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# THE TERROR THREAT FROM SOMALIA

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THE INTERNATIONALIZATION  
OF AL SHABAAB

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## Executive Summary

Three hundred people nearly died in the skies of Michigan on Christmas Day, 2009 when a Nigerian terrorist attempted to blow up a plane destined for Detroit. The terrorist was an operative of an al Qaeda franchise based in Yemen called al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The group operated known training camps in Yemen and had indicated a desire to strike American targets, but when the attack occurred, it still took the nation by surprise. Today, across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen, another terrorist threat on a par with that of AQAP is growing in Somalia. A militant Islamist group with ties to al Qaeda called al Shabaab controls much of southern and central Somalia, where it operates terror and insurgency training camps. Al Shabaab is composed of both Somali and international militants, including dozens from the United States and Europe. The group has threatened to attack the United States, and it has previously shown the ability to carry out its threats. The danger posed by al Shabaab to American and international security is real and imminent. There will be no excuse for being surprised when this group tries to attack the U.S.

Al Shabaab, whose name literally means “the youth,” began operating as an independent entity in early 2007. It initially sought to drive Ethiopian troops out of Somalia and establish an Islamic state there. The Ethiopians had entered Somalia in December 2006 to establish the authority of the UN-mandated Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and destroy a coalition of *shari’a* courts that controlled much of the country called the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). Upon the Ethiopian invasion, the ICU disintegrated and most of its elements fled, but its military wing, al Shabaab, stayed to fight the Ethiopians. Al Shabaab used techniques characteristic of a terror group when targeting its enemies, including roadside bombs, suicide bombings, grenade attacks,

and assassinations. Al Shabaab’s primary objectives at the time of the Ethiopian invasion appeared to be geographically limited to Somalia, and perhaps the Horn of Africa. The group’s rhetoric and behavior, however, have shifted over the past two years reflecting an eagerness to strike internationally.

Al Shabaab currently controls much of southern and central Somalia, including large portions of the capital, Mogadishu. It has evolved into a group resembling a hybrid of the Afghan Taliban and al Qaeda. It provides government services to its constituents, enforces a strict interpretation of *shari’a* law, and maintains its grip on power by using violence and intimidation. The group also conducts terror operations, including suicide bombings, against its perceived enemies and views itself as part of the global jihad movement. It has established an effective recruiting strategy to attract militants from throughout Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, as well as the United States and Europe. At least twenty Americans and one hundred Brits have travelled to Somalia to fight for al Shabaab. The authority of the internationally recognized and U.S.-backed TFG has been relegated to a few city blocks, government installations, and strategic locations, such as the airport and seaport, in Mogadishu. Al Shabaab thus has the geographic space to train fighters, plan operations, and shelter its al Qaeda allies—which have included top al Qaeda in East Africa operatives responsible for the 1998 attacks on the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

The United States appears to be high on al Shabaab’s list of international targets. The group began issuing threats against the United States in 2008, and it now professes an ideology resembling al Qaeda’s. It has pledged allegiance to bin Laden and views itself as fighting the global jihad led by al Qaeda. Intelligence reports indicate that the group may have intended to

conduct attacks on the U.S. homeland around the time of the 2009 Presidential Inauguration, and there are now reports suggesting that it may attempt to strike U.S. targets in South Africa at the time of the 2010 World Cup. Al Shabaab's threats are real, and the group appears to have the capacity to carry out such threats.

Al Shabaab operates training camps throughout the areas it controls. It has the funds, weapons, technical expertise, and human resources needed to conduct operations. It raises money by taxing international aid organizations, collecting *zakat* from citizens, receiving remittances from abroad, and receiving financial support from Eritrea. Al Shabaab has displayed both large and small arms in its videos, and it has proven its ability to succeed in battle against both conventional and irregular enemies. The group has also proven that it has the means to carry out sophisticated, mass casualty terror attacks. In 2009 alone, al Shabaab conducted at least five suicide operations. Al Shabaab benefits from the technical assistance, including bomb-making skills, of veterans of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Al Shabaab also contains one of the most valuable assets needed to achieve the feat of an international strike: foreign fighters. Al Shabaab militants from the United States and Europe possess, or should be easily able to acquire, the documents necessary to travel throughout much of the world. Striking American interests on the African continent would be likely much less challenging for the group. Many African countries have porous borders and are plagued by ineffective and corrupt intelligence and law enforcement agencies. Further, numerous East African

countries, including Uganda, South Africa, and Kenya, have large Somali populations that could potentially provide shelter to al Shabaab terrorists. The group also has access to at least one expert document-forgery, Fazul Abdullah, the current leader of al Qaeda in East Africa, which should facilitate the movement of non-western al Shabaab operatives, at least within the African continent.

Perhaps most alarming for Americans and their policymakers should be the fact that al Shabaab has demonstrated the ability to follow through on its threats. The group's twin suicide bombings on September 17, 2009, at the African Union force's headquarters in Mogadishu took place only days after the group vowed to avenge the assassination of Saleh Ali Nabhan, the former al Qaeda in East Africa leader, by U.S. Special Forces. Similarly, al Shabaab allegedly attacked a college graduation ceremony, killing numerous graduates and the country's Minister of Education, in December 2009—just three months after the group warned the Ministry of Education about using “un-Islamic” textbooks. The group has regularly acted on its threats to attack perceived enemies. There is no reason for American policymakers to assume that al Shabaab will not follow through on its threat to attack the United States.

The group has made clear its desire and intention to strike beyond the borders of Somalia, and it currently has the means to prepare and execute such an attack. It is partners with and loyal to al Qaeda, and it continuously strives to earn the respect and recognition of al Qaeda's leadership. America cannot afford to ignore the threat posed by al Shabaab.

## Important Groups and Organizations in Somalia

*Listed alphabetically*

**Ahlu Sunna wa al Jama'a**—a Sufi Islamist organization formed in 1991 as an umbrella group aimed at uniting Sufi brotherhoods throughout the country. It tends to be non-political, opposed to violence, in favor of national unity, and moderate in its interpretation of Islam. It has taken up arms to oppose Salafist groups and defend the national and local governments.

**Al Qaeda in East Africa**—al Qaeda's franchise based in the Horn of Africa. Several of its operatives were responsible for conducting the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, as well as the 2002 Mombasa hotel bombing and attempt to bring down an Israeli commercial airplane over Kenya. Al Shabaab has worked alongside the group and sheltered its operatives.

**AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia)**—African Union peacekeepers deployed to Somalia in March 2007 (the mandate was authorized by the AU in January 2007) to stabilize the security situation. As of February 2010, only about 5,300 AMISOM troops were present in the country, located at strategic locations in the capital, Mogadishu. Only Uganda and Burundi have contributed troops to the mission. The mandate calls for 8,000 troops, and several African countries that pledged to contribute to the mission have not yet done so.

**Hizb al Islam**—A militant Islamist group formed by Islamist leaders in the aftermath of the June 2007

Djibouti accord, which sought to establish peace between the TFG and former ICU leaders. The group opposes the presence of any foreign troops in the country. Hizb al Islam has a strong presence in Mogadishu and controls key areas in central Somalia including the town of Beledweyne. It has fought both with and against al Shabaab depending on circumstances.

**Islamic Courts Union (ICU)**—a coalition of *shari'a* courts formed in mid-2004 with the backing of the Somali business community. It controlled much of southern and central Somalia by late 2006, when Ethiopia invaded the country and disbanded it. Al Shabaab served as the group's military wing.

**Islamic Union (IU)**—The Islamic Union (*al Itihaad al Islamiya*) was an Islamist group formed in the early 1980s with the aim of deposing the dictator of Somalia, establishing an Islamic State, and seizing the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. It had ties to al Qaeda. A splinter group from the IU contributed to the formation of al Shabaab.

**Transitional Federal Government (TFG)**—Somalia's national government formed in 2004 after two years of negotiations. As of February 2010, it held only a few strategic locations in Mogadishu, and had a troop presence in several strategic cities and towns throughout the country. Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, a former leader in the ICU, became president of the TFG in January 2009.

## Notable Individuals

*Listed alphabetically*

**Sheikh Aadan Haashi ‘Ayro** was the first leader of al Shabaab as an independent entity. He is believed to have trained and fought in Afghanistan. ‘Ayro was killed in a May 2008 U.S. strike.

**Abu Mansour al Amriki (Omar Hammami)** is an American-born al Shabaab militant who now commands fighters in the Bay and Bakool regions. He also functions as an English-speaking recruiter for the group.

**Sheikh Ali Hassan Gheddi** was a senior official in al Shabaab and commanded militants in the east-central region. Gheddi defected from the group and aligned with the TFG in December 2009.

**Fuad Mohamed Qalaf** is one of al Shabaab’s top leaders.

**Issa Osman Issa** is a Kenyan-born senior leader in al Qaeda in East Africa and may command a unit in al Shabaab. He is responsible for firing one of the missiles that targeted an Israeli commercial airplane in November 2002.

**Najeh Fazul Abdullah Mohammed (Harun Fazul)** is believed to be the current leader of al Qaeda in East Africa. He had roles in the 1998 U.S. embassy attacks in Kenya and Tanzania, as well as the 2002 Mombasa Hotel attack and attempt to bring down an Israeli commercial airplane. He currently operates alongside al Shabaab.

**Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweis** is the current leader of Hizb al Islam. Aweis was a former military commander of the IU and was a leader of al Shabaab before it became an independent entity.

**Ibrahim Haji Hama (al Afghani)** is a leader of al Shabaab and is responsible for operations in Somaliland and Puntland. Al Afghani is believed to have trained and fought in Afghanistan and the Kashmir region.

**Mohamed Siad Barre** was the president of Somalia from 1969 until 1991, when he was overthrown.

**Mukhtar Abu Zubair (Ahmed Abdi Godane)** is the leader of al Shabaab, assuming command after ‘Ayro’s death. Abu Zubair is believed to have fought and trained in Afghanistan and to have received his religious credentials in Pakistan.

**Saleh Ali Nabhan** was a Kenyan-born leader of al Qaeda in East Africa. He had roles in the 1998 U.S. embassy attacks in Kenya and Tanzania, as well as the 2002 Mombasa Hotel attack and attempt to bring down an Israeli commercial airplane. He was killed by U.S. forces on September 14, 2009, while under the protection of al Shabaab.

**Sheikh Mukhtar Robow Ali (Abu Mansur)** is the spiritual leader and a main spokesman of al Shabaab. Abu Mansur was affiliated with the IU and is believed to have trained in Afghanistan. He is believed to have set up the first militant training camps in Somalia.

**Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed** is the current president of the Transitional Federal Government. Previously, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed was a leader of the ICU.

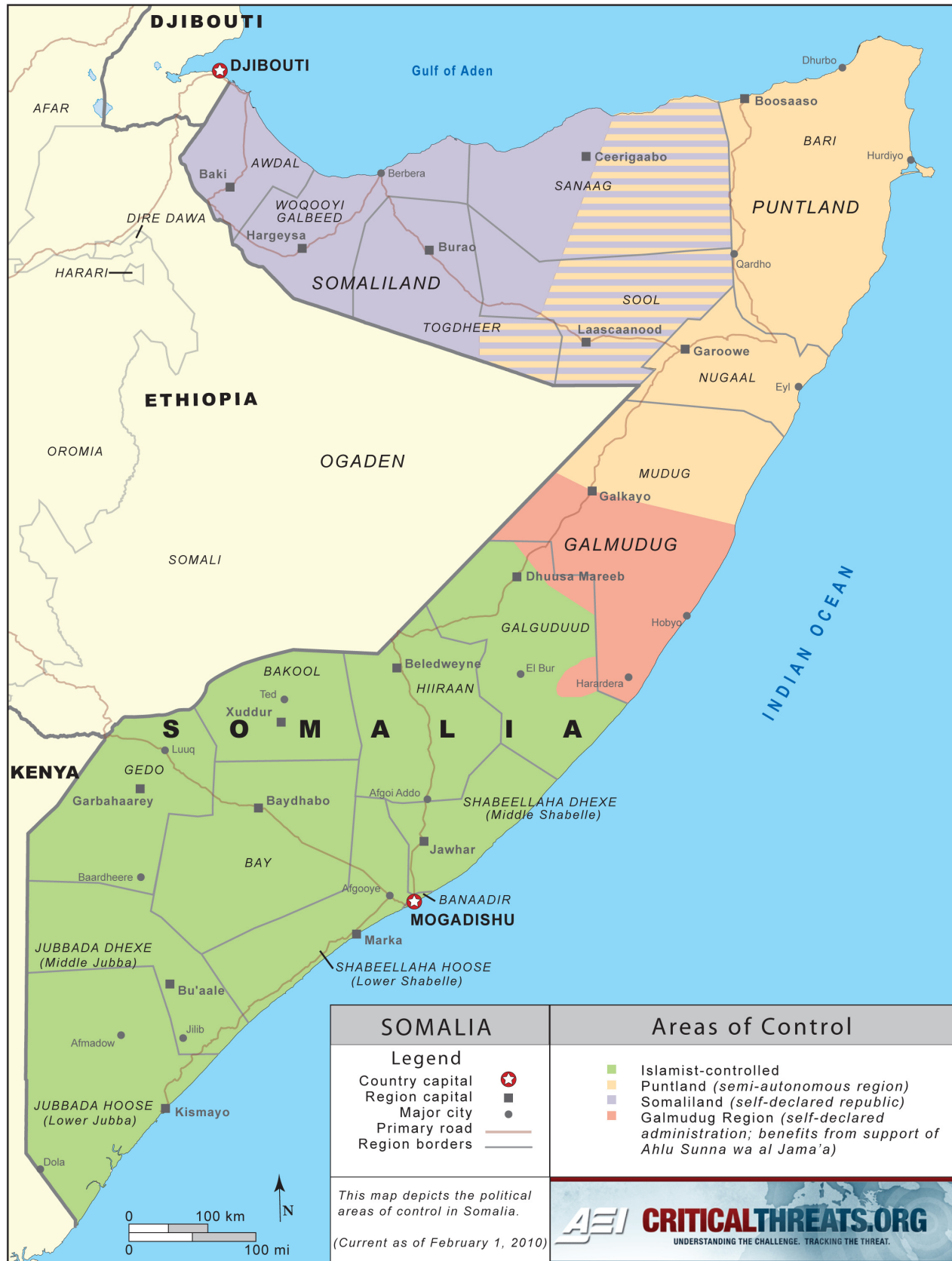
**Abu Talha al Sudani (Tariq Abdullah)** was a senior operative and financier for al Qaeda in East Africa. He was sheltered by al Shabaab and is believed to have died in a firefight with Ethiopian forces in 2007.

## Map of the Horn of Africa and Middle East



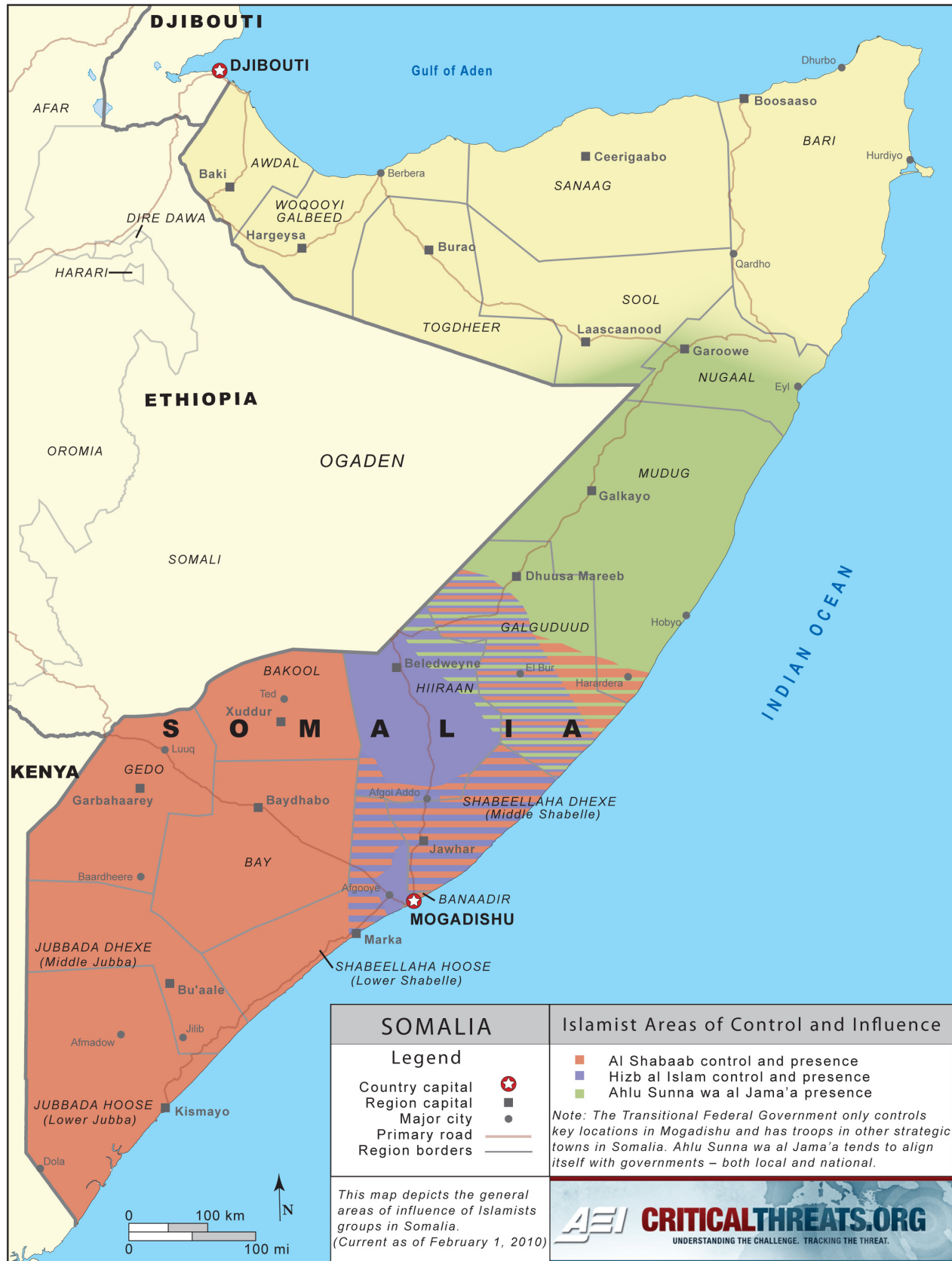


## Political Map of Somalia





# Map of Islamist-controlled and Influenced Areas in Somalia



## Introduction

Three hundred people nearly died in the skies over Michigan on Christmas Day, 2009, when a Nigerian terrorist attempted to blow up a plane destined for Detroit. The Nigerian man was an operative of an al Qaeda franchise based in Yemen called al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The group operated known training camps in Yemen, and it had indicated a desire to strike American targets. Most Americans, including many policymakers, had never heard of the group, although U.S. CENTCOM Commander General David Petraeus and other senior military leaders had been working for months to address the new threat. The attack, when it came, still took the nation by surprise. Today, just across the Gulf of Aden from Yemen, another terrorist threat on par with that of AQAP is growing in Somalia. A militant Islamist group with ties to al Qaeda called al Shabaab controls much of southern and central Somalia, where it operates terror and insurgency training camps. Al Shabaab is composed of both Somali and international militants, including dozens from the United States and Europe. The group has threatened to attack the United States, and it has previously shown the ability to carry out its threats. The danger posed by al Shabaab to American and international security is real and imminent. There will be no excuse for being surprised when this group tries to attack the U.S.

The U.S. Department of State placed al Shabaab on its list of foreign terrorist organizations in February 2008. The group, whose name literally means “the youth,” was at the time engaged in an insurgency to drive Ethiopian troops out of Somali territory. The Ethiopians had entered Somalia in December 2006 to establish the authority of the UN-mandated Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and destroy a coalition of *shari’a* courts called the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) that controlled much of

the country. Upon the Ethiopian invasion, the ICU disintegrated and most of its elements fled, but the military wing, al Shabaab, stayed to fight the perceived invaders. Al Shabaab used techniques characteristic of a terror group when targeting Ethiopian and TFG entities, including roadside bombs, suicide bombings, grenade attacks, and assassinations.<sup>1</sup> The direct threat the group posed to the United States and its interests outside Somalia, however, was minimal at the time it was placed on the list of foreign terrorist organizations. Its objectives appeared geographically limited to Somalia, and perhaps the Horn of Africa. To be sure, the group did have ties to al Qaeda and sheltered some of its top East African leaders, which undisputedly warranted it a spot on the list of terrorist organizations. Al Shabaab also recruited and trained fighters from around the world to fight in the Somali conflict. The group’s rhetoric and behavior, however, have shifted over the past two years, indicating that its ambitions are no longer limited to Somalia and the Horn of Africa. Al Shabaab has internationalized and appears eager to strike internationally.

Currently, al Shabaab, which has acted independently of the now-defunct ICU since early 2007, controls much of southern and central Somalia, including large portions of the capital, Mogadishu. It refers to the territory that it governs as the “Islamic Provinces,”<sup>2</sup> which is one step short of declaring an Islamic state or a Caliphate. Al Shabaab has evolved into a group resembling a hybrid of the Afghan Taliban and al Qaeda. It provides government services to its constituents, enforces a strict interpretation of *shari’a* law, and maintains its grip on power by using violence and intimidation. The group also conducts terrorist operations, including suicide bombings, against its perceived enemies, and views itself as part of the global jihad movement. It has

established an effective recruiting strategy to attract militants from throughout Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, as well as the United States and Europe. The authority of the internationally recognized and U.S.-backed TFG has been relegated to a

few city blocks, government installations, and strategic locations, such as the airport and seaport, in Mogadishu. Al Shabaab thus has the geographic space to train fighters, plan operations, and shelter its al Qaeda allies.

## Origins of al Shabaab

The roots of modern militant Islamism in Somalia trace back to the early 1970s. A group called al Salafiya al Jadiid was established to oppose the authoritarian socialist rule of President (General) Mohamed Siad Barre, who came to power through a military coup in 1969.<sup>3</sup> President Siad Barre defeated this threat to his power in the late 1970s.

Resentment of Siad Barre's oppressive dictatorship led to the formation of a second Islamist group, *al Itihaad al Islamiya*, or the Islamic Union (IU), in the early 1980s. The group sought to depose Siad Barre and set up an Islamic state, which would ideally encompass the entire Horn of Africa.<sup>4</sup> The IU also aimed to seize the Ogaden region of eastern Ethiopia, in which the majority of the people are ethnically Somali (Ethiopia and Somalia fought a major war in the late 1970s over the Ogaden).<sup>5</sup> At its founding, the IU was composed primarily of young, educated men who had spent time living or studying in the Middle East, and it received significant funding and support from Saudi-based Wahabi organizations.<sup>6</sup> The IU never achieved its goal of deposing Siad Barre, but the group remained intact after the warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid overthrew him in early 1991.

The overthrow of Siad Barre created a political power vacuum in Somalia throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. The international community made several attempts at setting up interim governments, but most of the country fell under the control of tribal warlords. The IU gained control of several parts of the country throughout the early and mid-1990s, including the key port towns of Kismayo and Merka, but these gains were short-lived.<sup>7</sup> The group managed to hold undisputed control of only one place for a sustained period of time (1991-1996): the commercial town of Luuq near Somalia's borders with Ethiopia and Kenya, where it successfully implemented *shari'a* law.<sup>8</sup> Sheikh Mukhtar Robow Ali

(a.k.a. Abu Mansur), an IU affiliate, established the first Islamist militant training camp in Somalia in 1996 in Hodur, a town located in the Bakool region near the Ethiopian border.<sup>9</sup> Robow Ali would go on to become a commander in al Shabaab and serve as the group's spiritual leader and spokesman.

The IU's control of Luuq and Robow Ali's Islamist training camp worried the Ethiopians. Moreover, the Ethiopian branch of the IU conducted several terror attacks inside Ethiopia in 1996, including two hotel bombings and an assassination attempt.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, Ethiopian military forces drove the IU out of Luuq and the border region and eradicated its safe haven.<sup>11</sup> Ethiopia's attack on the IU weakened the group and forced it to operate surreptitiously through a network of cells from then forward.<sup>12</sup>

The IU had established ties to al Qaeda, but the extent of those ties is unclear. Osama bin Laden, who took shelter in Sudan from 1992 to 1996, identified the IU as a potential ally, or proxy, for his nascent international jihad network, perhaps as early as 1993.<sup>13</sup> Bin Laden sent Arab envoys who had served with him in Afghanistan to Somalia to offer support and training to different Somali groups,<sup>14</sup> but he failed to establish a formal relationship with the IU or any other militant group in Somalia at the time.<sup>15</sup> Years later, bin Laden boasted about Arab militants fighting alongside Somalis against American troops in 1993 after nearly 30,000 Americans entered the country to conduct the humanitarian mission OPERATION RESTORE HOPE.<sup>16</sup> Bin Laden even took credit (undeservedly) for driving U.S. forces out of Somalia in 1993 after Somali militants dragged the bodies of U.S. servicemen through the streets of Mogadishu.<sup>17</sup> Arab veterans of the Afghan war were likely in Somalia in 1993, but their relationships with both bin Laden and the IU are impossible to determine.<sup>18</sup> Evidence that al Qaeda played a significant

role in the Battle of Mogadishu is very weak. Claims made by the prosecution at the trial of the 1998 African embassy bombers linking al Qaeda to the Battle of Mogadishu were not strong enough to stand up in court, and the judge ordered the claims struck from the court record.<sup>19</sup>

Evidence suggests that in the mid-to-late 1990s cooperation between the IU and al Qaeda strengthened. The IU allegedly received some degree of training and logistical and financial support from al Qaeda.<sup>20</sup> Some of its leaders also went on to train and fight with bin Laden's group in Afghanistan. One such fighter was Sheikh Aadan Haashi 'Ayro, who eventually became the leader of al Shabaab.<sup>21</sup> The IU reciprocated al Qaeda's support by providing protection to the al Qaeda in East Africa cell.<sup>22</sup>

Eventually, in the early 2000s (an exact date is impossible to corroborate, but no later than 2002<sup>23</sup>), a small group dedicated to protecting al Qaeda in East Africa and striking foreign targets inside Somalia broke apart from the IU.<sup>24</sup> This group was led by the former military commander of the IU, Hassan Dahir Aweis, who has been on the U.S. list of suspected terrorists since shortly after 9/11 because of the shelter the IU provided to al Qaeda elements.<sup>25</sup> 'Ayro appears to have been the top operational commander or a cell leader of this splinter group.<sup>26</sup>

This small group adopted the name "al Shabaab" and came to serve as the military wing of an emerging political force called the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). The ICU traces its roots back to the mid-1990s, when clans set up *shari'a* courts at the local level, partially filling the vacuum left by the collapse of the Siad Barre regime and the rise of warlordism.<sup>27</sup> There was at first no formal relationship between the various *shari'a* courts, but eventually they earned the appreciation of much of the population, including the business community, for bringing order to certain parts of the country. Consequently, the Islamic courts system earned the endorsement and financial backing of the Somali business community, and the relationship among the courts cohered to form the ICU in mid-2004.<sup>28</sup>

The ICU was composed of several different courts (the original ICU consisted of eleven Mogadishu

courts<sup>29</sup>) with interpretations of *shari'a* ranging from moderate to radical. It emerged as a major political force in Somalia immediately upon its formation.<sup>30</sup> Aweis became the leader of one of the more radical and militant courts, and he also emerged as the spiritual leader of the entire ICU. The more moderate Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, currently the president of Somalia, was the political leader of the ICU, but Aweis served as the Chairman of the ICU's Executive Committee and was later named as the head of its Shura council [consultative body].<sup>31</sup> 'Ayro replaced Aweis as the commander the ICU's militant wing (i.e. al Shabaab), and he continued to take his orders primarily from Aweis.<sup>32</sup> For example, Aweis vowed in October 2004 to order the ICU militia to attack any foreign troops who entered Somalia as part of a peacekeeping mission.<sup>33</sup>

The ICU took control of Mogadishu from U.S.-backed militias in June 2006.<sup>34</sup> It then expanded its authority throughout much of southern and central Somalia and eventually reached the outskirts of the city of Baidoa, which was the seat of the fragile UN-recognized Transitional Federal Government (established in October 2004 after two years of negotiations).<sup>35</sup> The spread of the ICU, whose more radical elements had declared jihad on Ethiopia, prompted Ethiopia to invade Somalia in December 2006 and drive the ICU from power.<sup>36</sup>

The Ethiopian military quickly dissolved the ICU and took control of Mogadishu, where it worked to install the TFG. Most of the ICU's leadership fled to neighboring countries. The head of the ICU, Sheikh Sharif, turned himself in to Kenyan authorities in January 2007, and subsequently engaged in a peace process with the TFG.<sup>37</sup> Many other ICU leaders, including Aweis, fled to Asmara—the capital of Eritrea—where they formed the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS), an opposition coalition determined to remove Ethiopian troops from Somalia.<sup>38</sup>

The political leadership of the ICU, including Sheikh Sharif and Aweis, elected to divorce itself from its militant wing—al Shabaab—after the Ethiopian invasion.<sup>39</sup> Al Shabaab, which had earned the reputation of being an elite fighting force by late

2006,<sup>40</sup> then regrouped in southern Somalia. ‘Ayro, now operating independently as the commander of al Shabaab, divided southern and central Somalia into three geographic operational commands, each led by a local al Shabaab leader.<sup>41</sup> The local leaders took guidance from ‘Ayro (who also held the Mogadishu/central Somalia command), but operated relatively autonomously.<sup>42</sup>

The first evidence of al Shabaab operating as an independent entity no longer affiliated with the ICU or IU surfaced in late March 2007. The group released a video on a password-protected and al Qaeda-affiliated Islamist web forum taking credit for downing a military supply aircraft over Mogadishu Airport.<sup>43</sup> The enemy designated in the video was the “apostate government” (i.e. the TFG) and the “Ethiopian forces,” who were participating in a “war waged by the Jewish coalition against Islam and its people.”<sup>44</sup> Al Shabaab used guerilla tactics against its enemies—namely the TFG, Ethiopian forces and the contingent of fewer than 5,000 Africa Union troops from Uganda and Burundi (initially deployed in March 2007<sup>45</sup> and known as “AMISOM”)—in an effort to drag the Ethiopians into a war of attrition.<sup>46</sup> The group used mortars, IEDs, and automatic weapons and carried out political assassinations.<sup>47</sup> Al Shabaab also introduced the technique of suicide attacks into Somalia; Somali culture generally viewed suicide as taboo.<sup>48</sup>

May 2008 was a watershed month for al Shabaab, as an American Tomahawk missile killed ‘Ayro.<sup>49</sup> Mukhtar Abu Zubair took over as leader of al Shabaab, marking the first (and thus far, only) change in leadership since the group began operating autonomously. One month after ‘Ayro’s death, Abu Zubair released a message in which he sent his greetings to top al Qaeda leaders, including bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri, and Abu Yahya al Libi, praised the 9/11 hijackers, and placed al Shabaab’s efforts in the context of the global jihad.<sup>50</sup> This message marked a significant early step in al Shabaab’s efforts to internationalize. The killing of ‘Ayro also inspired al Shabaab to announce a military campaign aimed at avenging his death.<sup>51</sup> The campaign would target

U.S., Western, and UN interests throughout Somalia.<sup>52</sup> The group demonstrated its ability to carry out its threats when it conducted five simultaneous suicide attacks on international targets in the semi-autonomous regions of Puntland and Somaliland on October 29, 2008—less than two months after the group announced the revenge campaign.<sup>53</sup> The targets of the attacks included a United Nations Development Program Compound, the Ethiopian consulate, a presidential palace, and two intelligence installations.

Al Shabaab’s guerilla warfare and terrorism tactics against Ethiopian forces proved successful. The group controlled nearly all of southern Somalia stretching from the Kenyan border to the outskirts of Mogadishu by mid-2008,<sup>54</sup> and managed to control parts of Mogadishu by January 2009.<sup>55</sup> Ethiopian troops withdrew from Mogadishu in January 2009 as part of a UN-backed peace deal that allowed the former head of the ICU, Sheikh Sharif, to become the President of the TFG, and kept the small contingent of AMISOM forces in Mogadishu.<sup>56</sup>

Al Shabaab took credit for “push[ing] away the evil occupiers,” but insisted that its jihad would continue until all foreign troops were expelled from Somalia.<sup>57</sup> Al Shabaab has attacked TFG and AMISOM forces, and assassinated their leaders, throughout 2009 and into 2010. The group has sometimes worked in cooperation with another militant Islamist group, Hizb al Islam, which was formed by former hard-line ICU leaders and other Islamists after moderate ICU leaders signed a reconciliation agreement with the TFG in June 2008.<sup>58</sup> Hizb al Islam is led by Aweis, and it controls some parts of southern and central Somalia, including the Afgoi district in the Lower Shabelle region and the strategic city of Beledweyne. Both al Shabaab and Hizb al Islam oppose the TFG and AMISOM, which has led to occasional alliances of convenience, especially when battling TFG and AMISOM forces inside Mogadishu.<sup>59</sup> The groups have also fought each other for control of territory in strategic towns in southern Somalia, such as the port town of Kismayo.<sup>60</sup> Al Shabaab, however, is indisputably the country’s most powerful Islamist group. It had captured all but a few pockets of southern

Somalia and much of central Somalia by June 2009.

Today, al Shabaab is the most powerful political force in Somalia as well. It operates shadow governments throughout the country and has a well-armed and well-trained militia. The group, whose roots lie

in an Islamist movement established to depose a brutal dictator and force the secession of an ethnically Somali region of Ethiopia, has emerged as one of the most feared political entities in Africa and one of the most dangerous terrorist groups in the world.



## Gaining Control, Governing, and Maintaining Control

The rise of al Shabaab as an independent player in Somali politics stemmed from Ethiopia's invasion of the country and the subsequent disbanding of the ICU. Al Shabaab manipulated both these events to garner public support and solidify a power base from mid-2007 until the Ethiopian withdrawal in January 2009. The group has since relied on a combination of providing basic government services and enforcing a draconian interpretation of *shari'a* with violent intimidation tactics to maintain its grip on power in southern Somalia.

Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia had the unintended consequence of creating conditions that al Shabaab could easily exploit. Relations between the two countries have long been bitter. Ethiopia, which is about 60% Christian and 33% Muslim, fought wars with Somalia, which is approximately 99% Muslim,<sup>61</sup> in 1964 and in 1977-1978 over the Ogaden. Hostilities and a propaganda war between the two countries continued on a lesser scale for more than a decade after the 1977-1978 war. The two sides finally signed a peace accord in 1988.<sup>62</sup> In 1996, Ethiopian forces reentered parts of Somalia to drive the IU, the precursor of al Shabaab, from the border town of Luuq.<sup>63</sup>

The ICU declared "holy war" on Ethiopia on July 21, 2006, just one day after reports emerged of a convoy of Ethiopian trucks and armored cars entering Somalia for an alleged training mission.<sup>64</sup> Clashes and skirmishes on a minor scale took place between Ethiopian forces and the ICU until December 2006, when Ethiopia launched what it called a "self-defensive" operation against the ICU.<sup>65</sup> The ICU was disbanded within weeks, and most of its political leadership fled abroad. Its militant wing, al Shabaab, remained in the country and seized on the invasion to portray itself as a defender of Somalis against Ethiopian aggression.

Al Shabaab combined its Islamist ideology with the anti-Ethiopian sentiment that gripped the country. Its propaganda referred to the "Ethiopian Crusader Forces,"<sup>66</sup> and al Shabaab declared itself the leader of the armed struggle against the Ethiopian occupation and the UN-backed TFG.<sup>67</sup> Most Somalis came to view al Shabaab's insurgency as a justified struggle for liberation from Ethiopian invaders tied to the U.S.<sup>68</sup> Al Shabaab's legitimacy was strengthened by the numerous accusations of human rights abuses committed by Ethiopian forces, including deliberately attacking civilians, particularly in hospitals;<sup>69</sup> using phosphorus bombs against insurgents and killing civilians in the process;<sup>70</sup> and kidnapping Somali children.<sup>71</sup> Al Shabaab was also accused of numerous war crimes, but it portrayed the Ethiopians as brutal occupiers and itself as the protector of Somalia.

The group used several means to disseminate its messages. It used local radio stations and newspapers, but also developed a more effective means of winning the people's support through an outreach program based on well-choreographed town visits by al Shabaab leaders. The visits usually included addresses by clerics at rallies, the distribution of food and money to the poor, attempts at reconciling inter-clan disputes, and *shari'a*-based resolutions of local crimes.<sup>72</sup> The group restored a degree of justice and stability to the country that had disappeared with ouster of the ICU. Southern Somali communities not only welcomed al Shabaab into their towns, but in some cases gave *zakat* (alms) to aid in the group's jihad efforts.<sup>73</sup>

Conditions in Somalia changed drastically for al Shabaab in January 2009. Ethiopian forces withdrew from Somalia completely that month, and Sheikh Sharif, the former political leader of the ICU, became the president of the TFG. Al Shabaab vowed to continue its jihad against the TFG, portraying it as a

puppet of the West, but, in reality the departure of Ethiopian forces meant that al Shabaab could no longer pose as the defender of the Somali people against a foreign occupier. Further, President Sheikh Sharif—widely considered a moderate Islamist—represented a return to the stability that existed under the rule of the ICU, and he promised to implement *shari'a*. President Sheikh Sharif thus deprived al Shabaab of two of its most important rhetorical bases of legitimacy.

Al Shabaab has responded to this challenge by establishing alternative governments to the TFG that govern “Islamic Provinces” and instilling fear in the populace through violence and intimidation.

A main element of the group's efforts to win the support of the people is to provide services that would normally be provided by the state. The administrations of the Islamic Provinces have mobilized their local bases to conduct public works projects, such as building bridges<sup>74</sup> and restoring roads.<sup>75</sup> Al Shabaab also claims to take care of the poorest members of its communities. It collects *zakat* from the communities that it governs and then distributes money to those most in need.<sup>76</sup> The militants also collect taxes on imports at the port in Kismayo (in the southeastern corner of the country),<sup>77</sup> at roadblocks throughout southern Somalia,<sup>78</sup> and from humanitarian NGOs distributing aid in regions the group controls.<sup>79</sup>

Al Shabaab also regulates which international NGOs can operate in the regions it controls and how foreign aid is distributed. The group has established an “Office for Supervising the Affairs of Foreign Agencies” to enforce its regulations.<sup>80</sup> Al Shabaab's efforts to regulate international NGOs aim to achieve two objectives. First, they allow al Shabaab to portray itself as the protector of the people. Al Shabaab accuses the United States and international donors of using imported food aid to undermine Somali farmers during the harvest season. It also warns the Somali people against becoming dependent on aid from the infidels.<sup>81</sup> The group has also accused NGOs of spying on al Shabaab on behalf of western countries.<sup>82</sup> Al Shabaab has therefore banned the

distribution of any aid labeled with the American flag,<sup>83</sup> and requested that the World Food Program (WFP) only distribute food aid harvested in Somalia.<sup>84</sup> Regulating international NGOs is a way for al Shabaab to portray itself as defending the Somali people from an American stratagem to weaken the country through humanitarian aid. This sort of regulation also distinguishes al Shabaab from Somalia's legitimate government—the TFG—which encourages international aid.

The second objective that regulating international NGOs achieves for al Shabaab is that it allows the group to assert itself as the legitimate and effective authority in the regions that it controls. The title of its “Office for Supervising the Affairs of Foreign Agencies” conveys the impression to the Somali people that al Shabaab is superior to international bodies, such as the UN which administers the WFP, in the regions it controls. This perception is reinforced when the al Shabaab administration dictates to international NGOs if, how, and where they may distribute aid, and then enforces such regulations with violence. The group proved that it was able to enforce its regulations when in July 2009 it raided the offices of two UN aid groups in southern Somalia (in the towns of Baidoa and Wajid), and then banned the operations of three UN relief groups in areas it controlled.<sup>85</sup> The raids on the UN compounds may have been spurred by al Shabaab's desire to steal UN equipment, such as vehicles and computers, but it also demonstrated to the Somali people and the UN that no entity is safe from al Shabaab.

It is impossible to determine whether al Shabaab has achieved its goal of portraying itself as a protector and an authority through regulating international NGOs and the distribution of aid. This strategy has the potential of causing a backlash among the southern Somali population if it is seen as depriving them of much-needed humanitarian assistance. Indeed, a senior al Shabaab official—Sheikh Ali Hassan Gheddi, the deputy commander of militants in an east-central region—deserted the group and joined the TFG in December 2009, citing al Shabaab's regulation of the WFP as his main reason. Hassan Gheddi

explained his decision in the following way: “The recent al Shabaab veto on WFP is the biggest contributor to my decision because I felt it affects the civilians.”<sup>86</sup> Nonetheless, the tactic of regulating international NGOs remains a key pillar of the shadow governments that al Shabaab administers.

Another element of the shadow governments administered by al Shabaab is the effort to control the flow of information and thus influence public perception. Al Shabaab communicates its propaganda primarily through local radio stations and newspapers.<sup>87</sup> On December 18, 2009, it launched a media arm called al Kata’ib Foundation for Media Production, which is responsible for producing al Shabaab publications and videos, as well as disseminating news about the group.<sup>88</sup> Al Kata’ib Foundation appears to be taking over for the Media Department and the Information Department, which had previously been responsible for releasing statements on behalf of the group.<sup>89</sup> The group has also operated several web pages, but those web pages have primarily targeted audiences outside Somalia.<sup>90</sup>

Perhaps the most effective way that Al Shabaab controls the flow of information is through censoring the media in a way resembling that of an authoritarian government. The militants have shut down numerous independent radio stations, kidnapped journalists, threatened journalists, and allegedly assassinated journalists.<sup>91</sup> Al Shabaab has justified this violent censorship by accusing its targets of “spreading false news.”<sup>92</sup> Many Somali journalists have allegedly received anonymous calls demanding they alter facts in “defense of the country.”<sup>93</sup> It is impossible to know whether such calls came from al Shabaab elements, but it would certainly fit in with the group’s strategy to control the media. Perhaps the most prominent example of attempting to censor the media through fear was when one of al Shabaab’s top leaders, Fuad Mohamed Qalaf, delivered a speech in the city of Merka in May 2009 demanding al Shabaab fighters hunt down and murder journalists from the Waaga Cusub media outlet, one of the few Somali news sources to run stories about the brutal tactics of the group.<sup>94</sup> Qalaf accused the media outlet of working for the “infidels.”<sup>95</sup>

Al Shabaab is also playing a growing role in the education sector. The group does not yet appear to have set up schools, designed curriculums or appointed teachers, but it has appointed executives responsible for education in some of its administrations.<sup>96</sup> The education administration in the Lower Shabelle region of southern Somalia in January 2010 exerted its authority by segregating boys from girls and requiring all students to adhere to strict Islamic dress codes.<sup>97</sup> The administration also renamed the schools after followers of the Prophet Mohammad.<sup>98</sup> Al Shabaab also likely has sympathizers, and perhaps affiliates, teaching in the more radical *madrassas* (Islamic schools) in southern Somalia, where children are indoctrinated in radical interpretations of Islam and encouraged to join the ranks of al Shabaab.<sup>99</sup> The group conducts much of its recruiting out of *madrassas*, schools, and mosques.<sup>100</sup> Al Shabaab has also established training programs to which young al Shabaab recruits are sent. Al Shabaab militants reportedly indoctrinate the recruits at these training programs with lessons about previous al Shabaab victories and forthcoming battles.<sup>101</sup>

Recent indications suggest that al Shabaab may use intimidation and violence in order to influence education throughout Somalia, including in areas not under the group’s control. The group issued a statement in September 2009 warning schools about using textbooks provided by the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that taught un-Islamic subjects.<sup>102</sup> The TFG Minister of Education at the time, Ahmed Abdulahi Waayeel, dismissed the warning in the following way: “The government and the education fraternity make sure that any books that are being used in our schools do not violate our religion and culture, so their [al Shabaab’s] statement does not concern us.”<sup>103</sup> Al Shabaab killed Ahmed Abdulahi Waayeel in a suicide attack at a college graduation ceremony in Mogadishu in December 2009. That suicide blast also killed the Minister of Higher Education, Ibrahim Hassan Addow, and the female Minister of Health, Qamar Aden Ali, along with at least nineteen others.<sup>104</sup> Little evidence exists, however,

suggesting that at the local level al Shabaab has targeted teachers or schools.

Beyond establishing governmental structures in Islamic Provinces, al Shabaab also controls its territories through imposing a radical interpretation of *shari'a* and intimidating the populace by violently enforcing it. Enforcing rigid laws by instilling fear in the people allows al Shabaab to maintain a degree of stability in its territories, impose a form of justice, and, most importantly, define itself as the area's sole authority, as opposed to the TFG, tribal leaders, or other Islamist groups. The specific laws imposed by al Shabaab, as well as the degree to which they are enforced, can vary from region to region, but they all stem from the group's radical ideology.

Laws demanding an ultraconservative adherence to Islam are reflective of the group's interpretation of *shari'a*. Al Shabaab administrations throughout southern Somalia demand that all women wear the veil, and some administrations demand that all men grow beards in imitation of the Prophet Mohammad.<sup>105</sup> Some al Shabaab administrations have also required all business operations to halt temporarily during the call to prayer, which happens five times a day, or else face consequences.<sup>106</sup> Al Shabaab prohibits numerous activities that it deems "un-Islamic." The group has banned playing and watching soccer, watching movies, dancing at wedding parties, listening to music (including as a ringtone), the wearing of bras by women, and branding of animals (especially donkeys).<sup>107</sup> The group also strictly prohibits people converting from Islam and proselytizing for any religion other than Islam—a rule that is actually fairly common in Muslim countries.<sup>108</sup> Some al Shabaab administrations have also taken steps to prevent women from working by shutting down organizations operated by women. An al Shabaab regional official justified the decision in the following way: "Islam does not allow women to go to offices. We recognize the fact that Muslim women need to stay in their homes and take care of their children."<sup>109</sup> The group has also banned adultery in accordance with Islamic law.<sup>110</sup> Some of these regulations are valid, if extreme, interpretations of Qur'anic prescriptions and

those of generally-accepted *hadith* (these include mandatory veiling by women, the penalty for adultery, and the requirement to facilitate the mandatory five daily prayers). Others are simply extremist interpretations without scriptural or normative justification (e.g. bans on dancing, soccer, and music). The inclusion of these extremist interpolations, the brutality with which prescribed punishments are executed, and the inflexibility of al Shabaab interpretations all mark the group's ideology as part of the radical Islamist agenda spearheaded by al Qaeda, rather than normal, if rigorous, mainstream Islam.

The methods by which al Shabaab enforces these draconian interpretations, as well as other more common laws such as the prohibition of theft, rape and espionage, instill fear in the populace and demonstrate al Shabaab's control and authority over an area. Al Shabaab administrations in most regions maintain a religious police force—known as the Army of Hisbah—that patrols towns and apprehends individuals not adhering to the group's strict regulations.<sup>111</sup> Suspects are then put before an Islamic judge who administers a verdict and a punishment based on his interpretation of Islamic law. Most punishments are carried out in public demonstrations. Lesser punishments administered in public by al Shabaab include whipping women for wearing bras, or not properly wearing the veil, as well as whipping men for not maintaining beards.<sup>112</sup> The group has carried out numerous public amputations of the hands and feet of those convicted of theft. This punishment is based on a literal interpretation of a Qur'anic verse (5:38), which states, "As for the thief, both male and female, cut off their hands."

Public execution is the most violent form of intimidation by punishment conducted by al Shabaab. The group has stoned to death at least four people—both male and female—accused of adultery in at least four different cities: Kismayo, Merka, Wanlaweyne and Wajid.<sup>113</sup> One accused adulterer was reportedly only thirteen years old and was the victim of a rape.<sup>114</sup> Other public executions have been conducted by firing squads. The group has used firing squads to kill numerous people convicted of espionage against al

Shabaab in at least three different ceremonies in two different cities: Mogadishu and Merka.<sup>115</sup> At least two of those killed for espionage were teenagers.<sup>116</sup> Al Shabaab uses loudspeakers to summon residents of the villages in which the executions are conducted.<sup>117</sup> Villagers have reportedly been forced to attend the executions in at least some cases.<sup>118</sup> Al Shabaab has also carried out the death penalty on people convicted of proselytizing for Christianity,<sup>119</sup> committing murder,<sup>120</sup> and committing highway robbery,<sup>121</sup> although executions for these crimes have not necessarily been conducted in public.

Such literal executions of Qur'anic injunctions are not unknown in Islamic countries, although they are increasingly rare. Combining these punishments, often easily justifiable by Qur'anic texts, with the radical interpolations discussed above accomplishes two important goals for al Shabaab. It establishes al Shabaab as a legitimate Muslim government because it enforces clear *shari'a* principles. It also obscures the real distinction between the specific crimes and punishments outlined in the Qur'an and widely-accepted *hadith* and those that are common only among Islamist extremists. Public whippings, amputations, and executions demonstrate to the people of local villages that al Shabaab has complete control of an area. The events are used to demonstrate to the people that everybody needs to submit to the authority of al Shabaab. In particular, public executions of spies are meant to compel loyalty and subservience to the militants. The entire ensemble is aimed at radicalizing the people's understanding of Islam.

Al Shabaab's authority has been challenged at times. Al Shabaab has fended off attacks from the TFG inside and outside Mogadishu with well-trained

and well-equipped regional militias. The group has also resisted attacks from tribal militias throughout southern and central Somalia, as well as attacks by a government-aligned Sufi Islamist group called *Ahlu Sunna wa al Jama'a* in parts of central Somalia. Despite these local attacks, al Shabaab has remained on the offensive. The group spent much of the spring and summer of 2009 taking key roads and bases from the TFG in Mogadishu.<sup>122</sup> It expanded its control in the south in the fall of 2009 by wresting cities and villages from the control of Hizb al Islam, the second most powerful Islamist group in Somalia. The group battled with Hizb al Islam in early October 2009 for control of the southern strategic port city of Kismayo, and it has since taken control of at least four areas previously under the control of Hizb al Islam, including districts within Mogadishu.<sup>123</sup>

The popularity of al Shabaab among regular Somalis is impossible to measure. The TFG points to an increasing number of officials and rank-and-file fighters from al Shabaab defecting to the TFG to suggest that support for the group is not high.<sup>124</sup> Hundreds of Somali civilians took to the streets of Mogadishu in mid-December 2009, burning the al Shabaab flag and protesting against the militant group, but the protest was the first of its kind and unique to Mogadishu.<sup>125</sup> Popular support for al Shabaab, however, may be a secondary issue in the group's ability to maintain control of large parts of the country, so long as it maintains a near-monopoly on the organized use of force in support of its governance. The group's control of large parts of Somalia is not simply a problem for the people living in those areas. It is a problem for the U.S. as well because of al Shabaab's continuing relationship with al Qaeda.

## Al Shabaab's Relationship with Al Qaeda, the Global Jihad Movement, and Its Global Ideology

Al Shabaab is a different entity from al Qaeda, and it should not be confused as a wing, branch or franchise of al Qaeda (unlike al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, al Qaeda in Iraq, al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, which are formally sanctioned al Qaeda franchises). The two groups do, however, have close ties and cooperate to further common interests. The immediate objectives of both groups differ, but they appear to share the same long-term ambition: to unify the Muslim Ummah (nation) under a single Islamic Caliphate. Al Shabaab's top near-term objective is defeating the near enemy—namely the TFG and its AMISOM supporters—and establishing an Islamic state in Somalia.<sup>126</sup> The group has not yet conducted strikes outside Somalia, but its recent statements and logistical support for al Qaeda suggest that it views itself as part of the larger global jihad movement led by al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda leaders have frequently argued about the desirability of attacking the “far enemy,” the United States, or the “near enemy”—Saudi Arabia or whatever temporal state nominally holds sway in their areas of interest. Until recently, for instance, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula had focused exclusively on attacking targets in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, but the Christmas Day airline bombing attempt demonstrated that its rhetoric about attacking the far enemy was not empty. Al Qaeda Prime (the leadership group in Pakistan including bin Laden, Zawahiri, and al Libi) has itself oscillated between prioritizing the U.S. and attacking local governments.

Al Qaeda Prime operates in a state of *hijra* (migration), where conditions are conducive to training, planning and preparing for attacks against its enemies. Osama bin Laden, for instance has operated out of Sudan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. Somalia holds very little sentimental value for al

Qaeda, but it does hold strategic value, especially as a failed state with al Shabaab in control of large parts of the south. Both groups have unique resources and advantages that can benefit the other. More important, experience with al Qaeda franchises elsewhere in the world suggests that a group sharing the common philosophy and goals of al Qaeda Prime can rapidly shift from a local focus to a global one.

The ties between al Shabaab and al Qaeda are extensive and take various forms. Several of al Shabaab's top leaders—current and deceased—trained and fought in Afghanistan, likely with al Qaeda, and perhaps even had direct contact with Osama bin Laden. These leaders helped to import al Qaeda's tactics and ideology and apply them to the situation in Somalia. Al Shabaab has also provided shelter for top al Qaeda leaders, especially al Qaeda in East Africa leaders. The al Qaeda leaders receiving protection from al Shabaab likely reciprocate by providing technical assistance to al Shabaab. The third type of connection between al Shabaab and al Qaeda takes the form of public messages. Al Shabaab has released statements and videos declaring the group's allegiance to bin Laden and partnership with al Qaeda. In return, top al Qaeda leaders have released statements in support of al Shabaab's efforts. Al Shabaab's statements reflect its perception of its own struggle as part of the broader global jihad led by al Qaeda. The statements by al Qaeda's top leaders in support of al Shabaab have given al Shabaab credibility and proven to be a valuable recruiting tool for attracting international fighters. These various links between al Shabaab and al Qaeda have also resulted in what appears to be a degree of operational cooperation between the two groups.



### Al Shabaab and al Qaeda: al Shabaab Training Abroad

One of the primary reasons cited by the U.S. State Department for designating al Shabaab as a Foreign Terrorist Organization was that “many of its senior leaders are believed to have trained and fought with al Qaeda in Afghanistan.”<sup>127</sup> Among those believed to have trained with al Qaeda in Afghanistan is ‘Ayro, the first commander of al Shabaab.<sup>128</sup> ‘Ayro’s training in Afghanistan likely happened prior to 2001, perhaps in the late 1990s, when ‘Ayro was in his mid-20s and a deputy in the IU.<sup>129</sup> This was approximately the same period in which reports emerged of the IU sheltering al Qaeda terrorists. ‘Ayro established at least one secret insurgency training camp in Somalia upon his return from Afghanistan, reflecting the influence that al Qaeda’s Afghanistan operations would come to have on the Somali terror group.<sup>130</sup> A U.S. airstrike killed ‘Ayro on May 1, 2008, indicating that, at a minimum, the U.S. considered him a critical threat to American interests.<sup>131</sup>

Another top al Shabaab leader who spent time training and fighting in Afghanistan alongside the Taliban, and likely alongside al Qaeda, is Sheikh Mukhtar Robow Ali (a.k.a. Abu Mansur), one of the group’s current spokesmen and commander in the Bay and Bakool regions of south-central and south-western Somalia. Robow Ali, currently in his late 30s or early 40s, reportedly fought against the Americans in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2002.<sup>132</sup> He has allegedly provided logistical support for al Qaeda operatives in Somalia since returning, although details are unclear.<sup>133</sup>

Al Shabaab’s current leader, Mukhtar Abu Zubair, also spent time fighting with al Qaeda in Afghanistan. He appears to have trained and fought in Afghanistan under his given name, Ahmed Abdi Godane, in the 1980s and returned there years later to train specifically with al Qaeda prior to 9/11.<sup>134</sup> Abu Zubair is believed to have received his religious credentials at a mosque or university in Pakistan.<sup>135</sup> The rhetoric espoused by Abu Zubair since taking control of the movement reflects loyalty to al Qaeda

and places al Shabaab’s efforts within the context of al Qaeda’s global movement.

A final al Shabaab leader known to have trained in Afghanistan is Ibrahim Haji Jama or “al Afghani.” Al Afghani, who is believed to have trained and fought in Afghanistan and the Kashmir region before returning to Somalia in the early 1990s, is responsible for operations in northern Somalia, including Somaliland and Puntland.<sup>136</sup> Al Afghani’s specific ties to Al Qaeda are unknown.

Al Shabaab likely has a number of rank-and-file members and supporters who also trained or fought in Afghanistan, possibly with al Qaeda. The former leader of the IU and current leader of Hizb al Islam, Aweis, visited Afghanistan and Pakistan in August 2001, when, among other things, he reportedly met with Osama bin Laden.<sup>137</sup> Some accounts also indicate that al Shabaab’s first leader, ‘Ayro, accompanied Aweis on this trip.<sup>138</sup> Aweis also allegedly met with a group of students from southern Somalia studying in Islamabad during the trip.<sup>139</sup> There is no evidence proving that these Somali students ever went on to fight with al Qaeda in Afghanistan, or that they subsequently returned to Somalia to fight with al Shabaab. The presence of Somali students in Islamabad does suggest, however, that rank-and-file members of al Shabaab spent time fighting in Afghanistan, perhaps with al Qaeda. Recent reports suggest that a number of veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan have relocated to Somalia although, again, it is impossible to determine if they are currently members or supporters of al Shabaab.

Veterans of the wars and training camps in Afghanistan offer al Shabaab several valuable advantages. First, they provide the group with battle-hardened fighters skilled in the art of guerilla insurgency against a conventional military. Second, they provide al Shabaab with the knowledge of how to operate successful training camps (a September 2009 video released by al Shabaab showed training camps in southern Somalia that had an eerie resemblance to the al Qaeda camps in Afghanistan prior to 2001), how to govern communities using a radical interpretation of *shari’a* (like the Taliban), how to recruit



locals, and how to execute terror and insurgency tactics. Third, the Afghan veterans in al Shabaab could potentially provide the group with valuable contacts within al Qaeda.

### **Al Shabaab and al Qaeda: Sanctuary in Somalia**

The second significant link between al Shabaab and al Qaeda is the shelter that the Somali group provides to key leaders and operatives of al Qaeda, and the support that al Shabaab receives from those leaders and operatives. Somalia has served as valuable terrain for al Qaeda since at least the mid 1990s. The ungoverned space of Somalia was a key transit point and safe haven for the al Qaeda in East Africa cell that targeted high-value soft targets in other East African countries, primarily Kenya. The international terrorist group used Somalia as a transit point for bomb materials and planners in the 1998 attacks on the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.<sup>140</sup> An investigation of the November 2002 al Qaeda attack on a Mombasa, Kenya hotel and attempt to shoot down an Israeli commercial airliner upon takeoff from the Mombasa airport also revealed that the group used Somalia to acquire the necessary weapons, train and plan for the attacks, and seek shelter after the attacks.<sup>141</sup> Finally, al Qaeda used Somalia, as well as Somali operatives, to plan and train for a foiled attack on the U.S. embassy in Nairobi in June 2003.<sup>142</sup> Most of the operatives and planners in these plots were not Somali. Somalia and its dominant clan culture is generally suspicious of foreigners operating in its villages, meaning that foreign al Qaeda operatives in Somalia would have to have used shelter and protection provided by locals in order to operate freely.<sup>143</sup> Shelter and protection from locals became even more vital after 9/11, when the United States began tasking local Somali militia leaders with monitoring and apprehending terror suspects.<sup>144</sup> The IU and, subsequently, al Shabaab and its leaders were the primary groups to provide the protection and shelter required by al Qaeda, and especially its East Africa cell.

The earliest connection established between al Qaeda and the IU appears to have occurred in the mid-to-late 1990s, when chief al Qaeda trainers Ali Muhammed and Sadiq Mohamed Odeh were sent to Somalia to establish training camps for Somali Islamists. Odeh told the FBI in an August 1998 interview that al Qaeda's efforts in Somalia were coordinated with the IU.<sup>145</sup> Odeh's statement is in line with U.S. intelligence reporting, which led President Bush to designate the IU and its leader, Hassan Dahir Aweis, as foreign terrorists in a September 24, 2001, executive order.<sup>146</sup> U.S. intelligence officials claimed that the IU helped al Qaeda set up a training camp on Ras Kamboni Island near the Kenyan border in the lead-up to the 1998 embassy attacks.<sup>147</sup>

'Ayro continued providing shelter for al Qaeda leaders and operatives after the disintegration of the IU in the early 2000s. 'Ayro was commanding al Shabaab in its nascent stages, perhaps still under the guidance of Aweis, in June 2004 when U.S. intelligence authorities identified an al Qaeda safe house belonging to 'Ayro in Mogadishu.<sup>148</sup> The well-guarded house was suspected of sheltering the al Qaeda in East Africa operative Abu Talha al Sudani (a.k.a. Tariq Abdullah).<sup>149</sup> Al Sudani was an explosives expert with allegedly close ties to bin Laden.<sup>150</sup> He was believed to have assisted in both the 1998 embassy attacks and the 2002 Mombasa hotel attack and attempt on the Israeli airliner.<sup>151</sup> He was also thought to have provided financial support to the al Qaeda in East Africa cell, having made frequent trips between Somalia and the United Arab Emirates following the 1998 embassy attacks.<sup>152</sup> Al Sudani, who was originally from Sudan but later married a woman from Somalia, was also suspected of plotting an attack on a U.S. military base in Djibouti in 2006.<sup>153</sup> The al Qaeda operative finally died in 2007, likely in a battle with Ethiopian forces.<sup>154</sup>

A July 2004 raid on 'Ayro's safe house by the leader of a Somali faction cooperating with U.S. intelligence authorities did not lead to al Sudani's death or apprehension, but it did yield valuable dividends. The raid turned up a bomb-making manual in English and Arabic, suggesting that al Sudani—an explosives

expert—was providing important expertise to his protectors.<sup>155</sup> The raid also led to the arrest of Mohamed Abdi 'Isse Yusuf, 'Ayro's brother-in-law and a suspect in the assassinations of an Italian nurse and two British teachers in the semi-autonomous polity of Somaliland in October 2003.<sup>156</sup>

Al Sudani was one of several al Qaeda in East Africa leaders sheltered by al Shabaab. Another leader that received the Somali group's protection was Saleh Ali Nabhan. Nabhan, believed to have been born in Kenya between 1968 and 1979,<sup>157</sup> was suspected by Kenyan authorities to have participated in the planning of the 1998 embassy attacks.<sup>158</sup> At a minimum, Nabhan was the primary operative in al Qaeda's East Africa cell responsible for communicating with bin Laden in the lead-up to the 1998 attacks.<sup>159</sup> He was also the al Qaeda leader responsible for coordinating the 2002 attack on the Mombasa hotel and Israeli airliner.<sup>160</sup> He bought the car that was used to bomb the hotel, and he himself fired one of the missiles targeting the airliner.<sup>161</sup> Kenyan authorities foiled a third terror plot planned by Nabhan in June 2003, in which he allegedly planned to attack the U.S. embassy in Nairobi using a truck and small plane, both filled with explosives.<sup>162</sup> The FBI listed Nabhan as "being sought in connection with possible terrorist threats against the United States" on February 24, 2006.<sup>163</sup>

Al Shabaab had provided shelter for Nabhan since at least 2008,<sup>164</sup> although the group's assistance to Nabhan likely began no later than 2003, when the al Qaeda leader was spotted in Mogadishu.<sup>165</sup> U.S. Special Forces killed Nabhan in September 2009 using helicopter gunships and small detachments of ground troops backed by two naval warships.<sup>166</sup> The attack occurred as Nabhan and at least five other non-Somalis were being escorted by three al Shabaab fighters from the town of Merka to Kismayo in southern Somalia.<sup>167</sup> Both Merka and Kismayo were firmly under the control of al Shabaab at the time of the attack on Nabhan.

Al Shabaab's protection of Nabhan earned the group valuable benefits provided by the al Qaeda leader. Nabhan, who allegedly spent time undergoing

paramilitary and small arms training at an al Qaeda camp near Khost, Afghanistan from the end of 1998 through 2001, trained factions of al Shabaab fighters in the town of Kismayo in 2008 and 2009.<sup>168</sup> He also led a group of about 180 foreigners who fought alongside al Shabaab.<sup>169</sup> Nabhan also used his status as a medium-to-high profile al Qaeda leader to release a video in late-2008 in which he praised Osama bin Laden as his "courageous commander" and "honorable leader" and then called on "Muslim youth everywhere" to join the fight in Somalia.<sup>170</sup> The precise contribution of Nabhan's efforts to al Shabaab is difficult to measure, but they certainly did move the group toward becoming a better trained and more internationalized force.

A third key senior al Qaeda operative who has benefited from the shelter of al Shabaab is the current al Qaeda in East Africa leader, Najeh Fazul Abdullah Mohammed (a.k.a. Harun Fazul). Fazul Abdullah, who was born in the Comoros Islands in 1972, reportedly assisted bin Laden in setting up training camps in Sudan in the mid-1990s.<sup>171</sup> He was indicted for his role in the 1998 embassy bombings, and co-conspirators in the 2002 Mombasa attacks described Fazul as the mastermind of the operation.<sup>172</sup> Fazul Abdullah is currently on the FBI's list of most wanted terrorists.<sup>173</sup> He is believed to be an expert document-forgery and skilled bomb-maker.<sup>174</sup>

Fazul Abdullah has proven to be among the most elusive al Qaeda in East Africa leaders. He has split his time over the past ten years hiding and operating in Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and possibly Afghanistan. He was detained by Kenyan authorities in connection with an armed robbery in July 2002, but police officers there failed to realize that they had captured one of the world's most wanted terrorists, and he escaped one day later.<sup>175</sup> Much of Fazul Abdullah's time evading arrest has been spent in Somalia, where he has received shelter from al Shabaab.<sup>176</sup> U.S. Special Forces operating in the Horn of Africa in January 2007 allegedly received intelligence indicating that Fazul Abdullah was traveling in the same convoy as al Shabaab leader 'Ayro; the U.S., however, failed to kill or apprehend either

leader.<sup>177</sup> Reports emerged in the wake of Nabhan's death that Fazul Abdullah was fighting alongside al Shabaab.<sup>178</sup> Some, including the Foreign Minister of Djibouti, Mahamoud Ali Youssouf, even alleged that Fazul Abdullah took over as the head of al Shabaab.<sup>179</sup> A senior al Shabaab leader, however, denied this claim.<sup>180</sup> The allegation that Fazul Abdullah took over as al Shabaab's commander was most likely an attempt by the opponents of al Shabaab to conflate the Somali group with al Qaeda. Local reporting does suggest, however, that Fazul Abdullah is currently operating alongside the Somali group.<sup>181</sup>

Issa Osman Issa is a fourth senior al Qaeda in East Africa operative who has received shelter from al Shabaab, and he has possibly commanded a unit within al Shabaab. Issa, who was born in Kenya in 1973, is responsible for firing one of the missiles targeting the Israeli airliner in November 2002, and he was involved in planning the Mombasa hotel attack.<sup>182</sup> Intelligence authorities believe that he has been hiding in Somalia since at least 2005.<sup>183</sup> Reports surfaced in 2007 that Issa actually had a leadership role within al Shabaab and commanded a militia unit that raided a Mogadishu hotel frequented by Ugandan peacekeepers in April 2007.<sup>184</sup> The U.S. government also asserts that he recruited suicide bombers to target Ethiopian forces.<sup>185</sup> The exact nature of the relationship between Issa and al Shabaab is impossible to ascertain, but it does appear that the shelter al Shabaab provided Issa resulted in operational support provided by the al Qaeda in East Africa operative.

Al Shabaab is also believed to have provided protection for mid-level al Qaeda in East Africa operatives, including Ali Swedhan, Samir Said Salim Ba'amir, and Mwakuuza Kuza.<sup>186</sup> These lesser-ranking al Qaeda figures are more likely to train al Shabaab fighters and conduct operations alongside them than merely to receive shelter. A number of lower-ranking al Qaeda operatives also likely work alongside al Shabaab at a tactical level. Somali President Sheikh Sharif claims that the number of foreign fighters in his country ranges from 800-1,100.<sup>187</sup> Half the foreign fighters in Somalia come from Kenya according to the African Union's special representative to Somalia, but

the rest hail from lands further away, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Sudan, Uganda, the United States, the Middle East, and Europe.<sup>188</sup> The affiliation that most of these foreign fighters have with al Qaeda is impossible to know with any certainty. It is likely that the only connection that most of these foreign fighters have with al Qaeda is a shared ideology. U.S. and Pakistani officials, however, have indicated that an increasing number of al Qaeda militants have been leaving the Afghanistan-Pakistan tribal area and taking up base in Somalia and Yemen.<sup>189</sup> A U.S. drone strike killed a senior al Qaeda leader originally from Somalia named Saleh al Somali on December 10, 2009, in the Pakistani tribal agency of North Waziristan. Al Somali maintained communications with al Shabaab and may have assisted in transferring fighters from al Qaeda camps in Pakistan to Somalia and Yemen.<sup>190</sup> Lower-level fighters who spent time in Pakistan and then transferred to Somalia may have received training from al Qaeda operatives, but it appears that nearly all foreign fighters operate under the command of al Shabaab once they reach Somalia.

Al Shabaab has also offered to provide militants to assist al Qaeda franchises in other parts of the world, most notably to al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which is based out of Yemen. In the aftermath of the Christmas Day attack on Northwest Airlines flight 253 by an AQAP operative, Shiekh Mukhtar Robow Ali, a senior al Shabaab leader, assured AQAP that al Shabaab would send fighters to assist in combating its enemies: "We [al Shabaab] will cross the water between us and fight alongside with you against the enemy of Allah, be patient until we reach you, brothers."<sup>191</sup> Thousands of Somali refugees travel from Somalia to Yemen each year, but it is impossible to know if al Shabaab has previously sent operatives to train with or fight for AQAP. Providing militants to AQAP would be costly for al Shabaab in terms of human resources, but the benefits it could yield may be worth the sacrifice for al Shabaab. The Somali group would earn desperately sought-after respect from al Qaeda's senior leadership if it were to send fighters to Yemen. Al Shabaab would also earn capital from AQAP (in the sense of

quid pro quo), which could come in the form of militants, equipment, or training, which al Shabaab could potentially collect in the future.

Al Shabaab has gained numerous benefits from harboring wanted al Qaeda in East Africa leaders, as well as from welcoming rank-and-file al Qaeda militants. The group has received training in skills such as bomb-making and document forging; assistance in setting up training camps; battle-hardened militants who can lead militias; and valuable international recruiting support. The group's cooperation with al Qaeda may have also translated into actual operational cooperation. The TFG defense minister in January 2010 accused Yemeni militants—perhaps from AQAP—of providing small arms and ammunition, including Kalashnikovs and hand grenades, to al Shabaab.<sup>192</sup> Reports also surfaced in December 2009 that a Somali man was arrested in Mogadishu on November 13, while attempting to board a plane en route to Dubai, for possession of an explosive that was identical to the one used by the Christmas Day AQAP bomber and by an AQAP operative who attempted to assassinate the Deputy Interior Minister of Saudi Arabia in August 2009.<sup>193</sup> If this report proves true, it may reveal a degree of previously-unknown cooperation between al Shabaab and AQAP. The links between al Shabaab and al Qaeda are extensive and strong, and they have resulted in direct operational advantages for al Shabaab.

### **Al Shabaab and al Qaeda: Common Messaging**

The third way in which al Shabaab is linked to al Qaeda is through its statements pledging allegiance to bin Laden and placing its efforts in the context of the larger global jihad led by al Qaeda. Al Qaeda's senior leadership has released reciprocal statements in support of the jihad in Somalia.

Al Shabaab emerged from two organizations—the IU and the ICU—whose goals were to establish an Islamic state in Somalia and eventually the entire Horn of Africa. Statements from al Shabaab over the

past two years, however, indicate that it sees itself as part of the greater struggle to establish a global Islamic Caliphate, with Somalia as a starting point. These same statements reflect al Shabaab's willingness to submit to the command of al Qaeda's senior leadership, as well as an eagerness to cooperate with the group. Al Qaeda has never designated al Shabaab as a regional franchise, but it has released statements praising the mujahideen in Somalia (presumably al Shabaab) and urging Muslims to support the struggle in Somalia.

A January 2008 statement by Abu Mansour al Amriki (whose real name is Omar Hammami), an American militant in Somalia commanding al Shabaab fighters in the Bay and Bakool regions, defined the group's aims as global. The statement explained that the difference between the ICU and al Shabaab is that "the ICU had a goal limited to the boundaries placed by the Taaghoot [tyrant], [and] al Shabaab had a global goal including the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate in all parts of the world."<sup>194</sup> Al Amriki went on to describe al Shabaab's efforts as being carried out in the same way as al Qaeda's: "[Al Shabaab] is focused upon the pure *manhaj* [method] which is adopted by the mujahideen in the rest of the blessed lands of jihad. It is the same *manhaj* repeatedly heard from the mouth of the mujahid Sheikh Osama bin Laden...It is the same *manhaj* heard in the addresses of the lion, the genius, the doctor Ayman al Zawahiri."<sup>195</sup> Al Amriki's statement must be qualified by the fact that he is a foreign fighter with no inherent ties to Somalia, so he will naturally adhere to a more global ideology regarding jihad, as opposed to one focused on Somali national issues.

The first statement from a Somali leader of al Shabaab (as opposed to a foreigner like al Amriki) that put the group's efforts clearly within the context of the global jihad was released to Islamist web forums on June 1, 2008. Al Shabaab leader Abu Zubair delivered a fourteen-minute tirade that praised several leaders of al Qaeda and the larger global jihad movement, lambasted the United States (along with the Jews, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and Shiites) for its

oppression of Muslims around the world, and promised future attacks on the United States. This statement was the first in which the al Shabaab leader explicitly declared the group's intention to attack the U.S. directly.

The speech also offered greetings and praise for al Qaeda's senior leadership, including Osama bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri, and Abu Yahya al Libi, and praised the nineteen 9/11 hijackers, referred to as the "nineteen eagles," as well as the former leader of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, Abu Hajar Abdul Aziz al Muqran.<sup>196</sup> Specifically, the speech referred to bin Laden as "our emir." The greetings delivered to these key al Qaeda figures were likely an attempt by al Shabaab to reach out to al Qaeda in an effort to acquire al Qaeda's support. Significantly, Abu Zubair also gave his greetings to Mullah Omar, the leader of the Afghan Taliban, and referred to him as "Emir al Mu'mineen" (or "commander of the faithful"). He also gave his greetings to Abu Omar al Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). The Taliban, and to a lesser degree the ISI, represent the manifestation of al Shabaab's long-term goal: the establishment of an Islamic state. Abu Zubair's effort to acknowledge Mullah Omar and al Baghdadi in his speech demonstrate his apparent intention to align al Shabaab with the other key regional al Qaeda affiliates and allies. In acknowledging Mullah Omar as "commander of the faithful," he follows bin Laden himself, as well as all of the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban groups and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. This declaration is an indication that Abu Zubair seeks recognition for al Shabaab as a front of Islamist jihad on a par with those led by other al Qaeda franchises.

Abu Zubair spent a significant portion of his June 2008 speech lashing out at the United States and its oppression of Muslims worldwide. He accused "the West, led by America, [of] dominating us and [causing our suffering]."<sup>197</sup> His criticism of America included killing Palestinian children, killing hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, raping Iraqi women, killing women and children in Afghanistan, and abusing prisoners at several prisons, including Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib.<sup>198</sup> Abu Zubair also

castigated the Saudi regime and Shiite Muslims for operating at the behest of the United States.<sup>199</sup> His speech even referred to the cause of the Chechens. His extensive rhetoric about the United States and international jihadist efforts was the first of its kind from an al Shabaab leader (apart from al Amriki) and showed a new eagerness for al Shabaab to participate in the global jihad, especially in defeating what he portrayed as the American oppressors.

Abu Zubair's statement also revealed an effort to cast al Shabaab as part of the global jihad going back to 9/11: "Those who are reasonable would stop and ponder the events of September and how we were able to strike them and infiltrate their nation and attack them."<sup>200</sup> The al Shabaab leader in this statement used "we" when describing the attacks, implying that al Shabaab had become an integral part of the al Qaeda movement that conducted the attacks. Later in the speech, he echoed the same sentiment: "We struck America on that fantastic blessed Tuesday so people came out soliciting blood!"<sup>201</sup> Abu Zubair was clearly positioning himself and his group as part of the broader movement responsible for attacking the United States on September 11. These statements do not prove that al Shabaab was involved in the 9/11 attacks—it was not. Nor do they prove that the group is now a full-fledged part of the global al Qaeda organism. They do, however, demonstrate the current leadership's intention to become part of that global structure.

Al Shabaab released another video on September 30, 2008—almost exactly four months after Abu Zubair's speech was released—that pledged al Shabaab's loyalty to al Qaeda and again put its efforts in the context of the global jihad. The video, which primarily appeared to be a recruiting video meant to attract mujahideen from Arab countries, is filled with scenes of militant training and sound bites of key al Qaeda leaders, including bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri, and Abu Yahya al Libi, taken from earlier al Qaeda videos. An unknown voice in the video addressed other mujahideen in Arabic: "Allah has blessed your mujahideen brothers in al Shabaab particularly with...an expansive vision of global jihad



against the third Crusade. They [al Shabaab] declared...their loyalty to their brothers in the blessed al Qaeda and other jihadist organizations.”<sup>202</sup> An English-speaking member of al Shabaab stated later in the video, “We have a global mission.”<sup>203</sup> The video’s purpose appears to be twofold: 1) to attract young Muslim adherents of violent Islamist ideology to Somalia, and 2) to align al Shabaab with al Qaeda Prime and earn its support. The video reflects al Shabaab’s loyalty to and admiration of al Qaeda, and does not at all resemble the rhetoric of a group concerned only with local grievances (it contrasts strongly, for instance, with the Afghan Taliban rhetoric of the past year that energetically distances that group from the pursuit of global jihad).

Al Shabaab concluded 2008 by releasing a message offering greetings to several violent Islamist groups, most of which were affiliated with al Qaeda, on the occasion of Eid al Adha—one of the most important holidays in the Islamic faith and a traditional moment for Islamist leaders to deliver key public statements. The message, which the Global Islamic Media Front published on December 8, 2008, revealed al Shabaab’s perception of itself as a part of the global jihad: “We also convey our congratulations to our mujahideen brothers who fight with us against our common enemy.”<sup>204</sup> The statement did not specify to whom the “mujahideen brothers” refers, nor did it identify the “common enemy.” The fact that the statement identified a common enemy with mujahideen outside Somalia, however, is quite telling for the group’s international ideology. Later in the statement, al Shabaab specifically also extended greetings to “the lions of the two Islamic Emirates, those in Afghanistan and Iraq; the heroes of the Islamic Maghreb [i.e. North Africa] and the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus; and our brothers in Palestine, Chechnya, and all Muslim lands that are now under the oppression of the Crusader invaders.”<sup>205</sup> Mentioning the different Islamist groups by name when offering greetings is meant to show admiration and respect while also trying to earn reciprocal respect from those more established groups.

Al Shabaab released two significant messages in 2009 that explicitly exhibit the group’s international ideology and its loyalty to al Qaeda and other leaders of the global jihad movement. The first message came in the form of a speech released by al Shabaab leader Abu Zubair on July 6, 2009. The speech referred to Mullah Omar, Osama bin Laden and Ayman al Zawahiri as the leaders of the global jihad.<sup>206</sup> More importantly, Abu Zubair portrayed al Shabaab’s efforts in Somalia as the third of three fronts against “domination by the western countries” and told the people of Somalia to prepare for “the establishment of an Islamic State.”<sup>207</sup> Abu Zubair described the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, and pointed to Islamists’ successes on all three fronts as proof that “the age of domination by the western countries is coming to an end, and a new age of a righteous Islamic state has come.”<sup>208</sup> He then castigated the TFG and prophesied that an Islamic state in Somalia was near. The message is significant because Abu Zubair parallels the war in Somalia with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and he seems to describe the establishment of an Islamic state in Somalia as part of a larger Islamic caliphate.

The second important message of 2009 revealing al Shabaab’s international outlook and loyalty to al Qaeda came in the form of a video entitled, “At Your Service, Oh Osama,” and was released September 20, 2009. The video was addressed to “the Lions of tawheed [unity or monotheism; a common symbol of Islamist groups who claim that human government is a form of polytheism and, therefore, apostasy]—Emir al Mumineen Mullah Omar and Sheikh Osama bin Laden.”<sup>209</sup> Throughout the video, voices are heard pledging allegiance to bin Laden. Abu Zubair offered greetings to bin Laden and then asked for his guidance: “So receive glad tidings and rejoice, and we are awaiting your guidance in this advanced stage in the life of jihad, in which the challenges of fighting the occupiers have overlapped with the requirements of establishing the Islamic State.”<sup>210</sup> He then went on to describe the place of al Shabaab in the global jihad: “Allah willing, the brigades for global jihad will be

launched from the land of the two migrations [Somalia] to deprive the disbelievers of sleep and to destroy their interests around the world.”<sup>211</sup> Abu Zubair concluded the video by saying, “We ask Allah that the Islamic Nation be liberated from invaders by the next Eid and the Caliphate be established by then.”<sup>212</sup> The video makes it unequivocally clear that al Shabaab accepts the leadership of al Qaeda Prime, that it seeks to establish an Islamic state and hopes for a larger Islamic Caliphate, and that it views itself as a key player in the global Islamist movement. The video also displays al Shabaab’s strong desire to receive recognition and support from al Qaeda’s senior leadership.

In May 2009, al Shabaab made a significant gesture regarding its international outlook and solidarity with the global Islamist movement, but the gesture did not come in the form of a statement or video. The group raised the flag of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) above Mogadishu Stadium after declaring victory against TFG and AMISOM forces in the city.<sup>213</sup> The ISI was the realization of what al Qaeda franchises and affiliates seek to achieve: an Islamic state meant to be part of the global Caliphate. When the ISI announced the design of its flag in January 2007, the group said that it hoped the flag would become the flag for all Muslims.<sup>214</sup> The raising of the flag by al Shabaab symbolized the group’s goal of establishing an Islamic state in Somalia as part of a larger global Caliphate.

Al Shabaab’s overtures to al Qaeda continued into 2010. The group released a statement in February 2010 echoing its rhetoric of the previous two years: “Jihad in the Horn of Africa must be combined with the international jihad led by the al Qaeda network.”<sup>215</sup>

Al Shabaab’s allegiance to al Qaeda and its adherence to an ideology that is global in perspective are clear through its numerous messages released over the past two years. One of al Shabaab’s goals in pledging fealty to al Qaeda’s senior leadership and recognizing Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden as the leaders of the global jihad movement was to receive reciprocal support from them. Al Qaeda’s senior leadership has stopped short of providing such unequivocal legitimacy to al Shabaab, but al Qaeda

senior leaders have made numerous statements in support of the jihad in Somalia.

Osama bin Laden voiced his support for the Islamic Courts Union—from which al Shabaab emerged—in 2006. He seems to have identified Somalia as a potential Islamic state once the ICU had established control of most of southern and central Somalia by mid-2006. Bin Laden released a statement addressed specifically to the Iraqi and Somali people on July 1, 2006, focused on the goal of establishing an Islamic state. He referred to Baghdad as “the home of the Caliphate” and then went on to praise the Somali people for choosing Islam.<sup>216</sup> Bin Laden warned the Somali people that, “There is no way for you to survive unless you stick to Islam, and are united with the Shari’a Courts, which try to establish the Islamic nation.”<sup>217</sup> He spoke of the necessity to fight foreign troops in Somalia and urged “Muslim youths and merchants” to sacrifice for the cause in Somalia.<sup>218</sup>

Bin Laden’s deputy, Ayman al Zawahiri, echoed bin Laden’s calls to support the jihad in Somalia in the following months. Zawahiri delivered a long speech in December 2006 detailing the state of the “conflict between Islam and unbelief.”<sup>219</sup> He discussed five conflicts at length, including the one in Somalia, and urged “the mujahideen in Somalia...to defend the honor of Islam and Muslims on the Horn of Africa against the Crusaders and Zionists.”<sup>220</sup> Zawahiri’s December 2006 speech reflected the importance with which al Qaeda’s leadership viewed Somalia, and, by identifying the enemy in Somalia as “Crusaders and Zionists,” Zawahiri identified Somalia as a front in the global jihad.

Zawahiri followed his December 2006 speech with an audio message in January 2007 that focused solely on the jihad in Somalia. The message came in the immediate aftermath of the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, when the political apparatus of the ICU had disintegrated and al Shabaab had begun operating as an autonomous entity. Zawahiri called for the Muslims of Somalia “to resist in this new battlefield of the Crusaders’ war, which is launched by America.”<sup>221</sup> He urged the mujahideen in Somalia to fight the



enemy using ambushes, mines, raids, and suicide attacks, and he called on “Muslims everywhere to participate in jihad in Somalia.”<sup>222</sup> Zawahiri concluded the speech by telling the Muslims of Somalia “that America and its slaves will be defeated...in Somalia, as Allah defeated it in Afghanistan and Iraq.”<sup>223</sup> Zawahiri’s message was the greatest gift al Shabaab could receive at the time. As one of the leaders of the global jihad, Zawahiri put the struggle in Somalia on a level comparable to that of the struggles in Afghanistan and Iraq and called on all Muslims to support the fight there. It was significant, if still limited, support for al Shabaab.

Al Qaeda’s senior leadership continued to support the struggle in Somalia in 2008 and throughout 2009. One of al Qaeda’s most senior commanders, Abu Yahya al Libi, released a speech in June 2008 entitled, “Somalia...No Peace without Islam.”<sup>224</sup> Libi focused nearly the entire speech on the need to reject any internationally brokered peace deal for Somalia and instead “accept nothing short of an independent Islamic state.”<sup>225</sup> Notably, Libi also specifically recognized al Shabaab for the first time by offering his condolences to the group for the death of its founder and leader, Sheikh Aadan Haashi ‘Ayro; al Qaeda leaders had previously just referred to the mujahideen in general when speaking of the struggle in Somalia. Ayman al Zawahiri echoed Libi’s call for the “lions of Somalia” to keep fighting until an Islamic state in Somalia is established when he issued an audio address in November 2008 in response to the election of Barack Obama.<sup>226</sup>

All three top al Qaeda leaders issued statements in 2009 supporting the fight in Somalia. In a February 2009 speech covering many issues, Ayman al Zawahiri made the point that “fighting fronts are open against the Crusaders and their helpers,” specifically mentioning Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia.<sup>227</sup> Zawahiri showed the high regard with which al Qaeda views Somalia by placing the Somali front in the same category as the Iraq and Afghan fronts—which is remarkable since there are no American

forces in Somalia, by contrast with Iraq and Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden released only five statements in 2009, and he dedicated one entire message to the battle in Somalia: “Fight on Champions of Somalia,” on March 19.<sup>228</sup> Bin Laden built on the previously established theme of defining Somalia as a front in the global jihad: “The war taking place [in Somalia]...is a war between Islam and the international Crusade.”<sup>229</sup> He then described Somalia’s president, Sheikh Sharif, as a puppet of the United States and told the Somali people that “The obligation is to fight the apostate government.”<sup>230</sup> Bin Laden also called on the Muslim nation to support the jihad in Somalia by either fighting or sending money.<sup>231</sup> The third message of support from an al Qaeda senior leader in 2009 came from Abu Yahya al Libi on July 30. The message, entitled, “Somalia...The Cloud of Summer Dissipated,” urged the Somali mujahideen to fight the infidels there to the death.<sup>232</sup>

The numerous statements that al Qaeda’s leadership issued in support of the struggle in Somalia have likely been as valuable to al Shabaab as any tactical or financial support that the leaders of the global jihad could have provided. By recognizing Somalia as a primary front in the global jihad, al Qaeda’s leadership gave credibility to al Shabaab’s international ideology. The statements from al Qaeda’s leadership also made Somalia a more desirable destination for international militants looking to participate in the global Islamist movement, as well as for Islamist financiers looking to contribute to it. Al Qaeda’s leadership has never classified al Shabaab as an al Qaeda branch or franchise, but it has called on Muslims around the world to support al Shabaab, and it has championed the group’s cause. Statements released by both groups over the past three years make clear that al Shabaab and al Qaeda view themselves as partners in the global jihad and are willing to support one another to achieve the same end-goal: the expulsion of perceived infidels—namely the American Crusaders and their partners—from Muslim lands, and the establishment of a global Islamic state.

## International Recruiting and Its Impact

Al Shabaab's initial rise to prominence in early 2007 was primarily a result of its leadership's strategic manipulation of the Ethiopian invasion, which earned it popular support and hundreds of local recruits. Al Shabaab's leadership, however, recognized that it needed to attract willing and experienced foreign recruits if it hoped to achieve its goals of establishing an Islamic state and contributing to the global jihad. In fact, a senior al Shabaab leader and spokesman, Mukhtar Robow Ali, said in a May 2008 interview, "We seek to empower the *shari'a* of Allah and commit His faith to His worshippers, in perfect conformity between the global jihad and the jihad in Somalia. However, [we] lack the precious element of the foreign fighters. There is an insufficient number of non-Somali brothers."<sup>233</sup>

The group therefore developed and implemented a robust and effective international recruiting strategy that has helped it expand its control of southern and central Somalia, raise funds, and, perhaps most importantly, execute high-profile and sophisticated terror attacks. Al Shabaab's international recruiting strategy has focused on attracting two specific, but not mutually exclusive, demographic groups to fight in Somalia. The first and more general group consists of young Muslim men looking to participate in the global jihad led by Osama bin Laden. The second and more specific group is young ethnically Somali Muslim men living abroad who seek both to fight in the global jihad and to defend their homeland. Al Shabaab's international recruiting program is twofold: well-produced recruiting media that are attractive to the target market, and grassroots efforts to recruit potential militants in foreign countries, especially the United States, who may feel sympathetic to al Shabaab's mission. As a result of the strategy's success, dozens of Americans and westerners have traveled to Somalia to fight with al Shabaab, as have hundreds, if not thousands, of mil-

itants from outside the West. Today, many of al Shabaab's most valuable assets are foreign fighters who arrived in Somalia as a result of the group's robust and effective international recruiting.

Al Shabaab has mastered the production of effective recruiting media perhaps better than any other militant Islamist group. Its product targets young Muslims, primarily those who speak English or Arabic, seeking to participate in the global jihad as portrayed and led by Osama bin Laden. One of the themes repeatedly echoed throughout al Shabaab's recruiting videos is its shared ideology with al Qaeda. The group goes to great lengths to portray its mission as part of bin Laden's international effort to defeat the "Crusaders" worldwide and establish a global Caliphate. These efforts have resulted in reciprocal video and audio messages released by al Qaeda portraying Somalia as a key battleground in the global jihad and calling on Muslims to support the efforts of militant Islamists in Somalia, as noted above. These videos are meant to persuade potential militants from around the world that fighting with al Shabaab is a contribution to defeating the "Crusaders" and establishing a global Caliphate on a par with fighting in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan or any other front in the global jihad.

Al Shabaab recruiting videos also attempt to portray the mission in Somalia as equally glorious and thrilling as any other front in the world for potential militants. This technique is the same as that used by conventional volunteer militaries around the world. Numerous al Shabaab videos show footage of al Shabaab militants equipped with automatic weapons and dressed in neat uniforms (including boots) engaged in combat. The battle scenes range from close combat in an urban setting to more conventional combat in the Somali bush. The al Shabaab fighters appear to have access to heavy weaponry

including 50-caliber machine guns, RPGs, and vehicles resembling humvees. The “At Your Service, Oh Osama” video shows images of American troops training Ugandan troops preparing to deploy to Somalia, and then clips of George W. Bush’s famous statement regarding the War on Terror: “you are either with us, or against us.”<sup>234</sup> Battle footage then portrays al Shabaab as the victor in an engagement, ostensibly against African Union or TFG forces, and shows the militants riding victoriously through the streets chanting, “Allahu Akbar!”. The message conveyed to the viewer is that he too can become a hero by fighting in Somalia against U.S.-backed forces.

Beyond combat scenes, al Shabaab’s recruitment videos also show footage of militants drilling at well-organized training camps. These scenes are reminiscent of the al Qaeda training videos made famous around the time of 9/11. The training footage shows militants maneuvering through obstacle courses, engaging in target practice with automatic weapons, crawling through trenches, crossing “monkey bars,” kicking in doors, and practicing hand-to-hand combat.<sup>235</sup> The footage attempts to appeal to potential international militants by demonstrating that the training provided by al Shabaab rivals the training offered by any militant group worldwide and that it can mold one into a skilled fighter.

Al Shabaab’s recruiting videos employ methods specifically designed to target potential militants in the West. Nearly all of al Shabaab’s videos are narrated in Arabic, or at least have Arabic subtitles. Several important al Shabaab recruiting videos, including “At Your Service, Oh Osama,” “Ambush at Bardale” (March 30, 2009), and “As Part of the Preparation of the Attack, ‘No Peace Without Islam’” (September 30, 2008), however, have portions narrated in English, as well as English subtitles—a clear appeal to potential western recruits.<sup>236</sup> The “Ambush at Bardale” video includes a rap song about liberating Somalia by force by an English-speaker with an American accent. The song is an attempt to relate to American and European youth less familiar with the Islamic chants that often accompany Islamist militant videos. One English-speaker in the “Preparation of the Attack” video

even makes a direct reference to the 2005 Prophet Mohammad cartoon controversy that sparked outrage in Muslim communities in an effort to reach out to potential European recruits: “And to the filthy dogs of Denmark, may Allah...break the hands for what they have drawn. We will never forget their mockery of the best of mankind and the last Messenger. So sleep with the thoughts of our swords dripping with your blood.”<sup>237</sup> Finally, the “At Your Service, Oh Osama” video has an image of a Caucasian-looking man with a bullet-proof vest appearing to lead a unit of al Shabaab fighters, likely an effort by the group to demonstrate the diversity of al Shabaab and to show westerners that they can rise to positions of leadership if they join the group.

One of al Shabaab’s most notable international recruiting assets is the aforementioned American-born convert to Islam, Abu Mansour al Amriki [the American]. Al Amriki, who was born Omar Hammami in May 1984, grew up in the small town of Daphne, Alabama.<sup>238</sup> The college-educated al Amriki was raised a Baptist, but his father was Muslim. He initially emerged as an al Shabaab militant in October 2007 when al Jazeera aired a story about the shared goal of al Qaeda and al Shabaab.<sup>239</sup> He has since released at least one public statement on behalf of al Shabaab, and he appeared in an al Shabaab recruiting video (“Ambush at Bardale”). He is referred to as a field commander in other al Shabaab statements,<sup>240</sup> but he appears in the “Ambush at Bardale” video to also serve as a spiritual instructor, at least for English-speaking al Shabaab militants. Al Amriki appears to be fluent in both English and Arabic. He makes direct appeals to the English-speaking Somali diaspora—especially those living in Minnesota—in the “Ambush at Bardale” video: “The only reason we’re staying here away from our families, away from the cities, away from, you know, ice, candy bars, all these other things, is because we are waiting to meet with the enemy.”<sup>241</sup> Al Amriki has also made several efforts to emphasize that al Shabaab’s battle is part of the “global jihad,” as opposed to a national struggle.

The significance of al Amriki in al Shabaab’s international recruiting efforts is multifold. First, he can

communicate to English-speaking recruits who otherwise might be hard to reach. He also gives confidence to such recruits that they will be working with other English-speaking militants in al Shabaab should they decide to join the group. Al Amriki also demonstrates to non-Somali militants that they can excel and attain a leadership role within al Shabaab. Finally, as an international fighter, al Amriki is a credible voice for the claim that al Shabaab's efforts are part of a broader global effort.

Alongside its effective media strategy, al Shabaab has also used a complex grassroots recruiting strategy to lure young, ethnic Somali men in the diaspora to join its ranks. An estimated two to three million Somalis reside outside their homeland, and approximately 150,000 to 200,000 live in the United States.<sup>242</sup> Thousands more Somalis live in Europe. The highest concentrations of Somalis in the United States are in Minneapolis, Seattle, Columbus, OH, Atlanta, and Washington, DC. Most of al Shabaab's target recruits in the United States and Europe immigrated to their current countries at a very young age, are well-educated (with at least a high school diploma), and are in their late teens or early-to-mid-twenties.<sup>243</sup>

The details of al Shabaab's recruiting strategy in the West, and specifically the United States, are still not completely clear. It appears, however, that the strategy has three prongs. First, al Shabaab surrogates attempt to indoctrinate Somali-American youth at mosques and youth groups to convince them that it is their duty to fight infidels.<sup>244</sup> Certain youth programs in Minnesota, for example, inculcated youth with the idea that Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia was an attack on Islam, and thus it was the duty of Somalis to defend the homeland.<sup>245</sup> There have been reports that imams at Minneapolis mosques have delivered sermons extolling the value of fighting in Somalia.<sup>246</sup> A veteran of the war in Somalia reportedly delivered a speech at a Minneapolis mosque at least once, describing the necessity to continue fighting there.<sup>247</sup> Some Somali religious leaders in the U.S. appear to be complicit in this indoctrination effort.<sup>248</sup>

The second prong of al Shabaab's grassroots recruiting strategy is for a recruiter to make contact

with a potential militant to convince him to travel to Somalia and fight alongside al Shabaab. It appears that the recruiters often have an affiliation with a local mosque, and the initial contact between the recruiter and the potential militant may take place at the mosque or an affiliated youth program. One of the first known cases of al Shabaab recruiting in the United States occurred in Minneapolis in October 2007 when a recruiter held secret meetings to discuss Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia.<sup>249</sup> In other cases, al Shabaab has used role models in the community to forge bonds with vulnerable youth and then attempted to persuade them to join al Shabaab.<sup>250</sup> In London, al Shabaab recruiters have reportedly called the family members of potential militants and pressured them into sending their children to Somalia to fight.<sup>251</sup>

The third prong of al Shabaab's grassroots recruiting effort is to intimidate the families of potential recruits into allowing their children to fight in Somalia. This intimidation appears to occur at both the mosque and community levels, and benefits from complicit elements of the Somali religious leadership in the U.S. Leaders at mosques within the Somali-American community—such as the Abu-Bakr al-Siddique mosque in Minneapolis—threaten the families of recruits who speak to either authorities or the media.<sup>252</sup> The leaders claim that speaking to the FBI will result in the government destroying the Islamic community and sending the parents of al Shabaab recruits to Guantanamo Bay prison.<sup>253</sup> The mosque leaders also attempt to tarnish the reputation of people who speak up against al Shabaab as traitors to the community.<sup>254</sup>

Al Shabaab's comprehensive international recruiting strategy has been very successful. The group has attracted hundreds, if not thousands, of recruits from around the world. The president of the TFG, Sheikh Sharif, estimates that between 800 and 1,100 foreigners belong to al Shabaab's ranks.<sup>225</sup> Many are ethnic Somalis from the diaspora, but others are Arab, African, Pakistani, Bengali, or Caucasian. Al Shabaab's foreign fighters are some of its most valuable assets. They often bring a willingness to participate in suicide missions, documents facilitating international travel,

financial resources, and a level of education rarely found in Somalia.

At least twenty men have travelled from the United States to Somalia to join up with al Shabaab.<sup>256</sup> This number exceeds the number of Americans who have left the United States to fight in either Iraq or Afghanistan.<sup>257</sup> Somali community leaders in Great Britain fear that up to 100 young men and women—including students and graduates of prestigious universities, such as the London School of Economics, King's College, and Imperial College—may have joined the group's ranks. Al Shabaab has also attracted recruits from other European countries, and possibly Australia.

Al Amriki is the most well known al Shabaab operative from the West, but other westerners have also played key roles in the group. Shirwa Ahmed, who hailed from Minnesota and had studied at a community college there, became the first American suicide bomber when he conducted an attack in the semi-autonomous Puntland region on October 29, 2008.<sup>258</sup> The attack killed twenty people. Another Somali-American, Omar Mohamad from Seattle, is widely suspected of having conducted a suicide attack on the African Union headquarters in Mogadishu on September 17, 2009 (the FBI has not

publically confirmed this claim).<sup>259</sup> In total, at least six Americans are believed to have died fighting for al Shabaab.<sup>260</sup> Additionally, initial reports claimed that a Danish man carried out the December 3, 2009 attack at a college graduation ceremony in Mogadishu (this claim has also not been confirmed).<sup>261</sup> Foreign operatives have contributed to al Shabaab beyond fighting or conducting attacks for the group. A twenty-four-year-old medical student in London, for instance, travelled to Somalia to work as part of al Shabaab's medical team.<sup>262</sup>

The group has benefited from its crop of international operatives. Mukhtar Robow Ali, the al Shabaab senior official who complained about a lack of foreign fighters in May 2008, emphatically defended the group's use of foreign fighters in September 2009 and indicated a hope that more would join the ranks: "Fellow Muslims have the right to come to Somalia to support our cause to establish an Islamic state and defeat the pro-western politicians."<sup>263</sup> Foreigners provide the group with technical assistance, as well as an eagerness to contribute to the global jihad. They also possess key travel documents, making it easier for them to travel outside Somalia. Should al Shabaab decide to strike beyond the borders of Somalia, its foreign fighters will likely play a key role.

## Al Shabaab's International Threats

Al Shabaab has demonstrated the ability to conduct a range of terrorist operations, from assassinations to sophisticated and spectacular double suicide vehicle bombings. All of the group's terrorist attacks thus far have occurred within the borders of Somalia. The group, however, has indicated a desire to expand its operations beyond its home nation. It has made direct threats against international targets and indirect threats against foreign countries. Al Shabaab has taken steps, including the recruitment of international operatives and the establishment of a special brigade to help conduct such operations, toward carrying out these threats. The group's aspirations to strike beyond Somalia are in accord with its international ideology and desire to be a significant contributor to the global Islamist movement. An attack outside Somalia, especially on an American, European, or Australian target, would earn the group further praise from al Qaeda's leadership and perhaps even a designation as an al Qaeda franchise. An international attack would also give the group greater notoriety and legitimize it as a contributor to the global jihad. All of these factors would result in an influx of funds and foreign fighters to further augment the group's capabilities. Al Shabaab has made it clear that it intends to strike beyond Somalia's borders.

Al Shabaab has already been linked with two failed plots beyond the Somali borders. Melbourne, Australia police executed nineteen search warrants and arrested five Australian nationals of Somali and Lebanese ethnicity who were allegedly planning to conduct a suicide attack on an Australian Army base with automatic weapons.<sup>264</sup> The August 2009 police operation came after seven months of surveillance of the suspects, who Australian authorities claimed were connected to al Shabaab. Al Shabaab denied that the Australian nationals had any connection with the group.<sup>265</sup>

The second al Shabaab-linked plot that occurred outside Somalia took place in Aarhus, Denmark on January 1, 2010. A Somali man who allegedly had close contact with al Shabaab was shot by police after breaking into the home of Kurt Westergaard, the famed cartoonist whose depictions of the Prophet Mohammad sparked outrage among Muslims around the world in 2005.<sup>266</sup> The Somali man was armed with an axe and a knife.<sup>267</sup> This attack appeared to be an attempt to follow-up on the threat made in the September 2008 al Shabaab statement. The attempted murderer was even armed with two weapons—an axe and knife—that echoed the statement: “sleep with the thoughts of our swords dripping with your blood.” Al Shabaab praised the attempt, although it stopped short of explicitly taking credit for the plot: “We appreciate the incident in which a Muslim Somali boy attacked the devil who abused our Prophet Mohammed and we call upon all Muslims around the world to target the people like [him].”<sup>268</sup> The Somali man who nearly killed Westergaard had previously been arrested in Kenya in August 2009 on suspicions of terrorist activities before the visit of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.<sup>269</sup>

Al Shabaab has issued numerous threats against international targets, both generally and specifically, that it has not yet acted upon. The United States appears to be high on the group's list of intended targets. Al Shabaab's first threat directed at the United States was issued in February 2008—several months before it fully adopted the global ideology articulated by Abu Zubair in June of that year. The threat came in response to alleged U.S. air strikes in southwestern Somalia and was confined in scope to U.S. targets in Somalia: “Al Shabaab will give them [America] a taste...of hardship in all the regions where they are present in the east and west of Somalia.”<sup>270</sup> About one month later, the group again threatened to attack



the United States, but this time the threat was not limited geographically to targets in Somalia: “We assure our Muslim brothers in general and the mujahideen in particular: give them the good news that we are preparing for America—Allah willing—what will make them forget the blessed attacks in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.”<sup>271</sup> The group then released a statement in May 2008 vowing to take revenge on the United States for killing its leader, ‘Ayro.<sup>272</sup> All these threats came in reaction to specific events linked to the United States, and they appear to foreshadow the group’s decision to adopt a global ideology with the United States as a primary target.

The statement issued by al Shabaab’s current leader, Mukhtar Abu Zubair, on June 1, 2008, highlighted al Shabaab’s newfound desire to strike the U.S.: “So wait, oh cursed America, for the events of the coming September [i.e. the next major attacks]. For it is not a strike, but strikes!!! They conspired against and made us retarded economically and politically and [sic] and technologically and religiously and morally and even mentally!!! And all of these tragedies are caused by the mother of [all evil] America!!! It continues, and [America] did not learn sufficiently from the previous strikes!! The curses of God [are] upon America and those who are loyal to it or protect it or love it!!!”<sup>273</sup>

The only publically-known al Shabaab threat directed at a specific U.S. target inside the homeland allegedly focused on the 2009 Inauguration Day ceremonies in Washington, DC. The al Shabaab threat was made known to U.S. intelligence agencies, but a Department of Homeland Security spokesman described the threat as “limited [in] specificity and [of] uncertain credibility.”<sup>274</sup>

Al Shabaab, however, appears focused also on hitting U.S. targets abroad, especially in Africa, which would likely be easier for the group to execute. This strategy appears similar to that of the al Qaeda in East Africa cell of the late 1990s which bombed the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. In October 2009, news surfaced of communications between al Shabaab and Somalis in South Africa being intercepted by South African intelligence agencies.<sup>275</sup> The intercepted communications allegedly dealt with an al Shabaab plot to strike U.S.

interests during the 2010 World Cup games, scheduled to be held in South Africa from June 11 to July 11, 2010.<sup>276</sup> An al Shabaab cell reportedly already exists in South Africa, and nearly 40,000 Somalis live there.<sup>277</sup> The U.S. embassy temporarily closed its embassy in Pretoria in response to this intelligence revelation.

Al Shabaab has also made clear its intent to strike Israeli targets around the world, and it has taken a proactive step toward executing such a plan. The group announced on November 1, 2009 the establishment of its al Quds Brigade, whose purpose is “to liberate Islamic Holy Sites.”<sup>278</sup> “Al Quds” is the Arabic word for “Jerusalem.” An al Shabaab statement described the brigade as “heavily armed with different kinds of weapons.”<sup>279</sup> The same statement also called on all Muslims to wage a battle against the “usurping Zionist entity and to target their interests, especially on the black continent [i.e. Africa].”<sup>280</sup> Al Shabaab has put the al Quds Brigade on display in videos and public rallies several times since its formation.

Al Shabaab’s other international threats have focused primarily on the group’s perceived enemies on the African continent. The group said in October 2009 that it would conduct attacks in both Uganda and Burundi in response to civilian deaths caused by those two countries’ armed forces in Somalia.<sup>281</sup> Uganda and Burundi are currently the only two nations contributing troops to the African Union’s peacekeeping mission in Somalia. Al Shabaab has also threatened to attack Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, in retaliation for the increased Kenyan troop presence along the Kenya-Somalia border.<sup>282</sup> Finally, the group has said that it would strike Djibouti if it contributed troops to the AU mission in Somalia.<sup>283</sup>

Al Shabaab’s threats to expand operations beyond Somalia’s borders must be taken seriously. The group can gain tremendous advantages if it can succeed in such an effort, including increased recognition, recruits and funds. More importantly, al Shabaab has proven many times over that it can and will carry out its threats. Al Shabaab’s international threats may appear to be empty rhetoric meant to gain political advantage, but the group may indeed have the capacity to turn such threats into reality.



## Threat Assessment and Conclusion

Today, al Shabaab poses a real and imminent threat to the United States, its interests, and its allies, perhaps equal to the threat posed by any militant Islamist group in the world. It has many of the same elements that have made al Qaeda so dangerous, including strong leadership, technical expertise, and militants from around the world willing to die for a cause, while also governing large swaths of the country in a manner reminiscent of the Afghan Taliban. Al Shabaab thus resembles a hybrid of al Qaeda and the Taliban, in which the militant elements are able to train and prepare for attacks as a result of the space provided to them by the group's administrative organization. The group certainly hopes to maintain and expand its control in Somalia, but it has also developed an international outlook and has made clear its desire to strike beyond Somalia's borders. Al Shabaab has threatened American interests, and it appears to have the capacity to carry out such threats.

Al Shabaab's most important advantage is its uncontested control of most of southern and much of central Somalia. The fragile TFG does not appear to have the resources or the capacity to pose a serious challenge to the group outside Mogadishu. In fact, the TFG's grip on strategic points even within the capital is tenuous. Al Shabaab has engaged in occasional small-scale battles with other Islamist groups and tribal warlords in southern and central Somalia, but al Shabaab has rarely ceded any territory to its rivals. No other militant Islamist group in the world, with the possible exception of Hezbollah, has unchallenged control of such large parts of a country. These conditions have allowed al Shabaab to set up training camps to prepare for its insurgency and terrorist operations. The group operates numerous camps throughout its controlled areas, where trainees undergo Islamist indoctrination and receive instruction on how to make and detonate bombs,

and operate small arms, machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades.<sup>284</sup> Al Shabaab will continue to have the capacity to train for attacks against the U.S. and its interests until its authority in southern and central Somalia is successfully challenged.

Room to train and plan for attacks, though, is not necessarily a major threat in itself. For a foreign group to pose a real threat to the United States and its interests it needs funds, weapons, technical expertise, and the human resources to conduct operations; al Shabaab has all of these. The group appears to have no shortage of money. It is able to operate shadow governments and build up its military capabilities as a result of the funds raised through taxing international aid organizations, collecting *zakat* from citizens, receiving remittances from abroad,<sup>285</sup> and receiving financial support from Eritrea.<sup>286</sup> Al Shabaab has a robust arsenal for conducting irregular warfare and terrorist attacks. The group has exhibited both large and small arms in its videos,<sup>287</sup> and it has proven its ability to succeed in battle against both conventional and irregular enemies. Some of the group's weapons are leftovers from the civil wars that have ravaged Somalia over the past twenty years, and others are allegedly provided by Eritrea.<sup>288</sup>

The group has also proven that it has the means to carry out sophisticated, mass-casualty terror attacks. In 2009 alone, al Shabaab conducted at least five suicide operations.<sup>289</sup> Some of the attacks, such as the September 17, 2009, strike on the African Union headquarters in Mogadishu, have been highly sophisticated. That attack was a twin vehicle-borne suicide explosion conducted with stolen UN vehicles that allowed the perpetrators to access their targets.<sup>290</sup> The group benefits from the technical expertise, including bomb-making skills, of veterans of the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Reportedly, many of the instructors at al Shabaab training camps

are non-Somalis.<sup>291</sup> The group has also proven that it has a number of militants who are willing to conduct suicide operations. Estimates of al Shabaab's total manpower range from 2,000-5,000,<sup>292</sup> including 800-1,100 foreign fighters. Certainly not every al Shabaab operative is training to be a suicide bomber, but the pool from which the group can draw is significantly larger than that of most other militant Islamist groups (al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, for instance, is believed to have fewer than 500 operatives in its ranks).

Striking beyond Somalia's borders will be a challenge for al Shabaab. The group would need to transfer some of its resources out of Somalia, including, at a minimum, human resources, to conduct an international attack. This process would require evading international intelligence and law enforcement authorities. The degree to which the United States and its partners track al Shabaab operatives is not known to the public. But the group does contain the most valuable asset needed to achieve the feat of an international strike: foreign fighters. Al Shabaab militants from the United States and Europe possess, or should be able to easily acquire, the documents necessary for them to travel throughout much of the world. Striking American interests on the African continent would be likely much less challenging for the group. Many African countries have porous borders and are plagued by ineffective and corrupt intelligence and law enforcement agencies. Further, numerous East African countries, including Uganda, South Africa, and Kenya, have large Somali populations that

could potentially provide shelter to al Shabaab terrorists. The group also has access to at least one expert document-forgery, Fazul Abdullah, the current leader of al Qaeda in East Africa, which should facilitate the movement of non-western al Shabaab operatives, at least within the African continent.

Perhaps most alarming for Americans and their policymakers should be the fact that al Shabaab has continuously demonstrated the ability to follow through on its threats. The twin suicide bombings on September 17, 2009, took place only days after the group vowed to avenge the assassination of Saleh Ali Nabhan, the former al Qaeda in East Africa leader, by U.S. Special Forces.<sup>293</sup> Similarly, al Shabaab allegedly attacked a college graduation ceremony, killing numerous graduates and the country's Minister of Education, in December 2009—just three months after the group warned the Ministry of Education about using “un-Islamic” textbooks.<sup>294</sup> The group has also acted on its threats to attack non-compliant United Nations agencies, such as the UN Mine Action Service.<sup>295</sup> There is no reason for American policymakers to assume that al Shabaab will not follow through on its threat to attack the United States.

Al Shabaab has made clear its desire and intention to strike beyond the borders of Somalia. The group currently has the means to prepare for and execute an international attack. It is partners with and loyal to al Qaeda, and it continuously strives to earn the respect and recognition of al Qaeda's leadership. There is enough evidence of the threat al Shabaab poses to the U.S. that there can be no excuse for being surprised by an attack.

## Appendix A: Timeline of Major Security Events in Somalia

*Significant security developments within the country dating back to the lead-up to the Ethiopian invasion of 2006*

### January 25, 2010:

An explosion at the main African Union base in Mogadishu killed as many as seven people. The blast occurred in the outpatient section of the base's hospital, though it is unclear whether it was caused by a suicide bomber or by a mortar blast. Al Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>296</sup>

### December 13, 2009:

Hizb al Islam militants carried out *shari'a* sentences in Afgoi, a town southwest of Mogadishu. Mohamoud Awale, who had confessed to murder, was shot by a relative of his victim. Mohamed Abukar Ibrahim, accused of adultery, was stoned to death. A 15-year-old girl received 100 lashes for having extramarital sexual relations. This is the first known instance of Hizb al Islam applying this interpretation of *shari'a* law. A dissident faction of Hizb al Islam protested the sentences and an ensuing firefight killed three militants.<sup>297</sup>

### December 3, 2009:

A male suicide bomber disguised as a woman killed at least twenty-two people, including three government ministers, at a graduation ceremony in a Mogadishu hotel. Over forty others were wounded in the blast that ripped through the Shamo Hotel. It is suspected that al Shabaab was responsible for the attack.<sup>298</sup>

### November 1, 2009:

Al Shabaab announced the formation of a new wing that would specifically target Israel called the *al Quds Brigade*. The military wing will be

headed by Abdifatah Aweys Abu Hamsa and will fight to liberate Islamic holy places, such as al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem.<sup>299</sup>

### October 28, 2009:

Heavy fighting erupted along Mekka al Mukarama road, which links the presidential palace to the main airport in Mogadishu, as President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed returned from a trip to Yemen. Four people were killed and at least eleven others were wounded.<sup>300</sup>

### October 22, 2009:

Al Shabaab shelled Mogadishu airport as Somali President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed left for Kampala, Uganda. The shells only hit the perimeter of the airport and the plane was able to take off safely. African Union and government troops returned fire and shelled al Shabaab's locations. Residential neighborhoods took heavy fire, and after the fighting ended, over twenty people were confirmed dead, with dozens more wounded.<sup>301</sup>

### October 1, 2009:

Fighting between al Shabaab and Hizb al Islam militants broke out in Kismayo, a port city in southern Somalia. This came after al Shabaab failed to cede control of the city per an agreement made when the two groups first captured Kismayo in 2008. At least twenty people were killed in the first day's fighting.<sup>302</sup>

### September 21, 2009:

Al Shabaab proclaimed its allegiance to al Qaeda in a publicized video. Entitled "Labaik ya

Osama,” or “At Your Service, Osama,” the leader of al Shabaab, Abu Zubair, stated that al Shabaab is “awaiting your [Osama’s] guidance in this advanced stage of jihad.”<sup>303</sup>

**September 17, 2009:**

Two suicide bombers exploded their vehicles marked with UN insignia at the main AMISOM base in Mogadishu, following a meeting between AMISOM and TFG officials. The attack killed four Somalis, five Ugandans, and twelve Burundians, including AMISOM Deputy Force Commander Major General Juvenal Niyoyunguruza. Over forty others were injured by the blast. Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack, adding that it was in retaliation for the U.S. strike on the top al Qaeda in East Africa operative, Saleh Ali Nabhan.<sup>304</sup>

**August 20, 2009:**

Al Shabaab militants attacked African Union peacekeeping bases in Mogadishu in retaliation for AU troops entering al Shabaab-controlled areas of the capital. Over twenty-four people were killed in the ensuing battle, but the AU reported no peacekeeper deaths. This came after days of minor clashes, which left over forty dead, as both sides tried to establish positions within the capital.<sup>305</sup>

**August 16, 2009:**

Armed men, believed to be al Shabaab militants, attacked a World Food Program compound in Wajid in southern Somalia. WFP guards returned fire, killing three attackers. The gunmen’s objective may have been to kidnap foreign aid workers and gain control of the compound and its possessions.<sup>306</sup>

**July 20, 2009:**

Al Shabaab militants raided two UN compounds, one in Baidoa and the other in Wajid, following an announcement that al Shabaab would close down UN agencies. They managed

to take equipment and UN vehicles. In Baidoa, al Shabaab seized all emergency communication equipment, forcing the UN to evacuate its staff for security reasons. The World Food Program compound in Wajid remained operational since its security had not been affected.<sup>307</sup>

**July 12, 2009:**

African Union peacekeeping forces reportedly became directly involved in the fighting between government troops and Islamist insurgents for the first time. The AU asserted that its troops were not fully involved and only took limited, defensive action. Over seventy people had been killed during the past two days of fighting, at least forty of whom were insurgents. Around one hundred and fifty more people were injured in what was the worst fighting over the previous two months.<sup>308</sup>

**June 22, 2009:**

President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed declared a state of emergency in Somalia following armed clashes in Mogadishu that killed at least twelve people. He announced that the government had issued the declaration because the “country is on the verge of being overrun by foreign fighters.”<sup>309</sup>

**June 18, 2009:**

Three men drove a small vehicle laden with explosives into the Medina Hotel in Beledweyne, killing at least twenty-five people and wounding thirty-eight others. Among the dead were Somalia’s Security Minister, Colonel Omar Hashi Aden, and the former Ambassador to Ethiopia, Abdkarin Farah Laqanyo. Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the blast.<sup>310</sup>

**May 24, 2009:**

A suicide bomber drove a 4x4 vehicle to the gate of the police headquarters and detonated it, killing six policemen and one civilian. Al Shabaab claimed that the bomber, Abdul Qadr Hassan Muhammad, was one of its fighters.<sup>311</sup>

**April 25, 2009:**

Mortars were fired at Somalia's Parliament, which was in session, and missed their target. The mortars hit a nearby school and a group of policemen, killing at least seven people and wounding fifteen others. Days earlier, the government had urged the UN to lift the arms embargo on Somalia, which prevented the Somali government from modernizing its weapons.<sup>312</sup>

**April 23, 2009:**

Islamist opposition leader Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweis returned to Somalia for the first time since he was exiled two years previously, when Ethiopian troops ousted the Islamic Courts Union. The U.S. lists Aweis as a terrorist suspect for alleged ties to al Qaeda.<sup>313</sup>

**April 13, 2009:**

Al Shabaab fired mortars at Aden Adde Airport in Mogadishu as U.S. Congressman Donald Payne left the country for Nairobi. He had been in the country on a fact-finding mission and to defend the U.S. operation to free American ship captain Richard Phillips from Somali pirates.<sup>314</sup>

**March 26, 2009:**

Somalia's newly appointed Interior Minister, Abduladir Ali Omar, was injured when a roadside bomb exploded near his vehicle in Bakara Market, the largest market in Mogadishu. Omar had previously opposed the government, and the attack likely came from one of his former allies. One of his security guards died in the attack and another was wounded.<sup>315</sup>

**March 19, 2009:**

Osama bin Laden released a tape urging Somalis to overthrow the new Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG). In al Qaeda's own English translation of the tape, bin Laden said that "these sorts of presidents are the surrogates of our enemens [sic] and their authority is null and

void in the first place, and as Sheikh Sharif is one of them, he must be dethroned and fought."<sup>316</sup>

**March 11, 2009:**

A key security official, Ubeyd Mohamed Mohamud, died after a remote-controlled roadside bomb hit his vehicle outside of Mogadishu, in addition to three others. Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>317</sup>

**February 22, 2009:**

Two explosions in the compound of Somalia's old National University, a base for the African Union peacekeepers from Burundi, killed eleven soldiers and injured fifteen more, according to an AU statement. Mukhtar Rubow Ali, the spokesman for al Shabaab, announced the group's responsibility for the suicide bombings.<sup>318</sup>

**February 14, 2009:**

Omar Abdirashi Ali Sharmarke, seen as a bridge between the Islamists and the international community, was sworn in as Somali Prime Minister in Djibouti. PM Sharmarke's father was Somalia's second civilian president and he is a member of one of the larger Somali clans, the Darod clan.<sup>319</sup>

**February 7, 2009:**

Mortars were fired at Villa Somalia, President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed's residence in Mogadishu, hours after he returned from the UN-led elections in Djibouti. There was no return fire or report of injuries.<sup>320</sup>

**February 2, 2009:**

An African Union convoy hit a roadside bomb, which was remotely detonated, according to AU officials, along the Mekka al Mukarama road in Mogadishu. AU forces returned fire in response. At least twenty people died and dozens more were injured during the incident. According to the Deputy Mayor of Mogadishu,

Abdifatah Ibrahim, AU soldiers fired into the crowds along the packed road and killed at least thirty-six people.<sup>321</sup>

**January 31, 2009:**

Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, the former leader of the Islamic Courts Union, defeated other candidates, such as Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein and General Maslah Mohamed Siad, in the UN-operated presidential elections. Hussein was favored by the West, but Sheikh Sharif was well-respected by many in Mogadishu and southern Somalia. AMISOM pledged to support the new president.<sup>322</sup>

**January 26, 2009:**

The last of Ethiopia's troops withdrew from Somalia. Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed (not yet elected president) called on Islamists to end the war; however, former ICU hardliners rejected the Djibouti peace process and vowed to continue until *shari'a* law is established throughout the country.<sup>323</sup>

**January 24, 2009:**

In Mogadishu, a car laden with explosives drove at a checkpoint manned by African Union troops. AU soldiers opened fire on the vehicle, which then hit a passenger bus. Fourteen people died in the explosion and additional civilians were killed in the ensuing firefight.<sup>324</sup>

**January 13, 2009:**

As hundreds of Somalis cheered in the streets, Ethiopian troops withdrew from bases in Mogadishu, which were shortly thereafter taken over by Islamist militants. The withdrawal occurred as fighting persisted between different Islamist groups. At the time, approximately 3,000 African Union peacekeeping troops were stationed in Mogadishu around the small areas of the capital under control of the TFG.<sup>325</sup>

**January 6, 2009:**

A roadside bomb killed a Ugandan peacekeeper and wounded another in Mogadishu. In the region of Gedo in southwest Somalia, three masked gunmen murdered Ibrahim Hussein Duale, a UN World Food Program employee. He is the third WFP to be killed since August 2008.<sup>326</sup>

**January 3, 2009:**

Fighting between rival Islamist groups, al Shabaab and Ahlu Sunna wa al Jama'a, killed at least seven people in Guriel in central Somalia.<sup>327</sup>

**January 2, 2009:**

Ethiopia announced that it had begun to withdraw some of its troops from Somalia after a two-year presence in the country. Many Somalis saw the Ethiopians as occupiers and Islamist insurgents had rallied against the Ethiopian troops.<sup>328</sup>

**December 29, 2008:**

Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf announced his resignation, which was welcomed by Somali Prime Minister Nur Hassan Hussein. Yusuf said he no longer had control over the country and that he could not fulfill his duties. Hours after the announcement, mortar shells landed near the presidential palace.<sup>329</sup>

**December 28, 2008:**

Somalia's Islamist militias began to fight each other as Ethiopia prepared to withdraw its troops. One of the two main groups fighting each other, Ahlu Sunna wa al Jama'a, had signed a peace deal with the TFG, but other Islamist factions, such as al Shabaab, continued to fight the government.<sup>330</sup>

**December 22, 2008:**

The African Union agreed to extend the mandate for its troops in Somalia for two additional months. There were 3,400 Ugandan and Burundi peacekeepers present in Mogadishu at the time.<sup>331</sup>



**December 10, 2008:**

Moderate Islamist leader Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, formerly a leader of the ICU, was welcomed at the airport in Mogadishu by members of the current government. Two years previously, the Ethiopian-backed transitional government had ousted the ICU. Sheikh Sharif returned to Somalia after a deal with the government, and was at the time the leader of the main opposition movement, the Alliance for the Re-Liberating of Somalia.<sup>332</sup>

**December 8, 2008:**

Despite announcements saying that it would pull out of Somalia by the end of the year, the Ethiopian army set up new bases in Somalia and deployed fresh troops. This came after al Shabaab successfully took control of many central Somali towns.<sup>333</sup>

**November 27, 2008:**

Ethiopia announced that its troops would leave Somalia by the end of the year.<sup>334</sup>

**November 14, 2008:**

Somali President Abdullahi Yusuf admitted that the interim government had collapsed and that Islamists controlled the country. "Today, there is no government in the country," he declared.<sup>335</sup>

**October 29, 2008:**

Coordinated suicide bombings hit Somaliland and Puntland. In Hargeisa, three suicide bombers exploded their vehicles—one in the United Nations Development Program compound, another at the Somaliland presidential palace, and the last at the Ethiopian Consulate, killing at least twenty-two people and wounding over thirty others. Two other suicide bombers struck intelligence facilities in Boosaaso, Puntland, killing one security official and wounding others.<sup>336</sup>

**September 22, 2008:**

Heavy fighting broke out in Mogadishu after Islamists attacked the main airport, the presi-

dential palace, and the African Union base. The fighting continued for a week and left over one hundred people dead.<sup>337</sup>

**August 20, 2008:**

Al Shabaab began to battle for control over the strategic port-city of Kismayo. By August 21, al Shabaab was in control of 80% of the city, and it took full control on August 22. A UN official estimated that one hundred had been killed during the battle, and up to 25,000 displaced by the fighting.<sup>338</sup>

**August 18, 2008:**

The TFG signed a peace deal with some key opposition figures in Djibouti. The Djibouti Agreement called for UN peacekeepers to replace Ethiopian troops and to take over the duties of the African Union Mission in Somalia. Disagreements over the treaty divided the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia and al Shabaab rejected the deal.<sup>339</sup>

**August 15, 2008:**

A roadside bomb hit an Ethiopian convoy, prompting soldiers to open fire on two minibuses carrying civilians. Over sixty-five people were killed in the incident.<sup>340</sup>

**August 3, 2008:**

A large bomb hidden in a pile of garbage killed over twenty people, primarily women who were cleaning Mogadishu's streets under the UN's work-for-food program.<sup>341</sup>

**August 1, 2008:**

A roadside bomb hidden in a pile of garbage killed a Ugandan peacekeeper near the Ugandan base at the international airport. The soldier was performing a routine check for explosives.<sup>342</sup>

**July 18, 2008:**

The ICU recognized the Djibouti Peace Accord and announced that it would await the agreement's implementation.<sup>343</sup>

**July 6, 2008:**

The head of the UN Development Program, Osman Ali Ahmed, was assassinated as he left evening prayers. Gunmen opened fire on the mosque and wounded Ahmed's son and a second man. The spokesman for al Shabaab, Mukhtar Robow Ali, denied that the group was behind Ahmed's death.<sup>344</sup>

**July 5, 2008:**

A remote-controlled land mine killed Hassan Elmi Abdtidoon, the Deputy District Commissioner of Mogadishu's Yaqshid district, and the occupants of his car.<sup>345</sup>

**July 1, 2008:**

Anti-government fighters ambushed an Ethiopian convoy en route to Mataban from Guguriel. At least twenty-six people died in the fighting. Reportedly, militants destroyed three vehicles and killed soldiers on two trucks.<sup>346</sup>

**June 22, 2008:**

In Beledweyne, gunmen shot and kill Mohamed Hassan Kulmiye, the head of a local NGO called the Center for Research and Dialogue. The next day, Hassan Mohamed Ali, head of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, was abducted from his home in Mogadishu.<sup>347</sup>

**June 9, 2008:**

The TFG signed a peace deal with the moderate faction of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia in Djibouti. It called for a three-month ceasefire and the replacement of Ethiopian troops with UN peacekeepers. The UN-brokered deal was rejected by Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweis, an Islamist hardliner.<sup>348</sup>

**May 5, 2008:**

Food riots broke out in Mogadishu when traders refused to accept old 1,000-shilling notes, favoring the new Somali notes instead. The riots continued for a second day as tens of thousands of

people demonstrated throughout the streets of Mogadishu. Troops fired into the crowd, killing at least two.<sup>349</sup>

**May 1, 2008:**

Aaden Haashi 'Ayro, the leader of al Shabaab, was killed in a U.S. airstrike in Dhusamareb. Witnesses report that 'Ayro's brother and other high-ranking al Shabaab officials were killed in the strike as well. Al Shabaab responded by issuing a threat on its website: "You have left us as martyrs and we vow to avenge your deaths with God's help."<sup>350</sup>

**April 8, 2008:**

Suicide bomber Abdul Aziz Bashar Abdullah detonated his vehicle at the gates of the African Union complex housing Burundi peacekeepers. At least one peacekeeper was killed and seven other people, two of whom were peacekeepers, injured. Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack in a communiqué issued the same day.<sup>351</sup>

**March 7, 2008:**

Islamist militants seized the strategic town of Beledweyne, situated along a critical road linking Somalia and Ethiopia. Earlier, Islamists had taken Hudur.<sup>352</sup>

**March 3, 2008:**

U.S. naval forces carried out a strike on a residence in the southern border town of Dhobley. Residents report that four people were killed and twenty injured, including four children. Reportedly, at least two Tomahawk cruise missiles were fired from a submarine. It is speculated that the target was Hassan Turki, an al Qaeda-affiliated Islamist, who was reported to be in the area.<sup>353</sup>

**February 20, 2008:**

The UN Security Council extended the mandate for the African Union Mission in Somalia another six months. The AMISOM troops consisted of

two battalions of Ugandans, about 1,600 troops, and an advance party of 192 Burundians.<sup>354</sup>

**February 16, 2008:**

President Abdullahi Yusuf escaped a mortar attack launched by Islamist insurgents on his residence following the president's return from a health-related trip. The roads connecting the airport to the presidential palace were closed down by Somali and Ethiopian troops.<sup>355</sup>

**February 6, 2008:**

A grenade attack in Boosaaso, Puntland, killed twenty-one people and injured one hundred, according to UN officials. The two blasts targeted a building that primarily housed Ethiopian migrants, which connected it to the ongoing Somali-Ethiopian conflict. No one claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>356</sup>

**January 21, 2008:**

The final 210 Burundian soldiers arrived in Mogadishu to bring the total number of Burundian soldiers in Somalia to 850. A second battalion was preparing to deploy. Troop deployment had been delayed by lack of funding; this effort was supported by the American Embassy in Burundi.<sup>357</sup>

**December 23, 2007:**

The first contingent of 100 Burundian soldiers arrived in Mogadishu. Their arrival had been repeatedly delayed since July 2007, when they were originally to be deployed. The rest of Burundi's first battalion would deploy over the coming weeks to support the Ugandan troops already present under the AU mission.<sup>358</sup>

**November 24, 2007:**

Parliament swore in as prime minister Nur "Adde" Hassan Hussein, three weeks after Ali Mohamed Gedi resigned from the position. Gedi faced pressure to resign over the lack of progress in building the government.<sup>359</sup>

**November 13, 2007:**

The TFG shut down two private Mogadishu radio stations, Simba and Banadir Radio. Shabelle Radio, one of the capital's most popular stations, was closed the day before.<sup>360</sup>

**November 9, 2007:**

Fifty people died in 24 hours of fighting in Mogadishu, the heaviest since April 2007, when at least 1,670 people were killed in the capital. Ethiopian troops enter the capital in increasing numbers.<sup>361</sup>

**October 10, 2007:**

A suicide bomber targeted an Ethiopian army reserve center in Baidoa during a meeting attended by President Abdullahi Yusuf and Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi. Two soldiers died and three were injured in the blast, according to witnesses. A communiqué released by al Shabaab identified the perpetrator as Muhammad Hussein Muhammad, also known as Abu Ayyub, and claimed that hundreds were either killed or injured by the blast. Al Shabaab militants also assassinated the Brigadier General of Intelligence in the counterterrorism division, Muhammad Mahmoud Almi, also known as Aynshi, and two of his associates. Militants also killed the Deputy Chief of Intelligence of Kismayo, Omar Siad al Jas, in al Bakara Market.<sup>362</sup>

**June 4, 2007:**

Ethiopian soldiers reported that they killed a would-be suicide bomber as he drove his vehicle towards their command headquarters. Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack on the Ethiopian military compound in southern Mogadishu. In addition, al Shabaab assassinated the Chief of the area of Aeil Bour.<sup>363</sup>

**June 3, 2007:**

A suicide car bomber detonated his vehicle near the residence of Somali Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi in Mogadishu, killing seven

people, including five soldiers guarding the residence. A communiqué released by al Shabaab names Abdul Aziz Muhammad Samatar as the mujahid who executed the suicide attack on Gedi.<sup>364</sup>

**April 26, 2007:**

Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi claimed victory over Islamists in Mogadishu, saying that TFG forces were conducting clearance operations. The next day, a hotel in Mogadishu used by the government was bombed.<sup>365</sup>

**April 24, 2007:**

Othman Odayo al Kini, a suicide car bomber, targeted Ethiopian forces in Afgoi, a city 30 km west of Mogadishu, according to a communiqué released by al Shabaab. Al Shabaab claimed the attack injured or killed over 270 soldiers; this figure cannot be verified through other media sources.<sup>366</sup>

**April 20, 2007:**

Witnesses reported that a 4x4 truck drove through the gates of an Ethiopian base in Mogadishu and then exploded, setting off secondary explosions from nearby munitions. Al Shabaab issued a communiqué claiming responsibility for the suicide attack, which allegedly involved chemical substances. According to the communiqué, Abdul Aziz Dawoud Abdul Qadr, the suicide bomber, killed over four hundred soldiers; this figure cannot be verified through other media sources.<sup>367</sup>

**April 7, 2007:**

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Jendayi Frazer, landed in Baidoa to press for a lasting truce. Frazer met with the president and prime minister on the sixth day of a ceasefire, before the April 16<sup>th</sup> national reconciliation conference.<sup>368</sup>

**March 26, 2007:**

Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the suicide attack executed by Adam Salam Adam,

who detonated a car bomb near the barracks of Ethiopian soldiers. According to the March 28 communiqué, this was the first suicide attack in Mogadishu. Al Shabaab reports that seventy-two soldiers died in the attack and that hundreds more were injured. Initial press releases reported that a taxi driver was killed by Ethiopian gunfire following the attack, but the reports did not give additional information regarding Ethiopian casualties.<sup>369</sup>

**March 23, 2007:**

A cargo plane with eleven people on board crashed over Mogadishu. Reportedly, it was struck by a missile shortly after takeoff and crashed in the northern suburbs. Mogadishu had seen elevated levels of violence over the previous week, which ended with a truce between Ethiopian troops and Hawiye clan elders.<sup>370</sup>

**March 21, 2007:**

Following heavy fighting in Mogadishu, crowds mutilated the bodies of government soldiers while chanting, "We will burn you alive!" The scenes were eerily similar to those from 1993's "Black Hawk Down" battle.<sup>371</sup>

**March 6, 2007:**

Officials report that the first of Uganda's 1,700-strong force arrived in Mogadishu. Islamist shelled the airport where the soldiers had landed.<sup>372</sup>

**March 1, 2007:**

Reportedly, thirty to thirty-five Ugandan officers landed in Baidoa as an advance guard for the 1,700 Ugandan soldiers to be deployed in the coming week. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni addressed troops awaiting deployment saying that they will be in Somalia to empower the government.<sup>373</sup>

**February 22, 2007:**

Ethiopia denied that the U.S. military used it as a base to stage attacks on al Qaeda leaders in

Somalia. Reportedly, members of Task Force 88, a secret American Special Operations unit, were deployed to Ethiopia and Kenya.<sup>374</sup>

**February 20, 2007:**

The UN Security Council voted unanimously to authorize an African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia. It called for AU troops to take “all necessary measures” to provide government, infrastructure, and humanitarian security and training for Somali security forces.<sup>375</sup>

**February 6, 2007:**

Representatives from the TFG and AU signed a Status of Mission Agreement.<sup>376</sup>

**February 1, 2007:**

Burundi committed up to 1,000 troops to join the African Union peacekeeping force in Somalia. Nine battalions have thus far been proposed, to total 7,600 troops. In addition to the Burundian forces, the Ugandan Parliament voted to deploy 1,500 troops. Nigeria and Ghana have both offered to send troops, and Malawi, Benin, Tanzania, Rwanda, and South Africa are considering it.<sup>377</sup>

**January 24, 2007:**

The U.S. executed an airstrike in Somalia, targeting Sheikh Ahmed Madobe of the ICU. He survived the attack.<sup>378</sup>

**January 19, 2007:**

The African Union Peace and Security Council authorized the deployment of AMISOM to replace Ethiopian troops.<sup>379</sup>

**January 12, 2007:**

Ras Kamboni, the last stronghold of the ICU, fell after several days of fighting. Government troops and Ethiopian forces had coordinated efforts to take the area.<sup>380</sup>

**January 7, 2007:**

A U.S. Air Force AC-130 gunship attacked suspected senior al Qaeda leadership positions in southern Somalia. U.S. ships moved into the waters off Somalia to reinforce maritime security operations in Somalia. Residents of the area reported that dozens of civilians had been killed in the strike, setting off a wave of anti-American anger in Mogadishu.<sup>381</sup>

**January 1, 2007:**

The ICU fled the port city of Kismayo, one of its final strongholds in Somalia, as government and Ethiopian troops advanced to the city. It took the combined forces only one week to capture all of the major cities in Somalia and uproot the ICU. Somali Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi offered amnesty to all Islamist fighters who turned in their weapons; however he said there would be no amnesty for the ICU leadership.<sup>382</sup>

**December 28, 2006:**

TFG forces backed by Ethiopian troops recaptured Mogadishu as Islamist fighters fled to the south. Mogadishu residents cheered the UN-backed TFG, but demanded that Ethiopians leave the country. Ethiopian troops remained outside the capital.<sup>383</sup>

**December 24, 2006:**

Ethiopia confirmed that it had troops fighting the ICU in Somalia. The Ethiopian Information Minister said that Ethiopian forces had taken “self-defensive measures” in the country. The UN estimated that at least 8,000 Ethiopian troops were in the country in support of the TFG and about 2,000 Eritrean troops were in the country in support of the ICU.<sup>384</sup>

**December 8, 2006:**

TFG forces, supported by Ethiopian troops, attacked Islamist positions in Dinsoor, about 110 km southwest of Baidoa. This is the first recorded attack by Ethiopian troops on ICU forces.<sup>385</sup>

**December 6, 2006:**

The UN Security Council passed a resolution, co-sponsored by the U.S. and the Council's African members, partially lifting the 1992 arms embargo on Somalia and authorizing IGAD and African Union member states to establish a protection and training mission in Somalia. The resolution banned neighboring countries from sending soldiers, prohibiting Kenya, Djibouti, and Ethiopia from participating. Uganda was the only country to have volunteered troops to date.<sup>386</sup>

**November 30, 2006:**

Witnesses reported that three cars loaded with explosives drove through a checkpoint outside Baidoa and blew up when police officers approached to search them. A veiled woman reportedly drove one of the cars. At least two police officers died in the blast, which killed over eight people [Note: Al Shabaab was not operating as an autonomous entity at this point].<sup>387</sup>

**November 19, 2006:**

Islamist fighters attacked an Ethiopian military convoy near the southern town of Berdaale. An Islamist source reported that the convoy hit a landmine and the ensuing firefight killed six Ethiopians. This is the first reported skirmish between the two warring sides in Somalia.<sup>389</sup>

**October 25, 2006:**

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi declared that his country is "technically" at war with the Somali ICU. PM Zenawi noted that a few hundred armed military trainers were in Somalia to

support the TFG in Baidoa. Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed responded by saying that the ICU had only declared jihad on Ethiopia in order to force Ethiopian troops out of Somalia.<sup>390</sup>

**October 9, 2006:**

The ICU declared jihad on Ethiopia following Ethiopia's seizure of Buur Hakaba, a city about 30 km from the government's base in Baidoa. Islamists later regained control over the city, but, as Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, the former chairman of the ICU said, "Ethiopia's capture of the city of Burr Hakaba constitutes a declaration of war on Somalia . . . we declare jihad against the state of Ethiopia whose forces have invaded Somali territories."<sup>390</sup>

**September 18, 2006:**

A suicide bomber drove his car into the convoy of President Abdullahi Yusuf as he was headed to address the Somali Parliament in Baidoa. Yusuf was rushed to safety and a gunfight ensued. At least eleven people, including Yusuf's brother, died in the attack. This is the first known suicide bombing in Somalia [Note: Al Shabaab was not operating as an autonomous entity at this point].<sup>391</sup>

**July 26, 2006:**

UN Envoy François Fall confirmed that Ethiopian troops were in Somalia, furthering fears of a proxy war between Ethiopia supporting the TFG and Eritrea supporting the ICU. Reuters reported that Ethiopia had around 5,000 troops in Somalia and along its border.<sup>392</sup>



## Appendix B:

### Major Suicide Attacks and Assassinations Claimed by or Attributed to al Shabaab

#### January 25, 2010:

An explosion at the main African Union base in Mogadishu killed as many as seven people and injured eleven others. The blast occurred in the outpatient clinic of the base's hospital, Halane Clinic, and witnesses report that it was executed by a suicide bomber. Al Shabaab has claimed responsibility for the attack [Note: This has not been independently confirmed to be a suicide attack].<sup>393</sup>

#### December 3, 2009:

A suicide bomber dressed in women's clothing detonated a bomb at the Banadir University graduation ceremony at the Shamo Hotel in Mogadishu. At least twenty-two people were killed in the blast, including Somali ministers and journalists. The Minister of Health, Qamar Aden Ali; the Minister of Education, Ahmed Abdulahi Waayeel; and the Minister of Higher Education, Ibrahim Hassan Addow, died in the blast. The Minister of Sports, Suleyman Olad Roble, died later from his injuries. The attack is widely attributed to al Shabaab despite the group's denial of responsibility.<sup>394</sup>

#### September 17, 2009:

Two suicide bombers detonated their vehicles marked with the UN logo near the African Union base where officials from the Transitional Federal Government were meeting with AU representatives. In a communiqué, al Shabaab declared that the dual suicide attacks on the AMISOM headquarters and the NATO and UN headquarters were executed to avenge the death

of al Qaeda in East Africa leader Saleh Ali Nabhan on September 14.<sup>395</sup>

#### September 7, 2009:

Al Shabaab claimed that its assassination brigade was responsible for the death of Ali Ahmad Iro, a TFG army officer in the Sana district of Mogadishu. According to the communiqué, Iro recruited troops and sent them to Uganda to receive training.<sup>396</sup>

#### September 4, 2009:

The assassination brigade of al Shabaab killed Shoaib Taruli, a TFG army officer in the Medina district of Mogadishu. Taruli was reportedly in charge of training TFG security forces in the Iskul Pulusio camp, which trains police.<sup>397</sup>

#### June 18, 2009:

A suicide bomber hit the Medina Hotel in Beledweyne, killing at least twenty-five people. Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the suicide attack that killed, among others, Somali Security Minister Omar Hashi Aden, former Somali Ambassador to Ethiopia Abdul Karim Farah Laqanyo, and at least two Ethiopian officials.<sup>398</sup>

#### May 24, 2009:

A man drove a Toyota truck into the TFG military base in the Hamar Jajab district in central Mogadishu, killing six soldiers and at least one civilian. According to a communiqué released by al Shabaab, Abdul Qadr Hassan Muhammad, an al Shabaab fighter, executed the suicide bombing on the military base.<sup>399</sup>

**March 11, 2009:**

The explosives brigade of al Shabaab targeted the car of Ubeyd Ali Fidow, a TFG senior security official, with an explosive device imbedded in the road. The blast killed Fidow and a number of his guards. Fidow had been responsible for the security of former Prime Ministers Ali Muhammad Gedi and Nur Adde.<sup>400</sup>

**February 22, 2009:**

Two explosions killed eleven soldiers and injured fifteen more in the compound of Somalia's old National University, a base for AU peacekeepers from Burundi, according to an AU statement. Mukhtar Robow Ali, the spokesman for al Shabaab, announced the group's responsibility for the suicide bombings over Mogadishu radio stations, identifying the bombers as Ahmed Sheikhdon Sidow Wehliye and Mursal Abdinur Mohamed Ali. Peacekeepers reported that the base had been under fire since February 17.<sup>401</sup>

**January 24, 2009:**

A car drove at a checkpoint in Mogadishu manned by African Union troops at a high speed and was fired on by soldiers, causing it to crash into a local bus. The driver reportedly detonated a bomb. The blast killed fourteen people and wounded at least fourteen others. Additional civilians were killed in the ensuing firefight between government and AU soldiers [Note: No group has claimed responsibility for this incident, and no one was named as a suspect in the aftermath].<sup>402</sup>

**October 29, 2008:**

Five coordinated suicide bombings hit four targets in Somaliland and Puntland. Three suicide bombers exploded their vehicles in Hargeisa—one in the United Nations Development Program compound, another at the Somaliland presidential palace, and the last at the Ethiopian Consulate, killing at least twenty-two people and wounding over thirty others. Two other suicide bombers struck intelligence facilities in Boosaaso,

Puntland, killing one security official and wounding others. The attacks have been attributed to al Shabaab.<sup>403</sup>

**October 4, 2008:**

Al Shabaab's security brigade assassinated the Chief of Intelligence in Baidoa, Ibrahim Hassan.<sup>404</sup>

**September 12, 2008:**

Al Shabaab assassinated Muhammad Haj Abdul Qadir, the chief judge of the special court in Baidoa.<sup>405</sup>

**August 10, 2008:**

A battalion led by Abu Mansour al Amriki arrested the Chief of Intelligence of Bakool province, Abdullah Jahourier, in the city of Hadar. Jahourier was then tried in a *shari'a* court and sentenced to death.<sup>406</sup>

**August 9, 2008:**

Al Shabaab used a remotely detonated landmine to assassinate the Chief of Police, Ahmed Ali Adwiyo, also known as Kanis, in Almada in northern Mogadishu. Kanis recently trained in Ethiopia.<sup>407</sup>

**April 8, 2008:**

Suicide bomber Abdul Aziz Bashar Abdullah detonated his vehicle at the gates of the African Union complex housing Burundi peacekeepers. At least one peacekeeper was killed and seven other people, two of whom were peacekeepers, injured. Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack in a communiqué issued the same day.<sup>408</sup>

**February 5, 2008:**

Sheikh Ibrahim Kunle, a judge in Beledweyne, was assassinated by al Shabaab militants.<sup>409</sup>

**December 12, 2007:**

Al Shabaab claimed to have assassinated an intelligence officer in Baidoa.<sup>410</sup>

**December 2, 2007:**

Abdullah Bouki, the Chief of Huwatako section of Medina, was assassinated in al Bakara Market by al Shabaab militants. Two TFG intelligence agents were also killed.<sup>411</sup>

**October 19, 2007:**

Al Shabaab militants assassinated the Chief of the Telih district in Hathin.<sup>412</sup>

**October 17, 2007:**

Al Shabaab assassinated Abdul Meyni, the governor of the Yaqshid district in Mogadishu. According to a communiqué released by the group, he is the third governor of that district to be assassinated and no one is willing to accept the position. Al Shabaab also killed Abdul Fartagh in Hiraan region, who reportedly was the “deputy of the biggest spy” in Hiraan and who was trailed for months by the security brigade.<sup>413</sup>

**October 10, 2007:**

A suicide bomber targeted an Ethiopian army reserve center in Baidoa during a meeting attended by President Abdullahi Yusuf and Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi. Two soldiers died and three were injured in the blast, according to witnesses. A communiqué released by al Shabaab identifies the man as Muhammad Hussein Muhammad, also known as Abu Ayyub, and claims that hundreds were either killed or injured by the blast. Al Shabaab militants also assassinated the Brigadier General in charge of Intelligence in the counterterrorism division, Muhammad Mahmoud A'Imi, also known as Aynshi, and two of his associates. Militants also killed the Deputy Chief of Intelligence of Kismayo, Omar Siad al Jas, in al Bakara Market.<sup>414</sup>

**September 9, 2007:**

Al Shabaab assassinated district commissioner Sudi Ganoole of Sukh Bacad in the Yaqshid district of Mogadishu. Militants also killed five intelligence officers separately in downtown Mogadishu.<sup>416</sup>

**September 5, 2007:**

Al Shabaab assassinated Shakir Shafei, an officer in the intelligence department, in the Medina district of Mogadishu.<sup>416</sup>

**July 26, 2007:**

Al Shabaab assassinated a deputy, Hassan Irro, in the Yaqshid district of Mogadishu.<sup>417</sup>

**July 16, 2007:**

Al Shabaab assassinated the Deputy Chairman of the governorate of Afgoi, Ahmed Hassan.<sup>418</sup>

**July 9, 2007:**

Al Shabaab assassinated the Deputy Police Commissioner of the Yaqshid district in Mogadishu, Nur Elmi Fareh. According to a communiqué, this assassination was part of a series of operations to assassinate the governors of Mogadishu.<sup>419</sup>

**June 14, 2007:**

Al Shabaab assassinated the commissioner of the Shibis district in Mogadishu, Abu Bakr Bandas.<sup>420</sup>

**June 4, 2007:**

Ethiopian soldiers reported that they killed a would-be suicide bomber as he drove his vehicle towards their command headquarters. Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack on the Ethiopian military compound in southern Mogadishu. In addition, al Shabaab assassinated the Chief of the area of Aeil Bour.<sup>421</sup>

**June 3, 2007:**

A suicide car bomber detonated his vehicle near the residence of Somali Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi in Mogadishu, killing seven people, including five soldiers guarding the residence. A communiqué released by al Shabaab named Abdul Aziz Muhammad Samatar as the mujahid who executed the suicide attack on Gedi.<sup>422</sup>

**June 2, 2007:**

Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the assassi-

nations of Hassan Feri, the Chief of Hol Wathag governorate, the Chief of Intelligence in the area of Casa Mayo in southern Somalia, the Chief of Huriwa governorate, the Chief of the Operations Department of Counterterrorism, the Chief of Security of Homar Wane governorate, and the court chief of Beledweyne.<sup>423</sup>

**May 31, 2007:**

Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the assassination of the Chief of Intelligence in Hamarweyne governorate, Ahmed Mohamed Odaysge, and two members of the intelligence office.<sup>424</sup>

**May 30, 2007:**

Al Shabaab assassinated Sheikh Mohamed Muse Duale, the chief judge in Beledweyne. In addition, the group accused him of hating Muslims and collaborating with a local warlord, Yusef Tibbi Jayed.<sup>425</sup>

**May 13, 2007:**

Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the assassination of Abdulahi Sheikhow, the commissioner of the Huriwa neighborhood in Mogadishu. In addition, al Shabaab claimed to have killed four intelligence officers in separate attacks.<sup>426</sup>

**April 24, 2007:**

Othman Otayo al Kini, a suicide car bomber, attacked Ethiopian forces in Afgoi, a city 30 km west of Mogadishu, according to a communiqué released by al Shabaab. Al Shabaab claimed the attack injured or killed over 270 soldiers; this figure cannot be verified through other media sources.<sup>427</sup>

**April 20, 2007:**

Witnesses reported that a 4x4 truck drove through the gates of an Ethiopian base in Mogadishu and then exploded, setting off secondary explosions from nearby munitions. Al Shabaab

issued a communiqué claiming responsibility for the suicide attack, which allegedly involved chemical substances. According to the communiqué, Abdul Aziz Dawoud Abdul Qadr, the suicide bomber, killed over four hundred soldiers; this figure cannot be verified through other media sources.<sup>428</sup>

**March 26, 2007:**

Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the suicide attack executed by Adam Salam Adam, who detonated a car bomb near the barracks of Ethiopian soldiers. According to the March 28 communiqué, this was the first suicide attack in Mogadishu. Al Shabaab reports that seventy-two soldiers died in the attack and that hundreds more were injured. Initial press releases reported that a taxi driver was killed by Ethiopian gunfire following the attack, but did not give additional information regarding Ethiopian casualties.<sup>429</sup>

**November 30, 2006:**

Witnesses reported that three cars loaded with explosives drove through a checkpoint outside Baidoa and blew up when police officers approached to search them. A veiled woman reportedly drove one of the cars. At least two police officers died in the blast, which killed more than eight people [Note: Al Shabaab was not operating as an autonomous entity at this point].<sup>430</sup>

**September 18, 2006:**

A suicide bomber drove his car into the convoy of President Abdullahi Yusuf as he was headed to address the Somali Parliament in Baidoa. Yusuf was rushed to safety and a gunfight ensued. At least eleven people, including Yusuf's brother, died in the attack. This is the first known suicide bombing in Somalia [Note: Al Shabaab was not operating as an autonomous entity at this point].<sup>431</sup>

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