

Assessing the Impact of Leadership Change **within al-Shabaab's Amniyat**

Sep 2025

Executive Summary

Over the past three years, Mogadishu has witnessed notable security improvements as a result of sustained efforts by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). In response to these developments, al-Shabaab has demonstrated increased vigilance and is actively seeking new opportunities to reassert its presence in the capital. Recent indications report that the group has undertaken a significant restructuring of its Amniyat leadership and operational cells in Mogadishu. This process has placed Abdullahi Osman aka Engineer Ismail in charge of the Amniyat Maktab, marking a renewed phase of strategic adaptation within al-Shabaab's intelligence and security apparatus.

Available insights into the group dynamics indicate that al-Shabaab is positioning itself to initiate high-level targeted operations directed at senior political leaders, security officials, and critical infrastructure within Mogadishu. The probability of carefully coordinated assassinations, high-profile attacks, or targeted bombings is assessed to be elevated at this stage. Such a shift in operational posture carries the potential to trigger a destabilizing campaign that undermines recent security gains, erodes public confidence, and complicates the government's ongoing security initiatives.

Given these heightened threat, the federal government's security agencies should adopt an extreme posture of vigilance and proactive measures. Priority should be placed on enhancing the protection of senior officials, intensifying intelligence operations to disrupt Amniyat cells in Mogadishu, and strengthening coordination with counterparts to conduct decapitation operations and ensure the gains are maintained and well balanced.

Reorganization of al-Shabaab's Amniyat

Al-Shabaab's intelligence branch, Amniyat, is the group's most critical and secretive unit. Operating independently with its own leadership, finances, and logistics, it focuses on preventing infiltration, gathering intelligence, and carrying out targeted operations in government-controlled areas. Its activities enable al-Shabaab to identify vulnerabilities, exploit opportunities, and plan high-profile operations that reinforce its asymmetric strategy.

The Amniyat Maktab has come under increasing pressure as the Federal Government of Somalia intensified its security and intelligence operations in Mogadishu. Alongside continued offensive campaigns in central Somalia, these efforts have contributed to a measurable decline in al-Shabaab-related incidents in the capital, falling

from 557 in 2022 to 249 in 2024.

In response to this sustained pressure, al-Shabaab has undertaken a restructuring of its Amniyat leadership and operatives in an attempt to adapt to the shifting dynamics. Early this year, Abdullahi Osman, aka Engineer Ismail, was appointed to lead the Amniyat in a step that marks a significant turning point in the organization's intelligence branch, signalling a renewed effort to restore operational effectiveness.

His predecessor, Abdulkadir aka Gees-cadde had presided over the Amniyat for almost a decade but had increasingly become viewed as ineffective, particularly due to his reliance on low-value operations and his inability to coordinate with other units. His removal seems both a reflection of internal dissatisfaction and a demonstration of Abu Ubaidah's faith in Ismail's abilities. Unlike his predecessor, Engineer Ismail simultaneously controls the Amniyat, the explosives department, and the media wing of the organization, making him one of the most powerful figures in al-Shabaab's hierarchy. His close personal loyalty to Abu Ubaidah and his reputation for methodical planning and strict discipline have allowed him to quickly implement wide-ranging reforms within the Amniyat.

According to sources interviewed for this study, senior Amniyat operatives were redeployed and new operatives

recruited and trained, to align them with his vision of a more professional and lethal force. This restructuring has been accompanied by a deliberate effort to reassert the Amniyat's primacy as al-Shabaab's core intelligence and special operations unit. While the Amniyat had lost some of its Mogadishu operational edge in recent years, it is now being positioned to regain its central role through a sharper focus on high-impact operations that serve both tactical and propaganda purposes.

Risk Outlook for Mogadishu

Recent assessments highlight the gravity of the emerging threat posed by Amniyat in Mogadishu. Current directives indicate that operatives are now prioritizing high-profile individuals rather than low-value targets, reflecting a shift in doctrine toward operations designed to maximize political and psychological impact. Senior political and security officials, and the critical infrastructure in Mogadishu, are among the current primary targets for al-Shabaab's Amniyat.

Another key trend relates to Amniyat's adaptation of operational methods. Instead of relying on large-scale hotel bombings or mass casualty attacks in public premises, the group is now assessed to be investing in precision operations that focus on targeted

killings and selective use of explosives. This tactical shift demonstrates lessons learned from previous failures and reflects the influence of Engineer Ismail's perfectionist approach. Reports also indicate that Mogadishu has recently witnessed an influx of trained operatives tasked with conducting assassinations and bombings, increasing the probability of simultaneous or sequential incidents in different districts of the city intended to show power projection. The threat is not limited to Mogadishu, however, as intelligence confirms that Amniyat is planning similar high-value operations against leadership figures in the federal member states, extending the scope of risk beyond the capital. There is also a strong likelihood that such operations might be accompanied by an aggressive propaganda campaign designed to showcase Amniyat's renewed effectiveness and move with the wave of Mogadishu fall that has recently been portrayed in national and international media. The wave of Mogadishu falling in the media outlets seems a perfect opportunity for al-Shabaab's propaganda machinery, led by the same Abdullahi Osman. This would not only affect public confidence in Mogadishu but also resonate across the FMS, fur-

ther undermining national cohesion amidst election transition dynamics. The possibility of coordinated operations targeting political leaders in the states increases the risk of wider destabilization at a time when Somalia is attempting to consolidate fragile security and political gains.

Implications of Leadership Change

The restructuring of the Amniyat under Engineer Ismail has three significant implications for Somalia's security environment. First, it signals a strategic refocus on high-profile targets, which could undermine the morale of state institutions. Second, the retraining and redeployment of Amniyat operatives could mean the unit is likely to operate with greater efficiency, operational security, and lethality than in recent years. This is particularly dangerous because it reduces the margin for error and increases the chances that attempted attacks may succeed. Third, the fact that Osman controls both Amniyat and media wings allow him to synchronize operations with effective propaganda outputs, ensuring that each attack is amplified for maximum psychological effect.

At the same time, Osman's concentration of responsibilities may make him personally more vulnerable to

counter-terrorism operations, as his increased visibility and need for direct engagement expose him to greater risks. However, in the immediate term, his leadership is expected to result in a more aggressive and determined Amniyat with the capacity to escalate operations in Mogadishu and beyond.

Strategic Recommendations

To mitigate the risks posed by the restructured Amniyat, Somalia's security institutions must strengthen personal protective measures for senior officials, adapt strict security protocols to focus on dynamic protection rather than static classic methods, and intensify intelligence-led operations to disrupt infiltrated networks within Mogadishu. The return of the current NISA Director is adding legit value to the process due to his known success in clearing Mogadishu from amniyat operatives in 2022-2023 and decreasing the terrorist related incidents to almost half. Coordinated efforts with FMS will be essential to counter the wider geographic scope of Amniyat's plans, while effective counter-messaging strategy should be deployed to reduce the propaganda value of any attempted attack.

Without such steps, Mogadishu and Somalia at large risk facing a renewed cycle of targeted political violence that could have far-reaching destabilizing consequences.

On the other hand, Somalia and its international partners may see value in refocusing on leadership decapitation strategy to ensure the group's leaders seek captivity and hiding instead of aggression. To this end, the international partners must, therefore, present significant assistance to Somalia to ensure decapitation happens and the groups leadership capabilities degraded.

Conclusion

The evidence points to a critical inflection point in al-Shabaab's operational trajectory. The Amniyat, once seen as a declining unit due to the FGS security measures in Mogadishu, is undergoing rapid revitalization and is now operationally positioned to conduct a campaign of high-profile targeted violence. The adaptation from indiscriminate hotel bombings to precision assassinations reflects both tactical learning and strategic ambition. For Somalia, this evolution presents a serious threat to leadership security, institutional stability, and the progress made in urban security in the past three years.



Copyright © 2025 | Wargelin Analytica
This document is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike
4.0 International License



info@wargelin.org
www.wargelin.org



[@wargelinn](https://twitter.com/wargelinn)