

From Ideology to Action: Analyzing Rapoport's Terrorism Framework in the Context of Al-Shabaab's Evolving Extremist Ideology in the Horn of Africa

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This study examines the evolution of Al-Shabaab's extremist ideology in the Horn of Africa through David Rapoport's Four Waves of Terrorism framework. It aims to analyze the persistent influence of Al-Shabaab amidst counterinsurgency efforts, highlighting the interplay between local grievances and global jihadist narratives. Through an ideological analysis of secondary sources, the research reveals that Al-Shabaab merges Somali nationalism with global jihadist ideologies, framing its struggle as both a local defense against foreign intervention and part of Islamic movement. This dual narrative is crucial for sustaining recruitment and operational resilience, illustrating the complexities of contemporary terrorism in the region.

Keywords: Al-Shabaab, Salafi-jihadism, terrorism, Rapoport's Four Waves

Introduction

Al-Shabaab (meaning *The Youth* in Arabic) is an Islamist militant group that has emerged as a significant force in the Horn of Africa, particularly in Somalia. Established in the mid-2000s, Al-Shabaab has become synonymous with violence, terrorism, and instability in a region already plagued by conflict. The group's origins can be traced back to the Islamic Courts Union (here after ICU), which sought to impose Sharia law across Somalia during a period of political chaos following the collapse of the central government in 1991 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). The ICU's fall, exacerbated by an Ethiopian invasion in 2006, catalyzed Al-Shabaab's transformation from a local militia into a formidable insurgent group that has since controlled vast territories in southern Somalia.

Historically, Somalia has been characterized by political fragmentation and clan rivalries. The collapse of Siad Barre's regime led to a power vacuum that allowed various factions to vie for control. Al-Shabaab emerged as a key player during this tumultuous period, presenting itself as a defender against foreign intervention and a champion of Somali nationalism (International Crisis Group, 2023). The socio-political landscape of Somalia is marked by widespread poverty, unemployment, and ineffective governance. These

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conditions have made extremist ideologies appealing to many young Somalis who see Al-Shabaab as a vehicle for social justice and national pride (Wekesa, 2015).

The group's ideology is rooted in Salafi jihadism, which seeks to return to what its adherents consider the pure practices of early Islam. Al-Shabaab combines this religious fervor with local grievances, framing its struggle as both a local jihad against foreign occupation and part of a broader transnational Islamic movement (CSIS, 2021). This dual narrative has proven effective in recruiting fighters from both Somalia and abroad. Al-Shabaab's operational tactics have evolved over time, shifting from conventional warfare to guerrilla tactics and terrorism. The group gained international notoriety for high-profile attacks such as the Westgate Mall attack in Kenya in 2013 and the Mogadishu bombings in 2017, which killed hundreds and underscored its capacity for violence (Wikipedia, 2023). Despite military setbacks and territorial losses due to counterinsurgency efforts led by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Al-Shabaab remains resilient and continues to mount lethal attacks against both military targets and civilians (BTI Project, 2024).

Understanding Al-Shabaab's evolution is crucial not only for addressing the immediate security challenges it poses but also for developing long-term strategies to counteract extremism in the region. This study aims to analyze Al-Shabaab's extremist ideology through the lens of David Rapoport's Four Waves of Terrorism framework. By contextualizing Al-Shabaab within this framework, we can better understand how its ideology has developed over time and how it aligns with or diverges from historical patterns of terrorism. Thus, this study strives to answer the following questions:

- (a) What are the ideological foundations of Al-Shabaab?
- (b) How has its ideology evolved in response to internal and external pressures?
- (c) In what ways does Al-Shabaab's trajectory align with or diverge from Rapoport's Four Waves?

Literature Review

David Rapoport's Four Waves of Terrorism

David Rapoport's conceptualization of terrorism outlines four distinct "waves", each representing a historical period characterized by unique ideological underpinnings and forms of violence. According to Rapoport (2002), the first wave emerged in the late 19th century and was dominated by anarchist movements, while the second wave, occurring in the mid-20th century, was primarily influenced by anti-colonial struggles. The third wave, which began in the late 20th century, was characterized by leftist ideologies, and the current fourth wave is primarily associated with religious extremism, particularly Islamist terrorism (Rapoport, 2002; 2004).

The fourth wave, which is particularly relevant to the study of Al-Shabaab, is marked by its global reach and its use of technology to disseminate propaganda and recruit followers (Hoffman, 2006). This wave emphasizes the role of radical Islamic ideologies in justifying violence, where groups perceive themselves as engaged in a cosmic struggle against perceived enemies of Islam (Juergensmeyer, 2000). Al-Shabaab, as a Salafi-jihadist organization, embodies these characteristics, drawing on religious narratives to legitimize its violent actions and bolster recruitment efforts (Menkhaus, 2014).

Al-Shabaab's ideological framework aligns closely with the tenets of the fourth wave of terrorism as articulated by Rapoport. The group emerged in the early 2000s amid Somalia's protracted civil conflict, which provided fertile ground for radicalization (Menkhaus, 2014). Central to Al-Shabaab's ideology is the desire to establish an Islamic state governed by Sharia law, which resonates with the broader goals of many contemporary jihadist movements (Hansen, 2013).

More so, Al-Shabaab's operational strategies reflect the fourth wave's emphasis on global jihadism. The group has utilized social media platforms to spread its message, recruit fighters, and inspire attacks beyond Somalia (Menkhaus, 2014; Sageman, 2004). Its affiliation with Al-Qaeda and later interactions with ISIS further illustrate its position within this wave of terrorism, as Al-Shabaab has sought to align itself with global jihadist movements while simultaneously asserting its local relevance (Hansen, 2013; Lister, 2015).

Al-Shabaab's relationship with Al-Qaeda has been pivotal in shaping its operational and ideological framework. Initially, Al-Shabaab sought to align itself with Al-Qaeda to gain legitimacy and resources, culminating in a formal pledge of allegiance in 2008 (Hansen, 2013). This relationship has provided Al-Shabaab with both ideological backing and tactical support, as evidenced by shared training and planning resources (Menkhaus, 2014). The emergence of ISIS posed a significant challenge to Al-Shabaab's position within the global jihadist hierarchy. Although Al-Shabaab initially rejected ISIS's claim to leadership over the global jihad, the group's aggressive recruitment strategies and territorial gains in Iraq and Syria attracted some of Al-Shabaab's members (Lister, 2015; McCauley & Moskalets, 2020). Despite this, Al-Shabaab has maintained its distinct identity by focusing on local grievances and resisting the more globalist agenda proposed by ISIS (Hansen, 2020). Thus, Rapoport's framework provides a valuable lens through which to analyze Al-Shabaab's operations and ideology, situating the group within the broader context of contemporary terrorism. By examining the historical roots and relationships with other organizations, we gain insights into the factors that continue to influence Al-Shabaab's strategies and resilience.

Historical Context of Al-Shabaab

Detailed timeline of Al-Shabaab's formation and key events influencing its ideology. Al-Shabaab's origins can be traced to the early 2000s, as a militant offshoot of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which briefly ruled Mogadishu in 2006 before being ousted by Ethiopian forces (Menkhaus, 2014). The following timeline highlights key events that shaped Al-Shabaab's ideology and operations:

Table 1. These events illustrate Al-Shabaab's evolution from a localized group to a significant player within the global jihadist movement, as well as the factors that have shaped its ideology over time.

Year	Key events
2004-2006	Formation of the Islamic Courts Union, which brought a semblance of order to Mogadishu, fostering the emergence of militant factions.
2006	Ethiopian invasion to oust the ICU, leading to the rise of Al-Shabaab as a key resistance group (Menkhaus, 2014).
2008	Al-Shabaab formally pledges allegiance to Al-Qaeda, solidifying its status as a player in global jihad (Hansen, 2013).
2010	The group carries out deadly bombings in Kampala, Uganda, marking its first major attack outside Somalia (Lister, 2015).
2012	Al-Shabaab begins losing territory but adapts its strategy to include more asymmetric tactics (Menkhaus, 2014).
2015-2017	Al-Shabaab conducts high-profile attacks in Kenya, including the Westgate Mall attack in 2013, which garnered significant international attention (Lindsay, 2014).
2019-Present	The group continues to carry out attacks in Somalia and neighboring countries, despite intensified military operations against it (Hansen, 2020).

Methodology

The methodology for analyzing Al-Shabaab's extremist ideology employs an ideological analysis framework, primarily utilizing secondary sources to explore the group's evolution through David Rapoport's Four Waves

of Terrorism. This approach is structured as follows.

Ideological analysis (see the analysis part). This method focuses on understanding the ideological underpinnings of Al-Shabaab, particularly its alignment with Salafi-jihadism. Scholars such as Menkhaus (2014) and Hansen (2013) provide foundational insights into how Al-Shabaab's beliefs reflect broader jihadist narratives while addressing local Somali grievances.

Contextualization within Rapoport's framework. The study positions Al-Shabaab within Rapoport's Four Waves of Terrorism to assess its ideological evolution over time. This framework allows for a comparative analysis of how Al-Shabaab's ideology aligns with historical patterns of terrorism, particularly the fourth wave characterized by religious extremism (Hoffman, 2006).

Data Collection

Secondary sources were rigorously used. A comprehensive review of academic literature, policy reports, and historical analyses provides a rich context for understanding Al-Shabaab's ideology. Key works include those by Sageman (2004) and Juergensmeyer (2000), which discuss the role of global jihadist ideologies in shaping militant groups. The methodology incorporates a timeline of significant events influencing Al-Shabaab's ideology, drawing from various scholarly sources to illustrate the interplay between local conditions and global jihadist movements.

Analysis Techniques

This paper utilizes thematic and comparative analysis. By identifying recurring themes in the literature regarding Al-Shabaab's operational strategies and ideological framing, this study highlights how local grievances are interwoven with global jihadist narratives. The study also compares Al-Shabaab's evolution with other terrorist organizations within Rapoport's framework to identify unique and shared characteristics in their ideological development. This is because the methods provide comprehensive understanding of Al-Shabaab's resilience and adaptability in the complex socio-political landscape of Somalia, revealing the intricate relationship between local and global narratives in contemporary terrorism.

Analytical Framework

The ideological analysis of Al-Shabaab, positioned within David Rapoport's Four Waves of Terrorism, provides a comprehensive understanding of how the group's beliefs and practices have evolved over time. This analysis explores the ideological roots and evolution, interplay between local grievances, global jihadist ideologies, and the strategic adaptations that have characterized Al-Shabaab's operational trajectory.

Al-Shabaab's ideological foundation is deeply rooted in Salafi-jihadism, which emphasizes a strict interpretation of Islamic law and the necessity of violent struggle (Menkhaus, 2014). This ideology aligns closely with the fourth wave of terrorism, wherein groups justify their violent actions as a form of religious duty. The group's emergence in the early 2000s coincided with the global rise of jihadism, influenced by events such as the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan (Hansen, 2013).

Initially, Al-Shabaab's ideology was largely focused on local Somali issues, such as the desire to establish an Islamic state in Somalia and combat foreign intervention (Menkhaus, 2014). However, as the conflict evolved, so did its ideological framing. The group began to adopt a more global jihadist perspective, resonating with the broader narratives propagated by Al-Qaeda. Hansen, in this regard claims that this shift is evident in its formal pledge of allegiance to Al-Qaeda in 2008, which provided a framework for legitimizing its violence on a global scale (2013, p. 33).

The application of Rapoport's framework also highlights how Al-Shabaab integrates local grievances with global jihadist narratives. The group's ideology is not merely an import from international jihadist movements but is significantly informed by the socio-political context of Somalia. For instance, the historical context of clan-based politics and the legacy of state collapse in Somalia has shaped Al-Shabaab's operational strategies and recruitment narratives (Menkhaus, 2014).

Al-Shabaab has adeptly framed its struggle as part of a larger global jihad against perceived enemies of Islam, including Western nations and secular governments. This dual focus on local and global issues is a hallmark of the fourth wave of terrorism, where groups seek to galvanize support by linking local grievances to broader ideological battles (Hoffman, 2006).

The ideological analysis also reveals how Al-Shabaab has adapted its beliefs and practices in response to internal and external pressures. After suffering territorial losses, particularly following military interventions by African Union forces, Al-Shabaab shifted from conventional territorial warfare to asymmetric tactics, such as suicide bombings and guerrilla warfare as Menkhaus (2014) noted. This strategic pivot reflects the group's resilience and ability to adapt its ideological framing to maintain relevance and operational capability. Al-Shabaab's use of social media and propaganda has also been instrumental in this evolution. The group has effectively harnessed digital platforms to disseminate its ideology, recruit fighters, and create a sense of belonging among its followers, reinforcing its narrative of a global jihadist struggle (Hansen, 2020). This adaptation underscores the fluid nature of Al-Shabaab's beliefs, as they continue to evolve in response to changing dynamics within the broader jihadist landscape.

The application of ideological analysis within the framework of Rapoport's Four Waves of Terrorism provides, in general, valuable insights into Al-Shabaab's evolution. By examining the interplay between local and global narratives, as well as the group's ability to adapt its beliefs and practices, we gain a deeper understanding of its resilience and continued influence in the region. This analysis not only highlights the complexities of Al-Shabaab's ideology but also illustrates the broader trends within contemporary terrorism, characterized by an intricate blending of local grievances with global jihadist ideologies.

Analysis

Ideological Foundations

Most researchers (Sageman 2004; Hansen, 2013; Menkhaus, 2014) agree that Salafi jihadism serves as the cornerstone of Al-Shabaab's ideological framework, shaping its beliefs, practices, and operational strategies. This ideology combines a strict interpretation of Sunni Islam—referred to as Salafism—with the belief in jihad (or holy struggle) as a necessary means to achieve the establishment of an Islamic state governed by Sharia law (Menkhaus, 2014). So, Salafism advocates for a return to the practices of the “salaf”, or the early generations of Muslims, emphasizing a literal interpretation of the Quran and Hadith. This movement encompasses various strands, including quietist, political, and jihadist Salafism. Al-Shabaab aligns primarily with the jihadist variant, which legitimizes violence as a means of defending Islam and promoting its interpretation of Islamic governance (Hansen, 2013).

Salafi jihadism distinguishes itself by its focus on both defensive and offensive jihad. Defensive jihad is seen as a response to perceived attacks on Islam, while offensive jihad is viewed as a proactive effort to spread Islamic governance (Sageman, 2004). Al-Shabaab's operational ethos reflects this duality, as it engages in

violent acts both in response to foreign interventions and as part of a broader mission to expand its influence across the Horn of Africa.

Al-Shabaab's Ideological Manifestations

Within Al-Shabaab, the tenets of Salafi jihadism manifest in several key ways. Al-Shabaab's primary objective is to establish a government based on Sharia law in Somalia. This goal is deeply rooted in the belief that Islamic governance is the only legitimate form of rule, rejecting both local and foreign secular systems. According to Hessein (2023), Al-Shabaab seeks to implement a strict interpretation of Sharia, viewing it as essential for restoring order and justice in Somalia, which they perceive as being plagued by corruption and ineffectiveness under secular governance.

Al-Shabaab frames its struggle as a defense of Islam against foreign invaders, particularly Western powers and neighboring countries like Ethiopia. This narrative is reinforced through propaganda that portrays the group as the protector of Somali sovereignty and Islamic values. As noted by Williams (2022), Al-Shabaab utilizes anti-Western rhetoric to galvanize support, positioning itself as the frontline defense against perceived imperialism and foreign interference in Somalia. Its ideology emphasizes Sunni orthodoxy and generally rejects sectarian divides. This focus allows the group to position itself as a unifying force for Sunni Muslims, which is particularly relevant in a region marked by diverse ethnic and religious affiliations. According to Menkhaus (2023), Al-Shabaab promotes a narrative that transcends local tribal and sectarian divisions, aiming to unify Somali Muslims under a singular Islamic identity rooted in their interpretation of Salafism.

The concept of martyrdom is also central to Al-Shabaab's narrative, with fighters often depicted as heroes in the struggle for Islam. This glorification of martyrdom serves to inspire recruits and legitimize the group's violent tactics, framing them as part of a noble cause. As highlighted by Raghavan (2023), Al-Shabaab's propaganda effectively romanticizes the idea of martyrdom, portraying those who die in battle as achieving eternal glory and a place in paradise, which is a powerful motivator for potential recruits.

Equally important is Somali's nationalism and resistance for it intertwines with Al-Shabaab's jihadist agenda, shaping the group's identity and operational strategies. In the context of a fractured state, where clan affiliations and historical grievances dominate, Al-Shabaab has adeptly positioned itself as a defender of Somali sovereignty and Islamic values. This dual identity allows the group to mobilize support by appealing to both nationalist sentiments and religious fervor (Menkhaus, 2014).

This is where it gets even interesting. The collapse of the Somali state in the early 1990s led to a power vacuum that various factions, including Al-Shabaab, sought to fill. The ensuing chaos fueled a sense of nationalism rooted in the desire for unity and stability among Somalis (Hansen, 2013). Al-Shabaab capitalizes on this sentiment by portraying itself as the only viable force capable of restoring order and protecting the Somali people from foreign intervention and internal strife.

What is most compelling for the recruited was the resistance narrative. Al-Shabaab frames its jihadist activities as a form of resistance against foreign powers and local elites perceived as corrupt or ineffective. This narrative resonates with many Somalis who have experienced decades of violence and instability. By positioning itself as a defender of Islam and Somali identity, Al-Shabaab garners local support and legitimizes its violent tactics (Menkhaus, 2014; Lister, 2015). One was culture. The group employs cultural symbols and references to Somali history in its propaganda. By invoking historical figures and events that resonate with nationalist sentiments, Al-Shabaab reinforces its ideological framework, making its jihadist agenda appear as a

continuation of a long-standing struggle for Somali unity and sovereignty (Hansen, 2020). More so, the ideological landscape of Al-Shabaab was and most probably is marked by internal conflicts between global jihadist aims and local Somali issues. While the group aligns itself with broader jihadist movements, the necessity to address local grievances often creates tensions within its operational strategies and messaging.

Evolution Over Time

First wave: Anarchist terrorism (late 19th century). The first wave of modern terrorism, commonly referred to as anarchist terrorism, emerged in the late 19th century and is characterized by its ideological roots in anarchism. This wave primarily spanned from the 1870s to the early 20th century, marked by a series of violent acts aimed at overthrowing established state structures and promoting radical social change. Anarchism advocates for the abolition of all forms of hierarchical authority, emphasizing individual freedom and collective self-governance. Anarchist terrorists sought to challenge state power and capitalist structures, believing that violent acts could catalyze revolutionary change (Della Porta & Tarrow, 2012). Key figures in this movement, such as Mikhail Bakunin and Emma Goldman, articulated the philosophical underpinnings of anarchist thought.

The tactics employed by anarchist terrorists included assassinations, bombings, and public demonstrations. High-profile assassinations, such as that of U.S. President William McKinley in 1901, highlighted the potential impact of individual acts of violence on political discourse (Hoffman, 2006). Bombings were particularly favored as they instilled fear and garnered media attention, amplifying the group's message. The rise of anarchist terrorism was closely tied to the socio-political climate of the time, particularly in Europe and North America. The Industrial Revolution and the resulting social inequalities created fertile ground for radical ideologies. Anarchist groups often operated transnationally, sharing tactics and strategies across borders, which foreshadowed the global nature of contemporary terrorism (Hoffman, 2006).

The legacy of anarchist violence laid the groundwork for understanding how ideologically motivated groups can utilize violence to achieve political ends. The tactics and strategies developed during this period, such as "propaganda by the deed", continue to influence modern terrorist organizations (Tilly, 2004). While contemporary terrorist groups may not be explicitly identified as anarchist, many draw on similar motivations of resistance against perceived oppression. For instance, groups like Al-Shabaab and ISIS incorporate messages of revolutionary change and resistance against established authorities, paralleling the motivations of anarchist terrorists (Menkhaus, 2014).

Notably, the anarchist wave highlights the role of media in shaping public perception of terrorism. The dramatic nature of anarchist attacks garnered significant media coverage, influencing public responses and government policies. This dynamic persists today, as modern groups leverage social media to amplify their messages and recruit followers globally (Hoffman, 2006). The international connections established by anarchist groups foreshadow the transnational networks that characterize contemporary terrorist movements, with modern jihadist organizations operating across borders and utilizing global communication networks to coordinate actions and disseminate propaganda (Rapoport, 2002). Ultimately, the first wave of anarchist terrorism provides critical insights into the evolution of terrorist tactics, ideologies, and the socio-political contexts that foster radicalization.

Second wave: Anti-colonial terrorism (1920s-1960s). The second wave of terrorism, often characterized as anti-colonial terrorism, emerged in the early 20th century and spanned from the 1920s to the 1960s. This

wave was primarily driven by the struggle against colonial powers, as various nationalist movements sought to liberate their countries from foreign domination. In the context of Somalia, several contextual factors influenced early forms of resistance during this period, shaping the trajectory of nationalist sentiments and the methods employed by Somali activists.

One of the central factors influencing resistance in Somalia was the legacy of colonial rule. Following the Scramble for Africa in the late 19th century, Somalia was divided among British, French, and Italian colonial powers. This division not only fragmented Somali territory but also created a profound sense of dislocation among the Somali people, who were subjected to foreign governance and economic exploitation. The imposition of external authority led to widespread resentment and fostered a burgeoning nationalist movement aimed at reclaiming sovereignty (Lewis, 2009).

The socio-economic conditions of the time also played a critical role in shaping anti-colonial sentiments. Colonial policies often favored certain clans and marginalized others, exacerbating existing tensions and fostering a sense of grievance among the Somali population. This context of inequality and exploitation galvanized various nationalist factions, who began to view violence as a legitimate means of resistance against oppressive colonial regimes (Menkhaus, 2014). The experience of World War II further intensified these sentiments, as many Somalis served in the British military and returned with heightened awareness of nationalist movements globally.

Religious identity also intersected with anti-colonial sentiments during this period. The influence of Islamic leaders and scholars who opposed colonial rule helped to frame the struggle for independence in moral and religious terms. This blend of nationalism and religious fervor provided a potent ideological foundation for resistance movements, motivating many Somalis to engage in acts of defiance against colonial authorities (Hansen, 2013).

In particular, the rise of pan-Africanism and global decolonization movements in the mid-20th century inspired Somali nationalists to pursue their liberation struggle more vigorously. The success of other African nations in gaining independence served as a catalyst for Somali activists, who began to organize protests, uprisings, and, in some cases, violent resistance against colonial forces (Lewis, 2002). This period also witnessed the emergence of various nationalist organizations, such as the Somali Youth League, which played a crucial role in mobilizing support for the anti-colonial cause. So, the legacy of colonialism, coupled with existing clan tensions, economic exploitation, and the interplay of nationalism and religion, created a fertile ground for resistance.

Third wave: New left terrorism (1960s-1980s). The third wave of terrorism, commonly referred to as New Left terrorism, emerged between the 1960s and 1980s, characterized by a significant ideological shift towards revolutionary Marxist and anti-imperialist principles. This wave was not merely a reaction to the existing socio-political conditions but also a manifestation of broader global currents that influenced various liberation movements, including those in Somalia. While the Somali context was unique, the impact of New Left ideology on local groups warrants a critical examination, particularly in understanding how these shifts shaped militant strategies and nationalist aspirations.

During this period, Somali groups began to adopt elements of New Left thought, primarily influenced by global anti-colonial movements and the rise of revolutionary ideologies. The Cold War backdrop, with its binary division between capitalism and socialism, provided a fertile ground for ideological experimentation. Groups such as the Somali National Movement (SNM) and the United Somali Congress (USC) began to frame

their struggles not only as national liberation efforts but also as part of a broader fight against imperialism and capitalist exploitation (Menkhaus, 2014).

This ideological evolution was significant in that it marked a departure from earlier nationalist sentiments that primarily focused on sovereignty and local grievances. The infusion of Marxist-Leninist principles into Somali resistance narratives introduced concepts of class struggle and anti-imperialism, which resonated with a segment of the population disillusioned by the failures of traditional clan politics. It allowed these groups to articulate a vision that extended beyond mere territorial integrity to encompass social justice and economic equity (Hansen, 2013).

However, the adoption of New Left ideologies was not without its contradictions and challenges. While the rhetoric of class struggle appealed to many, it often clashed with the deeply entrenched clan identities that defined Somali society. The attempt to unify diverse clan interests under a Marxist framework proved difficult, as local loyalties and historical grievances persisted, complicating the operational coherence of these movements. This tension highlighted a fundamental flaw in the ideological shift: the imposition of a foreign ideological framework that failed to account for the deeply rooted clan dynamics within Somalia (Lewis, 2002).

Besides that, the tactics employed by Somali groups during this period reflected the broader trends of New Left terrorism, including urban guerrilla warfare and high-profile kidnappings. While these methods aimed to draw international attention to their cause, they often alienated segments of the population that were wary of violence and instability. This disconnection between revolutionary ideals and local realities raised critical questions about the efficacy of such strategies in achieving genuine political change. The reliance on violence as a means to an end risked undermining the legitimacy of the movements themselves, as potential supporters grappled with the consequences of armed struggle in their daily lives (Menkhaus, 2014).

The ideological shifts of the New Left era also intersected with external influences, particularly from the Soviet Union and other socialist states, which provided varying degrees of support to Somali nationalist movements. This international dimension further complicated the landscape, as groups navigated the competing interests of global superpowers while attempting to maintain their autonomy. The entanglement with foreign ideologies and support mechanisms sometimes diluted local agendas, leading to a disconnect between the movements' stated goals and the realities on the ground.

It can thus be inferred that the third wave of New Left terrorism catalyzed significant ideological shifts within Somali groups, reshaping their narratives and strategies. While the infusion of revolutionary principles offered a broader framework for resistance, it also revealed inherent contradictions and challenges rooted in local realities. The tension between global ideological currents and entrenched clan identities underscored the complexities of Somali nationalism and the difficulties faced by movements striving for both liberation and social justice.

Fourth wave: Religious terrorism (1980s-present). The fourth wave of terrorism, often characterized as religious terrorism, has been a defining feature of global conflicts since the 1980s. This wave is marked by the intertwining of religious ideologies with political objectives, where groups justify their violent actions through a framework of religious duty and divine mandate. Al-Shabaab exemplifies this wave, embodying the characteristics of religious terrorism through its global jihadist connections and the articulation of local grievances.

At its core, Al-Shabaab's ideology is rooted in Salafi jihadism, which promotes a radical interpretation of Islam that emphasizes the necessity of violent struggle against perceived enemies of the faith. This ideological

stance is not merely a reflection of local discontent; it is deeply influenced by global jihadist movements, particularly the legacy of Al-Qaeda. Al-Shabaab formally pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda in 2008, aligning itself with a broader network of jihadist organizations that share similar objectives of establishing a global caliphate and combating Western influence (Hansen, 2013). This connection amplifies Al-Shabaab's legitimacy in the eyes of its supporters, allowing it to draw recruits not only from Somalia but also from a wider international pool of jihadists seeking to engage in a global struggle.

However, Al-Shabaab's identity is not solely defined by its global jihadist aspirations. The group adeptly integrates local grievances into its narrative, framing its struggle as a defense of Somali sovereignty against foreign intervention and oppressive local regimes. The history of foreign military interventions, particularly by the United States and the African Union, has provided Al-Shabaab with a potent narrative that resonates with many Somalis who view these actions as violations of their national sovereignty (Menkhaus, 2014). By positioning itself as the defender of Somali interests, Al-Shabaab effectively mobilizes support among communities that feel marginalized or disenfranchised by both local leaders and international actors.

This duality of global ambition and local relevance is crucial to understanding Al-Shabaab's operational strategies. The group employs a range of tactics that reflect both its jihadist ideology and its focus on local issues. For instance, while Al-Shabaab conducts high-profile attacks aimed at international targets, such as the Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi in 2013, it also engages in local governance, providing services and enforcing its interpretation of Sharia law in areas under its control (Hansen, 2020). This strategy not only enhances its legitimacy among local populations but also allows it to maintain a degree of operational flexibility in a complex and evolving conflict environment.

Moreover, Al-Shabaab's use of propaganda plays a vital role in reinforcing its ideological framework. The group leverages social media and other communication channels to disseminate its message, glorifying acts of violence as part of a righteous struggle and framing its actions within the context of a broader Islamic resistance movement. This narrative serves to attract recruits, particularly young individuals disillusioned with the state of affairs in Somalia and seeking a sense of purpose through participation in a global jihad (Menkhaus, 2014).

Conversely, the integration of global jihadist ideology with local grievances is fraught with challenges. The complexities of clan loyalties and historical grievances often complicate Al-Shabaab's attempts to unify various Somali factions under its banner. While the group has had success in recruiting from disenfranchised segments of the population, it also faces resistance from local leaders and communities that are wary of its violent methods and strict interpretations of Islam (Hansen, 2013).

It can thus be inferred that Al-Shabaab serves as a poignant example of how the fourth wave of religious terrorism encapsulates the interplay between global jihadist connections and local grievances. The group's ability to navigate these dual narratives has been instrumental in its resilience and operational longevity. By framing its struggle as both a part of a global jihad and a defense of Somali sovereignty, Al-Shabaab continues to adapt to the complexities of the regional landscape while maintaining its ideological commitments. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for developing effective counter-terrorism strategies that address both the ideological underpinnings of religious terrorism and the local contexts in which these groups operate.

Conclusion

This study has illuminated the complex evolution of Al-Shabaab's extremist ideology through the lens of David Rapoport's Four Waves of Terrorism framework. The relevance of this theoretical model lies in its

ability to contextualize Al-Shabaab within a broader historical and ideological narrative, demonstrating how the group embodies characteristics of the fourth wave of terrorism, primarily associated with religious extremism. By integrating local grievances with global jihadist narratives, Al-Shabaab has crafted a dual identity that resonates with both Somali nationalism and broader Islamic movements.

The findings reveal that Al-Shabaab's ideological foundation is deeply rooted in Salafi-jihadism, which legitimizes violence as a means to establish an Islamic state governed by Sharia law. This alignment with global jihadist ideologies has allowed the group to maintain operational resilience despite significant military setbacks. Furthermore, the study highlights the adaptability of Al-Shabaab's ideology in response to internal and external pressures, showcasing its strategic pivot from conventional warfare to asymmetric tactics.

The implications of this research extend beyond academic discourse; they provide critical insights for policymakers and counter-terrorism strategists. Understanding the interplay between local and global narratives is essential for developing effective counter-radicalization strategies that address the root causes of extremism in Somalia and similar contexts. As Al-Shabaab continues to evolve, ongoing analysis within this theoretical framework will be vital for anticipating its future trajectories and mitigating its impact on regional stability. Ultimately, this study underscores the necessity of a nuanced approach to counter-terrorism that recognizes the complexities of ideological motivations in contemporary militant movements.

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