



# AL-SHABAAB

## Background

- Al-Shabaab is an extremist organization based in Somalia seeking to establish an austere version of Islam. The group operates in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. The organization pledged allegiance to al-Qa'ida in 2008, and Ahmad Umar has led the group since 2014 after the death of Ahmed Abdi Godane from a US airstrike.
- In Somalia, al-Shabaab primarily targets African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces, attacking government bases and soft targets such as hotels and restaurants that foreign diplomats and officials frequent.
- Prior to 2018, al-Shabaab's most notable coordinated attacks included the Westgate Mall siege that killed 67 in 2013 and the Garissa University attack in 2015, which killed 148.

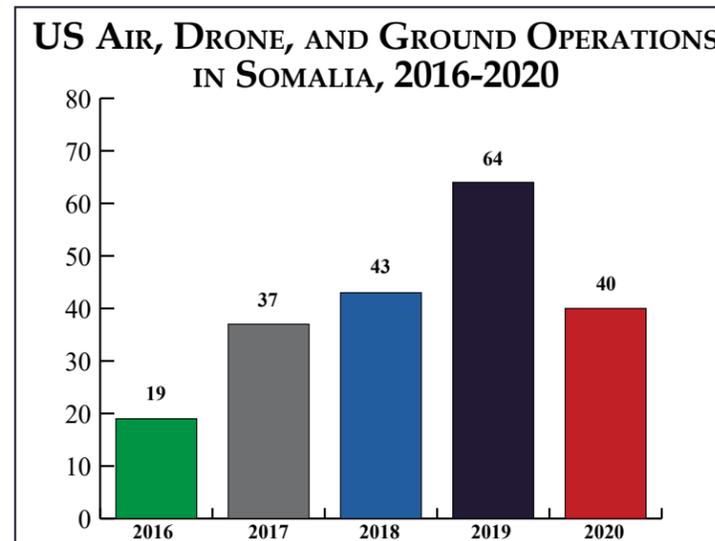


*Al-Shabaab fighters in Somalia*

## Threat to New Jersey: Low

*Al-Shabaab's threat to New Jersey is low, as the group lacks the capability to direct attacks against the United States and continues to focus operations in Africa.* The United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) increased the pace of strikes against al-Shabaab, viewing the group as a growing threat to US interests. Since the beginning of 2020, AFRICOM announced over 30 airstrikes in Somalia.

- On February 22, 2020, AFRICOM carried out an airstrike that led to the death of the al-Shabaab commander responsible for planning and directing terrorist operations in Kenya, including the attack at Manda Bay Airfield in January 2020 that killed a US soldier and two contractors.
- On February 19, 2020, al-Shabaab attacked two Somali military bases using vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices and making off with a cache of small arms and light weapons.
- In December 2019, a truck bomb exploded at a checkpoint in Somalia's capital, killing 79 people and wounding 125 others. AFRICOM responded the next day by carrying out three airstrikes and killing four members of al-Shabaab.



### Additional Resources

[2020 Terrorism Threat Assessment](#)

[Undeterred: International Terror Groups Encourage Attacks Amid Losses](#)

## US Nexus

- In May 2020, al-Shabaab claimed it executed a spy working for US intelligence and was waging multiple attacks and detonating explosives on Somali and Kenyan forces and Ugandan and Burundian troops within the AMISOM mission.
- During his inaugural speech as the new leader of al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula in March 2020, Khalid bin Umar Batarfi rallied his fighters and those elsewhere, renewing the mission of the Afghan Taliban to “defeat” the United States and praising al-Shabaab for its raids at the Baledogle Airfield in Somalia and at Manda Bay.
- In February 2020, al-Shabaab released a statement accusing the United States of waging a “campaign of carnage” via drones in Somalia and deliberately terrorizing civilians. The group also warned the United States of retaliatory strikes in Somalia and neighboring Kenya, citing past attacks at the Manda Bay and Baledogle airfields.
- On January 5, 2020, al-Shabaab insurgents attacked the Manda Bay Airfield, a key US airbase in Kenya. The attack led to the destruction of several US aircrafts and the deaths of three Americans, including two defense contractors.



*Map of Somalia*