Countering Terrorism at Sea. In *Smart Ports and Robotic Systems: Navigating the Waves of Techno-Regulation and Governance* (pp. 135-147). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

19 Hooks, D., Davis, Z., Agrawal, V., & Li, Z. (2022). Exploring factors influencing technology adoption rate at the macro level: A predictive model. *Technology in Society, 68*, 101826.

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## BORDER SECURITY AND SECURITY CONCERNS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY WORLD

Prof Cem Karadeli, PhD  
Ufuk University

### Border Security Since Cold War



A group photo taken during the “Border Security in Contested Environment Workshop” organized by COE DAT in Ankara in June 2023.

Since the end of the Cold War, the world experienced many changes including the collapse of the Soviet system and the rise of Russian Federation as a regional power; establishment of new nation-states in Eurasia; the establishment of the European Union and the Schengen Area and Eurozone -and hence the introduction of Euro as a rival currency to US Dollar-; several wars in the Balkans; the 9/11 attacks and the ensuing War Against Terrorism; invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq; the rise of different kinds of terrorist threats; Globalization and its effects on all the world states and all world economic balances; the rise of People’s Republic of China as a totalitarian state that applies liberal economic ideas; and, the new ease of movement for people, workforce, financial products, capital, technology, and ideas.

All these changes and newly emerging concepts affected world public opinion about borders, national security, border management, and measures against terrorism to make national and global borders safer. The European Union’s Schengen Area, which removed controlled borders between Schengen Treaty signatory states, brought an ease of movement for people and goods and yet also required new approaches to the concepts of border security and counterterrorism.

## **Consequences of border changes and conflicts**

All these developments led to new security concerns in the modern world. Consequently, we saw a rise in:

- internal and inter-state/cross-border destabilization and conflicts,
- mass eviction of populations, irregular migration and illegal immigration,
- cross-border organized crime
- illicit cultivation, fabrication, and trafficking of narcotic drugs,
- trafficking in human beings and people smuggling,
- epidemics and pandemics due to forced migration,
- smuggling of goods,
- significant deterioration of socioeconomic circumstances in a regional context,
- terrorism, foreigners fighting abroad to support terrorist organizations and violent extremism, and,
- other forms of serious transnational crime.

## **Irregular Migration and Mass Evictions**

When we look at these significant issues, it can be seen that border security and the associated issues of smuggling of goods and people and illegal immigration have recently become highly politicized issues. Two of these issues are the irregular migration and mass eviction of people due to violent conflict.

Irregular migration is caused mostly by the economic, political, social and security-related factors in the countries migration originates from. The instability that causes people to migrate from one country also directly affects border security and border management in the transit and target countries, also creating migration routes that cause another level of threat to peace and security on a regional, continental, and even global scale.

Countries have to respond to such a threat. As a result, sovereignty and border control lie at the heart of a regulatory framework that separates “insiders” from “outsiders” on the basis of the countries’ individual understandings of national identity. Sovereignty is exercised and preserved through government, which relies on casting those without “appropriate” paperwork as threatening outsiders. The nationals of a country are legally documented citizens as opposed to the undocumented alien who are named as “illegal immigrants,” “illegals,” “aliens.” This insiders versus outsiders style adversary conceptualisation process is fundamental to maintaining the boundaries of nation both in terms of nationhood and of geographical definitions. The nation hence has easily definable rules to identify as a cohesive group and the outsiders are also easy to identify. Hence, borders become more than geographical notations and become integrated to the society’s everyday life.

As a result, we end up with a two-sided observation of the problem. On the one hand, we have people who are not able to secure employment, a healthy life, ownership of their possessions, or even their right to remain alive; and, on the other hand, we have the target countries’ populations who are not welcoming to anyone and anything that upsets their country’s existing status quo – they don’t want to compete for jobs with foreigners, they are afraid of migrants or refugees carrying diseases, even epidemics, endemic to the country of origin, or from the establishment of foreigner-only illicit activities or ghettos. These concerns make border security a very important problem.

## **Cross-border Terrorism**

In recent times, terrorism “came to be regarded as a calculated means to destabilize the West as a part of a vast conspiracy” (Hoffman 2006, p. 17). This is probably especially true in the case of terrorist organizations such as ISIS, al-Qaida, Lashkar-e-Taiba whose actions are mainly directed to confront and contest the Western order or Western concepts such as democracy or freedom of choice.

As the actions of groups like these go beyond the national borders and have consequences that are international, their kind of terrorist activity is considered as international and/or cross-border terrorism. Nevertheless, nowadays the term terrorism is usually designated as an illegal type of violence carried on by non-state actors whose actions are aimed at a coercion of a government in order to obtain specific political results. There were attempts at defining terrorism and international terrorism by the UN, the EU, and the African Union, but, we couldn't reach a globally accepted definition of the term yet. Still, terrorist activities are quite clear in the mind of most people.

Many terrorist groups are given international support, and sanctuary so they can destabilize competing countries and prevent targeting of country's population but it turned out to be not a reliable option. However, this did not help security in the country that supports the terrorist groups and in the long run they returned to use counter-terrorist measures.

In countries where securing the borders is not easy due to several problems ranging from weak or failed state structures to demographic challenges, the problem is not whether or not supporting terrorist groups but to prevent them from crossing borders. Lashkar-e-Taiba mainly targeting Jammu Kashmir and India, Boko Haram in East Africa can cross borders or use their terrorists based in several countries in their acts of terror. Such border-crossing is a real problem to be faced. In the European Union, the Schengen Area provides open borders between 26 EU member states and that has alarming results in terms of inspecting the movement of terrorists.

In this respect, to monitor migration management, EU agencies such as FRONTEX, and numerous technology-laden border-control operations come to mind.

Integrated border security options are not the only solution. Other countries may adopt different approaches. For instance, India's response to tensions in Kashmir is multidimensional, as it includes military response to deal with situation, border management to prevent infiltration, political dialogue and negotiations with all parties that have given up violence, economic measures to improve the living conditions and job prospects of the local population, diplomatic initiatives toward peace to include confidence-building measures neighbouring countries, and, international counterterrorism cooperation with friendly countries.

## **Integrated Border Security**

To solve the problems caused by the issues discussed so far, integrated border security is a necessity. Integrated Border Management system is a possible solution in this context.

The principle of Integrated Border Management can be summarized as a sum of national and international harmonisation and cooperation among all the related authorities and agencies involved in border security and trade assistance. With integrated border management, it would be easier to establish effective, efficient, and integrated action by cooperating countries. The main issue here is the degree of trust and the degree of cooperation among the participating countries and international organizations.

To provide a guide to the world, the United Nations has come up with a list of good practices to be referred to for establishing border security. These are now revised by NATO member countries so that NATO members can actually use the new NATO Good Practices on Border Security in real life conditions.

<b>UN Border Security Good Practices</b>
Good Practice 1: Enhance intra-agency cooperation.
Good Practice 2: Enhance inter-agency cooperation.
Good Practice 3: Enhance international cooperation.
Good Practice 4: Develop and establish comprehensive remote border area surveillance programs.
Good Practice 5: Engage with and empower border communities as key contributors in border security and management.
Good Practice 6: Develop and implement Border Community Policing programs.
Good Practice 7: Develop and implement Border Security Management information exchange programs and mechanisms.
Good Practice 8: Establish Border Cooperation Centres.
Good Practice 9: Nominate and assign Border Liaison Officers.
Good Practice 10: Conduct joint and coordinated cross-border patrols, as well as joint multiagency and interdisciplinary operation exercises.
Good Practice 11: Define parameters for cross-border operational engagement.
Good Practice 12: Conduct effective risk analysis assessments.
Good Practice 13: Create National Border Management Strategies and Action Plans.
Good Practice 14: Establish Joint Border Crossing Points.
Good Practice 15: Identify corruption as a serious risk for effective and robust Border Security Management.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, border security is a problem that has increased since the end of the Cold War. Such problematic issues as trans-border terrorist activities, undocumented migrants crossing borders, and organized crime activities rose more dramatically in the globalized world.

Solutions to these problems include stronger border security, integration of security efforts amongst different countries, integration of migrants into the host societies without creating problems for either side, and stronger military and political action against terrorist organizations. In the case of NATO and its member states, it is imperative that border security is maintained by the determined, applicable good practices which may turn to best practices in time. Such a step would be very important for NATO in particular and for world security in general, as NATO's example is sure to create a strong precedent for other non-NATO-affiliated countries as well.

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## THE CHALLENGES OF FIGHTING AL-SHABAAB IN SOUTHERN SOMALIA

Prof. Dr. János Besenyő and Gábor Sinkó

In August 2022, the Somali government launched a major offensive against al-Shabaab after the organization killed more than twenty people in a Mogadishu hotel siege.<sup>1</sup> President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud – who had been reelected in May 2022 after defeating Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmaajo” – pledged a total war against the terrorist group.<sup>2</sup> Presidential and parliamentary elections should have taken place the previous year; however, political impasse and instability delayed them, offering a host of opportunities for al-Shabaab to strike and capitalize on the Somali government’s weaknesses.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the renewed offensive against the terrorist group has an economic, ideological and military aspect in order to cause such damage to the movement that it cannot recover from no matter how resilient and adaptable it is.<sup>4</sup>

The first phase of anti al-Shabaab operations proved quite successful to the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) since the vast majority of the group’s militants was dislodged from the Middle Shabelle region in Central Somalia, including Hirshabelle and Galmudug states. It is one of the largest territorial gains of the Somali government in its fight against al-Shabaab.<sup>5</sup> The last time the terrorist organization was weakened significantly was during the combined military operations of the African Union (AU) and the Transitional Federal Government in 2011. At that time, al-Shabaab was forced to retreat from the Somali capital, losing much of its revenue. In order to survive, it had to look for alternative sources of income and began waging asymmetric warfare. Despite the fact the terrorist organization was continuously attacked by the International Community, had to weather

1 Leo Sands and Damian Zane (2022), ‘Somalia hotel siege: More than 20 die in al-Shabab attack’, BBC, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-62621205> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

2 Mohamed Dhaysane (2022), ‘Somalia’s President Vows ‘Total War’ Against al-Shabab’, Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-s-president-vows-total-war-against-al-shabab/6714508.html> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

3 Al-Shabaab could finance its activities, in a large part, as a result of generating significant income from piracy. For more, see Besenyő János and Sinkó Gábor (2022), ‘Combating piracy strategically: Analysing the successes and challenges of NATO and EU interventions off the Somali coast’, *South African Journal of International Affairs*, Volume 29, Issue 3, DOI: 10.1080/10220461.2022.2125064

4 Center for Strategic & International Studies (2022), ‘Strengthening Somalia’s Security: A Conversation with H.E. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud’, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/strengthening-somalias-security-conversation-he-president-hassan-sheikh-mohamud> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

5 Harun Maruf (2023), ‘Al-Shabab Has Lost Third of its Territory, US Ambassador Says’, Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/al-shabab-has-lost-third-of-its-territory-us-ambassador-says/7026624.html> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

an internal leadership crisis and lost significant parts of its area of operations, it managed to reemerge, posing a threat to the entire Horn of Africa region.<sup>6</sup>

In the last decade, major offensives against al-Shabaab were spearheaded by the AU, but now they are led by the Somali National Army (SNA) coupled with local militias. One could ask what factors played into the hands of the Somali government. When in July 2022 al-Shabaab militants attacked villages close to the Ethiopian border, the regional forces were quick to react and drive the group out of the territory.<sup>7</sup> They were helped by locals, which may have inspired Central Somalis to create clan militias with support received from the FGS who could fight the organization locally. The truth is there was growing dissatisfaction among the dominant Hawiye clan, since al-Shabaab insisted that weapons, livestock and boys needed to be given to the group, which deepened antagonism between the people and the movement.<sup>8</sup> Although the organization was aware that it was pushing the boundaries with its forced recruitment strategy, it also used bad tactics, overplaying its hand. Increasing taxation as compensation for the loss in revenues proved to be a wrong decision, considering food insecurity, impoverishment and the ongoing record drought in Somalia.<sup>9</sup>

With the second phase of anti al-Shabaab operations launched at the end of March 2023, it is worth analyzing the challenges the Somali government may face in its fight against the terrorist organization. While the focus of the offensive in the first phase (August 2022 – January 2023) was Central Somalia, the FGS is now targeting the southern parts of the country, which have historically been al-Shabaab's strongholds.<sup>10</sup> President Mohamud reasoned that the second phase was going to be easier than the first one, since the SNA is now more experienced and had time to adjust to the tactics used by the militants. As proof, it can be seen that approximately a third of the area that had previously been under al-Shabaab's control was liberated by the SNA. Based on the data from the Somalia's Ministry of Information, over three thousand al-Shabaab militants died and about the same number of fighters was injured during the first offensive.<sup>11</sup>

Kamal Dahir Hassan Gutale, a national security advisor to Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre argued that the SNA had become battle-hardened and more efficient. International support in terms of weapons and training must have played an important part in the process, as the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), Türkiye and the United States contributed large sums of money to the capacity-building of the SNA.<sup>12</sup> After the successful conclusion of the latest operations, morale and optimism are high when it comes to the increased capacities and capabilities of the Somali army. However, in order to paint a realistic picture of the current situation, a thorough analysis is needed to predict how well the FGS is likely to be able to mobilize its resources and build its relations locally, regionally and internationally.

One of the most important questions is whether clan militias can contribute to the defeat of al-Shabaab in southern Somalia as well. In his speech before the United Nations General Assembly in 2022, President Mohamud emphasized that the FGS is leading the fight against al-Shabaab terrorism in Somalia<sup>13</sup>; however, it

6 Christopher Anzalone (2017), 'Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The Resilience of al-Qaeda's East African Affiliate', In: Aaron Zelin (Ed.) *How Al-Qaeda Survived Drones, Uprisings, and the Islamic State: Nature of the Current Threat*, Washington D.C.

7 George Obulutsa (2022), 'Somalia's al Shabaab group makes rare attack near Ethiopia border', Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somalias-al-shabaab-group-rare-attack-near-ethiopia-border-2022-07-21/> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

8 International Crisis Group (2023), 'Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab', Briefing No. 187, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b187-sustaining-gains-somalias-offensive-against-al-shabaab> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

9 Al Jazeera (2023), 'Somalia drought may have killed 43,000 in 2022, half under 5: UN', <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/20/somalia-drought-may-have-killed-43000-in-2022-half-under-5-un> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

10 Hiiraan Online (2023), 'Somali President launches second phase of anti-Al-Shabab operations', [https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Mar/190539/somali\\_president\\_launches\\_second\\_phase\\_of\\_anti\\_al\\_shabab\\_operations.aspx](https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Mar/190539/somali_president_launches_second_phase_of_anti_al_shabab_operations.aspx) (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

11 Africa Defense Forum (2023), 'Somalia Launches 2nd Offensive Against Al-Shabaab Strongholds In The South', <https://adf-magazine.com/2023/04/somalia-launches-2nd-offensive-against-al-shabaab-strongholds-in-the-south/> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

12 Garowe Online (2023), 'Somalia to start second phase of Al-Shabaab crackdown during Ramadan', <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-to-start-second-phase-of-al-shabaab-crackdown-during-ramadan> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

13 United Nations (2022), 'Somalia committed to tackling twin threats of looming famine and terrorism, President tells UN Assembly', <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1127561> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

might have seemed that offensives in the first phase of anti al-Shabaab operations were spearheaded by clan militias, albeit with government backing. Arming clans could be a dangerous game to play, since it has the potential to disrupt power dynamics and ignite inter-clan conflicts<sup>14</sup>, which are likely to have a number of political and security implications for clan identity as well as fighting for influential governmental and political positions.<sup>15</sup> On top of that, victories against al-Shabaab in Central Somalia will not end the group. Instead, the battleground should be shifted, taking the fight to the southern strongholds of al-Shabaab, Southwest and Jubaland states.

Historical memory is another factor that has to be taken into consideration. It is ingrained in Somalis' memory that clan militias assisting the government in overthrowing the Siad Barre regime in 1991 were beneficiaries when it came to the allocation of high ranking posts in the new political system.<sup>16</sup> It would definitely be a better option if the FGS was able to exercise an official leadership but that would require the integration of clan armies into the SNA; which is something they might not be particularly interested in. Besides, it is often claimed that ATMIS should do its fair share of the fight against al-Shabaab, especially since they receive significantly higher salaries than the soldiers in the SNA.<sup>17</sup> The involvement of ATMIS in eradicating al-Shabaab will be of paramount importance in the second phase, since it is believed that clan militias may not – or only limitedly – be taken advantage of in southern Somalia as the same level of dissatisfaction with the terrorist organization is not present there.

The Somali government is therefore compelled to change its strategy and instead of backing clan armies it needs to pay more attention to fostering regional connections. Some of the neighboring and Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) in ATMIS, including Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya vowed to send over 30,000 additional troops to Somalia to combat al-Shabaab more efficiently.<sup>18</sup> However, it is not enough to mobilize ATMIS exclusively. Their offensive has to be complemented by other troops, such as the Danab (Lightning) Brigade and Gorgor (Eagle) commandos that are trained by the United States and Türkiye respectively. The main problem appears to be the large gap in the quality of equipment between the regular recruits of the SNA and those who received training abroad. While the former's level of equipment is not much more advanced than local militias', the latter is more sophisticated. As a result, the SNA does not seem a unified force, but rather the combination of two armies – one which is quite mobile and one which is mostly stationary.<sup>19</sup>

Due to this difference that is still prevalent in the SNA today, the Somali government is struggling not only with the stabilization but also holding of newly reliberated territories. It is one thing to make al-Shabaab withdraw from Central Somalia and a completely different one to hold the area as long as conditions for security and peace are created for the locals. The Somali government did not prove entirely successful in the former either,

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14 It would be quite similar to the struggles after the collapse of the Somali state in the 1990s. For more information, see Abdi Ismail Samatar (2022), 'Somalia's strategy for the way against al-Shabaab will condemn the country to perpetual hell', Daily Maverick, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2022-11-06-somalias-strategy-for-the-war-against-al-shabaab-will-condemn-the-country-to-perpetual-hell/> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

15 The involvement of local clan militias in the fight against al-Shabaab may not even be a possibility in Jubaland and Puntland. In the former, it is the result of longstanding political opposition between the Ogaden (Jubaland administration) and Marehan sub-clans (clan militias) of the Darood clan. Between the federal state of Puntland and the FGS differences are also of political nature.

16 For more information on the Siad Barre regime and its main intelligence apparatus, the National Security Service (NSS), the predecessor of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), see Gábor Sinkó (2021), 'Different times, same methods: The impact of the National Security Service on the operations of the National Intelligence and Security Agency', *Journal of Central and Eastern European African Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1-2, pp. 112-123

17 Suhaib Mahamoud (2022), 'Somalia: Is 'arming the clans' really enough to defeat Al-Shabaab?', The New Arab, <https://www.newarab.com/opinion/somalia-arming-clans-enough-defeat-al-shabaab> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

18 Hiiraan Online (2023), 'Somalia's neighbours commit to send more than 30,000 additional troops to combat Al-Shabaab', [https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Mar/190155/somalia\\_s\\_neighbours\\_commit\\_to\\_send\\_30\\_000\\_additional\\_troops\\_to\\_combat\\_al\\_shabaab.aspx](https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Mar/190155/somalia_s_neighbours_commit_to_send_30_000_additional_troops_to_combat_al_shabaab.aspx) (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

19 Harun Maruf (2023), 'Exclusive: Somalia Sends Thousands of Army Recruits Abroad for Training', Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/exclusive-somalia-sends-thousands-of-army-recruits-abroad-for-training-/6941868.html> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)



since they were unable to expel all the group's fighters from Hirshabelle and Galmudug states.<sup>20</sup> Holding the regained territories in the long run was also doomed from the start as the SNA does not (yet) have the military capacity for doing that. On top of that, the FGS needs to do more than merely preventing the recaptured areas to fall under al-Shabaab control again. Basic services should be provided and reconciliation has to be prioritized. It is especially important since the terrorist organization was able to capitalize on the FGS's weaknesses and carry out operations against the Somali army as well as maintain some of their military bases.

Besides, when the SNA concentrated its efforts on Galmudug, the group recaptured territories in Hirshabelle. As a consequence, the Somali army was forced to remain in the regions of Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle instead of pushing towards southern Somalia.<sup>21</sup> As long as it is not clarified which troops are going to hold the ground in the reliberated territories, similar instances will probably happen in the future. The problem is that "common" soldiers in the SNA are not trained in community engagement and Danab and Gorgor commandos specialize in offensives. The best scenario would be if the Somali law enforcement bodies could take on this responsibility, however, they need additional capacity-building and thus it remains a long-term plan.<sup>22</sup> Another issue is the financial and humanitarian limitation of the FGS. The priority now is that the Somali Security Forces can take over security responsibilities from ATMIS by the end of 2024. It puts enormous pressure on the government, which would be in an even more difficult situation if there were further territorial gains. The FGS overstretched its boundaries during many counter-terrorism campaigns in the past; thus it would be important that now it learns from its mistakes.<sup>23</sup>

Winning over al-Shabaab in southern Somalia is likely to be more challenging than in the central parts of the country. It is not only because the group alienated the Hawiye clan with their most recent deeds, but can be traced back to much earlier. Resistance in this area has deeper roots. For instance, sub-clans in Central Somalia have been armed since the 1990s. President Mohamud, who is a Hawiye, found it much easier to earn the support of the Habar Gidir sub-clan in Galmudug and the Abgaal and Hawadle sub-clans in Hirshabelle. Former President "Farmaajo" would have never dreamed of such thing<sup>24</sup>, which attests to clannism still playing a prominent role in Somali affairs. Clans in southern Somalia are also more diverse, but less equipped militarily.<sup>25</sup> There could be a higher number of disputes about power sharing between the FGS and member states, but also within the latter group itself. This political divide – which is mostly about retaining authority – could hinder success and victory against al-Shabaab.

Another challenge the FGS is now facing is the obligation to keep the promises it has made to mobilize the Somalis. One of the most appealing was establishing new districts with their own budgets, where locals would be entitled to basic services, including healthcare. However, it is not enough to stabilize the newly reliberated territories in the short term; it has to happen in the long run. Somalis did not definitively commit themselves to the FGS; they are likely to switch sides if the government either breaks its promises or take a long time to fulfill them.<sup>26</sup> Simultaneously, the terrorist organization is fighting on two fronts. On the one hand, it is striving

20 International Crisis Group (2023)

21 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project [ACLED] (2023), 'Somalia: Counter-Insurgency Operation Gains Regional Support in Phase Two as al-Shabaab Attacks and Political Differences Persist', Situation Update, April 2023, <https://acleddata.com/2023/04/21/somalia-situation-update-april-2023-counter-insurgency-operation-gains-regional-support-in-phase-two-as-al-shabaab-attacks-and-political-differences-persist/> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

22 Reliance on Somali forces would also be in step with aspirations towards a federal security framework, which was stipulated in the National Security Architecture in 2017.

23 International Crisis Group (2021), 'Reforming the AU Mission in Somalia', Briefing No. 176, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b176-reforming-au-mission-somalia> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

24 "Farmaajo", who hails from the Marehan sub-clan of the Darood clan, could not get the support of other Darood sub-clans, including the Ogaden and Majeerteen.

25 The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (2015), 'South and central Somalia: Majority clans and minority groups', [https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1048940/1226\\_1427284958\\_cig-som-clans-and-mgs-march-2015.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1048940/1226_1427284958_cig-som-clans-and-mgs-march-2015.pdf) (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

26 It is similar to pledging a bay'ah, which is an oath of allegiance that can be given and taken back at any particular time depending on the interests of the individual or group.

to destabilize the FGS by carrying out offensives in major cities. On the other hand, they are working towards severing the tie between the SNA and clan militias. Due to al-Shabaab still controlling remote places in Central Somalia, where people fear for their safety, the movement is offering locals peace agreements. They do not need to support the group; it is already acceptable for al-Shabaab if they remain neutral, weakening the efforts of the Somali government.<sup>27</sup>

Lastly, the FGS proves unable to combat al-Shabaab without the help of its bilateral and external partners. To achieve long-term peace and security the country needs to become much more stable than it currently is, which in turn requires large sums of money. It seems expectations differ significantly when it comes to promises made by the FGS and the needs of locals. While the International Community is willing to help, their financial support will most probably be limited, since humanitarian and security assistance is expensive and there are other crises in the Horn of Africa region they need to allocate resources for.<sup>28</sup> Although several international partners, such as the US, UK and European Union pledged to channel additional financial aid to Somalia, more support would be needed to stabilize the territories that have been recaptured from al-Shabaab most recently.<sup>29</sup>

While significant progress has been made in the fight against al-Shabaab, a lot remains to be achieved. In light of the Somali government's latest offensive, morale and optimism are high; however, it is quite likely the FGS needs a different strategy to combat the terrorist group in the south. Contrary to popular belief, the hardest part might not be to drive al-Shabaab out of southern Somalia, but to hold the newly reliberated territories.<sup>30</sup> The terrorist organization will probably try to prevent further progress by carrying out attacks in larger towns and striking peace deals with sub-clans. At the same time, the FGS should make efforts to provide the basic but much needed services to locals (thereby keeping its promise), reconcile rivals, foster regional and international connections, and if possible, integrate clan armies into the SNA. If the Somali government devotes all its energy to defeating al-Shabaab in southern Somalia, neglecting the central parts of the country, there is a high chance that the movement will recapture the areas previously under its control.

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27 Hiraal Institute (2023), 'Governance Without Presence: The Somali Government's Liberation Struggles', Hiraal Commentary, <https://hiraalinstitute.org/governance-without-presence-the-somali-governments-liberation-struggles/> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

28 For more information, see European Union (2023), 'EU launches a new Rapid Nationwide Stabilisation programme worth €4.5 million', [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/somalia/eu-launches-new-rapid-nationwide-stabilisation-programme-worth-%E2%82%AC45-million\\_en?s=153](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/somalia/eu-launches-new-rapid-nationwide-stabilisation-programme-worth-%E2%82%AC45-million_en?s=153) and U.S. Department of State (2023), 'Joint Statement on Somalia', <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-somalia/> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

29 International Crisis Group (2022), 'Ten Challenges for the UN in 2022-2023', Crisis Group Special Briefing No. 8, New York/ Brussels, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/b008-ten-challenges-for-the-un-in-2022-2023.pdf> (Accessed: 19 June 2023)

30 Also, it should not be forgotten that even if al-Shabaab is eventually defeated, the group's intelligence apparatus, the Amniyat, has been created to survive any kind of dissolution. For more information, see Gábor Sinkó and János Besenyő (2021), 'Comparison of the Secret Service of al-Shabaab, the Amniyat, and the National Intelligence and Security Agency (Somalia)', *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Vol. 36, Issue 1, pp. 220-240.





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