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JSOU Report 14-1 Al-Shabaab Turbiville, Meservey, and Forest

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Countering the al-Shabaab Insurgency in Somalia: Lessons for U.S. Special Operations Forces

Graham Turbiville
Josh Meservey
James Forest

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Joint Special Operations University and the Strategic Studies Department

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Members of al-Shabaab take part in a rally in Mogadishu, Somalia's capital, accusing Israel of "desecrating" Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque and showing their support of Palestine. Photo used by permission of Newscom.

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In Memoriam: Graham H. Turbiville, Jr.
September 9, 1942 – April 24, 2012

This monograph is dedicated to Dr. Graham Turbiville, who sadly passed away on 24 April 2012. Dr. Turbiville was a Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) Associate Fellow and a plank holder in the JSOU research program. He authored the very first monograph the university published, research report 05-1, *Russian Special Forces: Issues of Loyalty, Corruption and the Fight Against Terror*, in August of 2005. From the beginning of JSOU's budding research program, Dr. Turbiville was actively involved in ground-breaking research and analysis, publishing on a broad range of issues important to the Special Operations community. A prolific author, Dr. Turbiville researched and wrote six JSOU monographs in less than five years.

In the fall of 2011, Dr. Turbiville began research for this report on the terror group al-Shabaab. He unexpectedly fell ill once he began to research and write the monograph. Despite his failing health he insisted on continuing with the project and was doing all he could do to complete it. Unfortunately, Dr. Turbiville passed away before he could see his project to completion.

JSOU will forever be indebted to the contributions Dr. Turbiville made to our university. The special operations community has lost one of its great thinkers. He was a gentleman who made a difference and helped enhance our national defense capabilities.

Foreword

Dr. James Forest and Mr. Josh Meservey build upon the work of the late Dr. Graham Turbiville in this monograph which argues that al-Shabaab's current fortunes have probably never been so low. It has been pushed from all of its major strongholds by a robust international effort, and its violent Salafism has alienated many Somalis. But it still has teeth. It continues to harass coalition forces, as well as ordinary Somalis, with improvised explosive devices, suicide bombings, and assassinations. Its tactics reflect a strategic decision made by its leadership to fight a guerrilla war, a familiar role for a group that thrived by waging an anti-Ethiopian insurgency in the mid-2000s.

The authors point out that the coalition has not responded with a coherent counterinsurgency campaign dedicated to maintaining and winning Somalis' support. All indications are that it failed to properly plan the best way to fight al-Shabaab's evolution, and it has made its task harder by committing a series of mistakes. Most grievously, Kenya has involved itself in tribal politics in Lower Juba, and appears to be picking favorites in a country infamous for its violent and oftentimes inscrutable clan dynamics.

Lasting peace for a unified Somalia hinges on the establishment of a highly-decentralized but viable and effective indigenous government. But some members of the coalition appear intent on pursuing their own national interests instead. Such a disunified approach badly damages the new government's legitimacy, and makes it impossible to implement a coherent counterinsurgency strategy. And the government, for its part, has made little progress in breaking from the corruption and ineffectiveness that so hobbled its predecessors. It is a golden chance for al-Shabaab to pick itself up off the mat.

Mr. Meservey, Dr. Turbiville, and Dr. Forest have determined that al-Shabaab is aided in its quest by some fundamental realities of Somali culture and history. Ethiopia, a part of the anti-Shabaab coalition, is Somalia's ancient enemy, and Kenya has its own fraught relationship with the country. Five of the six national armies currently inside Somalia hail from Christian countries, and Somalia is overwhelmingly Muslim. Many of the Somali clans are traditionally warrior tribes with a history of resisting foreign intervention,

and little history of accepting government rule. It is a country awash in weapons.

If a broad-based insurgency begins to boil, the coalition will not be able to contain it. Al-Shabaab or a splinter group will be well positioned to take power, buttressed by a growing Salafist ideology that can claim to be the only ideology left to try. Warlords backed by militias could scramble for the spoils, sending the country spiraling back into the violent cycle from which it is trying to pull itself now.

In the meantime, southern Somalia has seen some of the worst and most prolonged fighting on earth. Somalis have no doubt been overwhelmed by the carnage for many years now, and are ready to give anyone who can bring them peace a chance. They are similarly tired of the depredations of al-Shabaab and the affronts they suffered at the group's hands. So far they are willing to give the coalition a chance, despite all of its flaws, but it is not an open-ended forbearance. The coalition must prove its worth in one of the most complex and divided countries on earth. It is a wickedly difficult task, and the coalition needs to do much better than it has if it is going to succeed.

Kenneth H. Poole, Ed.D.
Director, JSOU Strategic Studies Department

About the Authors

Josh Meservey is currently the assistant director of the Atlantic Council's Africa Center. Mr. Meservey lived and worked in East and Southern Africa for more than five years. As a Peace Corps Volunteer in Zambia he designed, implemented, and monitored development projects in the rural north of the country, and later worked on an electronic medical records project run by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention out of Lusaka. He then joined Church World Service (CWS) and traveled throughout sub-Saharan Africa interviewing refugees applying for resettlement to the United States. He ended his time at CWS as the Field Team Manager responsible for managing approximately 90 Kenyan and American staff who interviewed more than 15,000 refugees during his tenure.

Meservey received a master's degree in Law and Diplomacy from the Fletcher School at Tufts University where he studied international security and global political economy with a focus on counterinsurgency, illicit networks, and the security/development nexus. He spent a summer at the U.S. Army Special Operations Command where he helped write an Army concept known as the 7th Warfighting Function, and his written work has appeared in the *Perspectives on Terrorism* journal and the *Fletcher Forum of World Affairs Online.*

James J.F. Forest, Ph.D. is a professor and director of the Security Studies program at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, where he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and security studies. He is also a Senior Fellow with the Joint Special Operations University Strategic Studies Department.

Dr. Forest is the former Director of Terrorism Studies at the United States Military Academy. During his

tenure on the faculty (2001-2010) he taught courses in terrorism, counterterrorism, information warfare, international relations, comparative politics, and sub-Saharan Africa. He also directed a series of research initiatives and education programs for the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, covering topics such as terrorist recruitment, training, and organizational knowledge transfer. Dr. Forest was selected by the Center for American Progress and Foreign Policy as one of "America's most esteemed terrorism and national security experts" and participated in their annual Terrorism Index studies (2006-2010). He has been interviewed by many newspaper, radio, and television journalists, and is regularly invited to give speeches and lectures in the U.S. and other countries. He has published 14 books and dozens of articles in journals such as *Terrorism and Political Violence, Contemporary Security Policy, Crime and Delinquency, Perspectives on Terrorism*, the *Cambridge Review of International Affairs,* the *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, the *Journal of Political Science Education*, and *Democracy and Security*. He has also served as an advisor to the Future of War panel for the Defense Science Board, and has testified before committees of the U.S. Senate.

His recent books include: *Intersections of Crime and Terrorism* (Routledge, 2013); *Homeland Security and Terrorism* (McGraw-Hill, 2013, with Russell Howard and Joanne Moore); *Weapons of Mass Destruction and Terrorism, 2nd edition* (McGraw-Hill, 2011, with Russell Howard); *Influence Warfare: How Terrorists and Governments Fight to Shape Perceptions in a War of Ideas* (Praeger, 2009); *Handbook of Defence Politics: International and Comparative Perspectives* (Routledge, 2008, with Isaiah Wilson); *Countering Terrorism and Insurgency in the 21st Century* (3 volumes: Praeger, 2007); *Teaching Terror: Strategic and Tactical Learning in the Terrorist World* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); *Homeland Security: Protecting America's Targets* (3 volumes: Praeger, 2006); *The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training and Root Causes* (3 volumes: Praeger, 2005); *Confronting the Terrorism of Boko Haram in Nigeria* (JSOU Press, 2012).

Dr. Forest received his graduate degrees from Stanford University and Boston College, and undergraduate degrees from Georgetown University and De Anza College.

Dr. Graham Turbiville was an Associate Fellow with the JSOU Strategic Studies Department. At JSOU, his research centered on a range of regional and transnational threats to include insurgency, terrorism, the development of foreign Special Operations Forces (SOF), and foreign perspectives of U.S. and allied capabilities and vulnerabilities. Dr. Turbiville also served as a senior consultant and researcher for a Department of Defense/intelligence community program dealing with geographic and cultural intelligence in several areas of the world and which produces history-based assessments of tribal/clan societies in contemporary war and conflict.

He received his B.A. in Foreign Languages from Southern Illinois University, M.A. in Russian Studies from George Washington University, and Ph.D. in History from the University of Montana. Dr. Turbiville served 30 years in intelligence community analytical and leadership positions at the Defense Intelligence Agency and the Department of the Army. These positions included director/chief of long-range and current intelligence offices and directorates, director of a Joint Reserve Intelligence Center, and other assignments dealing with foreign combined arms, security, and SOF.

Dr. Turbiville authored many monographs and studies for military, law enforcement, and intelligence venues. His articles appeared in several publications, including *Special Warfare, Military Review, Marine Corps Gazette, Infantry, Army, International Defense Review, The Military Engineer, ALOG: Army Logistician, Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement, Transnational Organized Crime, Crime and Justice International, Strategic Review, RUSI: Journal of the Royal United Service Institute, Global Crime, Journal of Soviet Military Studies*, and *National Guard*. Edited works include *Global Dimensions of High Intensity Crime and Low Intensity Conflict* and the three-volume National Defense University Press series, *The Voroshilov Lectures*, a collection of authoritative, classified Soviet General Staff Academy writings on strategy, operational art and tactics, acquired clandestinely in the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics by a foreign officer.

Dr. Turbiville's JSOU Press monographs are *Russian Special Forces* (August 2005); *Logistic Support and Insurgency* (October 2005); *Hunting Leadership Targets in COIN and Counterterrorist Operations* (June 2007); *Private Security Infrastructure Abroad* (November 2007); *Guerrilla Counterintelligence* (January 2009); *U.S. Military Engagement with Mexico: Uneasy Past and Challenging Future* (March 2010).

Executive Summary

It is commonly understood that a legitimate indigenous government is the *sine qua non* for any successful counterinsurgency campaign. This monograph is designed to serve as a tactical document for members of the special operations community outlining the way in which the international community and AMISOM can best support the Somali Federal Government now that the anti-Shabaab coalition's respective governments have made the decision to do so. It does not attempt to establish whether the policy decision to support the government is correct, as that is a question influenced by a complex set of factors beyond the scope of this document. It assumes that policymakers have calculated that the government can achieve legitimacy, and so operates under the assumption that the policy decision is correct. It further acknowledges that Somalia faces challenges to peace and stability beyond al-Shabaab—the focus of this monograph is on how to wage a counterinsurgency campaign against the group, but there are other thorny challenges beyond the insurgency that also must be addressed before the country will become stable.

1. A Brief History of Somalia and al-Shabaab

Somalia is markedly different from other sub-Saharan African countries. Given Somalia's proximity to the Middle East, its long coast that invites trade and exploration, and its people's dedication to Islam, Somalis identify far more strongly with Arabs than with their African neighbors. In fact, Somalis' affinity is so strong for Arab culture and history that many claim to be able to trace their ancestors back to the Prophet's companions—or, less ambitiously, to itinerant Sheikhs or saints who traveled to Somalia and married local women. While most Somalis likely believe, correctly, that such an esteemed lineage is apocryphal, it is still an important founding myth for the Somali people and an indicator of their wish to be associated with Arab culture.[1]

Arab traders in the 9th century founded many of the major coastal towns of modern-day Somalia, such as Mogadishu, Marka, and Brava, as trading cities, dealing in gold, leather, ivory, and slaves.[2] Given their antiquity, information on the political arrangements of these cities is sparse, but what little is known speaks of relatively peaceful Islamic centers[3] dedicated to trade and ruled by diverse councils of elders. Baraawe was led by a "confederation of elders" from 12 different lineages that included elders of Persian-Arab descent as well as Somali elders,[4] while Mogadishu in the 16th century was ruled by a federation boasting 39 lineages from 4 different groups.[5] In fact, there is evidence that a number of the city-states in the 13th century formed a confederation under the authority of a ruling dynasty based out of Mogadishu,[6] and that the city-states' influence, while primarily oriented towards the sea,[7] likely extended into the Somali nomadic areas, however lightly.[8]

While these city-states were impressively diverse and apparently well ruled, they were not very centralized, as evidenced by the fact that the councils did not levy taxes (a forbearance that one author credits with contributing to the peace of the cities)[9] and that they never controlled the hinterlands.[10] In fact, they bore more resemblance to the voluntary, loose federations of the Swahili coastal city-states, such as Lamu and Malindi,[11] than to what in modern times could properly be called a centralized government. Furthermore, these cities were not strictly Somali undertakings; as noted earlier,

Arabs established these towns, and the ruling councils had a strong Arab presence. And while there was significant cooperation between the Arabs and Somalis, there were also clashes between these city-states and interior Somalis, to the point that Somali harassment of their trade routes was one of the reasons for the city-states along the Benadir coast's decline. Perhaps there is no better indication of the gulf between the city-states and the majority of Somalis than the fact that the Arabs referred to the Somalis in the north as "berberi," or "barbarians," an epithet that served as the origin of the name for the current Somali town, Berbera.[12]

Somalis are largely nomadic people, and they steadily expanded the areas under their control west and south from the Horn of Africa. After 900 years of such expansion, they eventually ran into British-controlled Kenya, effectively stopping their expansion at the Tana River, which serves as the southern border of Somali habitation today.[13]

By this time, the European colonial project was in full swing, and the Italians, intent on getting their own slice of Africa, began to obtain concessions for parts of modern-day Somalia beginning in 1888; by 1925, they controlled all of southern Somalia.[14] Initially, the Italians did not show much interest in governing their new colony, but when they eventually did, they took to it with vigor. Described as "ambitious and even aggressive,"[15] Italian colonization came to include big plans for the "modernization" of the colony.[16] Beginning in 1905, a series of regulations defined the colonial administration's powers so broadly that it was characterized as "an authoritarian regime that would have been tolerated in few European countries of that time."[17] This intense administration of the colony did not diminish under the fascist Italian government that tried to stir up local support for a vision of "La Grande Somalia."[18] It was only in 1950, after having lost the colony in World War II and then denied its return by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in favor of a limited trusteeship over it,[19] that Italy appeared to finally give up on her colonizing project.

Britain established a presence in northern Somalia in the area that is today Somaliland. The British administered the area "with a light, sympathetic touch,"[20] as they viewed their colony in the Horn of Africa primarily as a supply base for their colony in Aden, considered critical for the defense of India.[21] The British initially signed a series of trade treaties with local Somali elders, culminating in "protection" treaties that many of the elders were pleased to sign as they viewed them as guarantees against infringements

by other clans. This phenomenon was so widespread that it gave rise to a proverb: "He who is weak has found the European as his protector."[22]

While the British had little desire to be heavily involved in Somalia, a famous rebellion ensured that it would have to commit extra resources and attention to the colony. Sayyid Mohammed Abdille Hassan, the "Mad Mullah," launched his anti-British insurgency in the late 1800s and sustained it for 20 years, while also managing to find the time to compose a range of blood-curdling poems.[23] The Mullah was able to attract a following from a variety of clans, and is "credited with founding the first nationalist Somali movement that explicitly sought to unite Somalis on a non-clan basis."[24] The British never did capture or kill him, despite their very best efforts that included using their air force for the first time in sub-Saharan Africa.[25] The Mullah is still known as "the Master" in modern-day Somalia.[26]

The Mullah's campaign for the first time inspired in Somalis the idea of a "Greater Somalia," a state that would encompass all the land inhabited by ethnic Somalis. Today, Somalis remain divided into five different areas ruled by different countries:[27] the Northern Frontier District in the northeastern part of modern-day Kenya, site of the *Shifta* War in the early 1960s that broke out after the newly-independent Kenyan government refused to allow the district to join Somalia;[28] the Ogaden, located in the eastern part of Ethiopia, conquered by the Ethiopians starting in 1887, who were eventually given permanent control of the area by the British in 1948; the "French Somali Coast," colonized by the French and which now comprises modern-day Djibouti after it gained independence in 1977; British Somaliland, now the autonomous enclave of Somaliland that broke away from southern Somalia on 18 May 1991; and *Somalia Italiana*, the southern part of the country colonized by the Italians and which gained independence on 1 July 1960.[29]

Figure 1. Map of Somalia. U.S. State Department map.

Somalis still make irredentist claims on the three areas outside of Somalia's borders,[30] as most prominently symbolized by the five points of the star on the Somali flag—each point

represents one of the five Somali regions mentioned above.[31] And various radical groups, including al-Shabaab, have tried to leverage Somalis' nationalism on this question into support.[32] In 2006, Hizbul Islam's leader, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, claimed that he and his fighters would "leave no stone unturned" to bring the Somali regions of Kenya and Ethiopia back under the control of Somalia,[33] while as recently as late May 2013 al-Shabaab was tweeting about the "soon-to-be-abolished colonial Kenyan-Somalia border."[34]

While the Mullah did not live to see it, both British Somaliland and *Somalia Italiana* eventually gained independence, and joined together on 1 July 1960, to form the independent nation of Somalia.[35] During its brief life, this "top-down democracy"[36] struggled to harmonize the strong political differences within Somalia that led to an eruption of political parties—by the time of its last multi-party elections in March 1969, Somalia had more political parties per capita than any other democratic country apart from Israel. The proliferation of parties did not lead, however, to any concomitant increase in the government's ability to deliver services or govern effectively—it remained unable to do either well.[37] Instead, the country was beset by an "inexperienced and inefficient bureaucracy, which became increasingly corrupt with the passage of time." Worse, in their fierce competition for electoral support, the parties made appeals along regional and clan lines, which served to exacerbate the already-existing fractures within the society.[38]

Barre and Post-Barre Chaos

The democratic government of Somalia came to an abrupt end with a coup launched on 21 October 1969. Major General Mohamed Siad Barre took control of the government,[39] inaugurating a ruinous rule that led to the terrible state of Somalia familiar to most current observers of the country. Barre's tenure was marked by violent repression and human rights abuses,[40] and set the stage for the tragedy of the last 20 years.

Given the fragmentation of the country, it is perhaps understandable that one of Barre's central goals was to create a national Somali identity; however, his motivations likely were not for the betterment of the country, but rather to aid him in undercutting any potential clan-based opposition. He outlawed any discussion of tribe, launched literacy campaigns, and established Somali as the official language. However, it was all a failure as many Somalis

believed (correctly) that Barre was favoring his clan, the Darod, and specifically three sub-clans—the Ogaden, Marehan, and Dulbahante—with plum government positions and access to the levers of power. Furthermore, some of his initiatives, such as his establishment of Somali as the official language, actually deepened a sense of tribalism, as it embittered several clans that did not speak Somali as their first language.[41]

The results of all of this were predictable. Clan-aligned rebel militias began to sprout up throughout the country in the 1980s, including the United Somali Congress (USC), which was largely Hawiye and based in south-central Somalia; the Somali National Movement (SNM), an Isaq group based in the north; the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) which was Darod, of the Ogaden sub-clan; and the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), also Darod but drawn from the Marehan sub-clan, that operated in the northeast.[42]

The fighting during the rebellion was terribly brutal and extraordinarily complex. One report on the actions of Barre's troops in the north found that they "appear[ed] to have engaged in a widespread, systematic and extremely violent assault on the unarmed civilian Issak population of northern Somalia;" the same report found that the government armed refugees to fight the SNM and attack Isaq civilians. The SNM responded by systematically targeting camps in the north, resulting in hundreds of civilian casualties.[43] By 1991:

> Somaliland was in ruins. Its capital, Hargeisa, was three-quarters destroyed. Towns and villages were sown with mines that still bring two or three victims a week to Hargeisa's rundown general hospital. Soviet-American rivalry had turned the country into a vast arms dump littered with ammunition stores and unexploded ordnance. Siad Barre had set clan against clan.[44]

Armed groups proliferated, including several that fought in support of Barre's government, while others turned on each other even in the midst of fighting their common enemy.[45] It was chaos, and Barre could not hold on.

The peace that many hoped would come with Barre's departure on 26 January 1991, proves elusive to this day. The conflict metastasized further, with clans and sub-clans turning on one another in a scramble for resources and power. Most notoriously, the Hawiye clan that had formed the bulk of the USC that captured Mogadishu from Barre splintered into its Abgal and Habar Gedir sub-clan factions, who then commenced a vicious struggle for

control of the presidency. Mohamed Farah Aideed, who would later become the U.S.'s preeminent enemy in Somalia, led the Habar Gedir faction.[46]

In April 1992, the UN established the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM) to monitor the "ceasefire" to which several of the warring factions had agreed, and to protect humanitarian convoys. UNOSOM transitioned to the Unified Task Force (UNITAF), a 24-nation intervention led by the U.S. that was designed to protect the delivery of humanitarian aid. UNITAF was largely successful as it secured "all major relief centres," so the UN then decided to transition from UNITAF to another peacekeeping operation in March 1993, called UNOSOM II.[47]

However, this situation was about to unravel in spectacular and bloody fashion. In June 1993, Aideed's forces killed more than 20 Pakistani peacekeepers, putting a very large American bull's eye on Aideed's back. In October 1993, Special Operations Forces (SOF) launched an attack on a building suspected of holding Aideed. The following battle resulted in hundreds of Somali deaths and searing images of American servicemen being dragged through the streets. The Black Hawk Down battle, also known as the First Battle of Mogadishu, resulted in the U.S. withdrawing almost all its forces by 1994, with the UN following soon after.[48]

The international community had no appetite left for intervening in Somalia after the First Battle of Mogadishu, and instead sponsored a series of peace conferences outside of the country designed to establish a Somali government. These conferences accomplished little more than to waste millions of the international community's dollars as the delegates, safe from the violence of Somalia, were happy to drag the negotiations out for as long as possible. One conference lasted for more than two years.[49]

The international community had no appetite left for intervening in Somalia after the First Battle of Mogadishu, and instead sponsored a series of peace conferences outside of the country designed to establish a Somali government.

Back in Somalia, things did not improve. Warlords continued to struggle for power and wealth, and clans began to carve out enclaves in order to protect themselves; most ominously for the West and Somalia's neighbors, radical Islamic groups began to rise to prominence, and al-Qaeda terrorists began to take shelter in the country. In response, the Central Intelligence

Agency (CIA) decided to enlist the help of some warlords in the fight against al-Qaeda elements,[50] earning the further anger of a Somali population that hated the warlords for the violence and instability they brought.[51]

The Beginnings of al-Shabaab

There are links between several of these prominent radical organizations and al-Shabaab, and it is not possible to fully understand the latter group without briefly examining its most important forebear. Al Ittihad Al Islamiya (AIAI) was formed in 1984 as a nationalist organization dedicated to overthrowing the Barre regime, then later switched its focus to "liberating" the Ogaden region from Ethiopia. It supposedly took part in the First Battle of Mogadishu, as well as attacks in Kenya on Israeli targets. By 1997, AIAI had lost most of its vigor, drained by Ethiopian retaliation for AIAI attacks in the Ogaden, from fighting with the SSDF in Puntland, and from internal squabbling.[52]

Despite its unpopular Wahhabism/Salafism,[53] AIAI managed to derive a measure of support from Somalis because it delivered certain social services, such as opening boarding schools for poor children and providing food to a population struggling to survive a famine. In a pattern that would repeat itself with other militant groups, including al-Shabaab, AIAI also secured some Somalis' tolerance or even support by imposing a measure of security in areas under its control.[54]

AIAI counted among its members several jihadis who pop up throughout the history of radical Islamic groups in Somalia. Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, who would later go on to lead Hizbul Islam, which was eventually subsumed by al-Shabaab, was a prominent member of AIAI.[55] So too was Aden Hashi Farah Ayro, who would go on to become one of the founders of al-Shabaab,[56] and Hassan al-Turki, a prominent leader within the AIAI who would later lead a faction of the Ras Kamboni Brigade that allied with al-Shabaab in 2009.[57]

The Islamic Courts Union (ICU)[58] was the next important player on the Somali scene. In response to the lack of an effective government and the resulting insecurity, alternate forms of authority began to grow in Somalia. Clans and sub-clans, beginning in 2000, set up courts in their own neighborhoods of Mogadishu, and began to deliver a measure of justice to Somalis within their areas of control. There were eventually 11 such courts that

merged into the ICU in 2006 and rapidly took control of Mogadishu, and then most of the south.[59]

The ICU was a diverse mixture of Islamists; it contained radical nationalists, such as Aweys, radical internationalists, such as two of al-Shabaab's founders, Aden Hashi Farah Ayro (formerly of the AIAI) and Ahmed Abdi Aw Muhammad Godane, and more moderate nationalists, such as Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed.[60] But Ethiopia was deeply concerned by the irredentist claims made by prominent ICU leaders, (such as Aweys),[61] and, with the support of the U.S., invaded to topple the group in 2006.[62]

As will be explored in further detail later in this monograph,, Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia proved to be a far stickier task than it had envisioned. Ethiopia by this time had experience staging incursions with impunity into its neighbor's territory, as it did when it entered to hit AIAI. But this time Ethiopia toppled a fairly popular regime in the ICU, and ran into the teeth of a broad-based Somali backlash against its presence.[63] It eventually was forced to retreat from the country in 2007, leaving behind a powerful new movement:[64] Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, more commonly known simply as al-Shabaab.

Al-Shabaab's origins are murky, but it probably began in 2002 and was founded by four Somali men, three of whom still lead the organization: Godane (Sheikh Mukhtar Abu Zubayr), Ibrahim Haji Jamaa al-Afghani, Sheikh Mukhtar Robow Ali (Abu Mansur), and Ayro (Abu Muhsen al-Ansari). All four were dedicated jihadists who received training in terrorist camps in Afghanistan before returning to Somalia to found al-Shabaab as a Salafist enforcer militia for the ICU. After the ICU fell, al-Shabaab continued to battle on, drawing fighters to it with a mix of nationalist and religious rhetoric that proved to be extremely effective. It quickly became the most powerful force in Somalia, and cornered the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) inside a few blocks of Mogadishu, protected only by African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) troops.[65]

AMISOM was formed in January 2007,[66] with the mandate to protect the newest TFG[67] led by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, former leader of the ICU. The TFG was hobbled by corruption, ineffectiveness, and weak leadership, and did not have the loyalty of the Somali people.[68] A stalemate ensued, as al-Shabaab had free rein in most of the South and in Mogadishu, while the TFG and AMISOM grimly hung on in a small enclave in the city.

On 11 July 2010, two bombs ripped into crowds that had gathered at a popular restaurant and at a rugby club to watch the World Cup Final in Kampala, Uganda (see Figure 2). More than 70 people were killed, and al-Shabaab claimed responsibility, saying it was retaliation for Uganda's support of the AMISOM mission.

Figure 2. Memorial at the Ethiopia Club, Kampala, Uganda, for the victims of the July 2010 terrorist attack. Source: James Forest, 2013.

The Ugandan president, Yoweri Museveni, was enraged and sought a broadened mandate from the UN for AMISOM to bolster its force level and to allow vigorous offensive action against al-Shabaab.[69]

The bombings caught the world's attention, and signaled the danger a sophisticated international terrorist operation based out of Somalia could pose to the delicate region. AMISOM broke out from its enclave in Mogadishu, and al-Shabaab began to rapidly lose ground. Its fortunes worsened a short time later when Kenya, after several kidnappings inside its borders it blamed on al-Shabaab,[70] launched its own incursion into the south. It seized Kismayo, al-Shabaab's last stronghold, in October 2012, as al-Shabaab beat a hasty retreat out of the city. Ethiopia joined the fray as well, entering the central region of Somalia in late 2011,[71] and several local militias that had been fighting al-Shabaab, most prominently Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'ah (ASWJ) and the Ras Kamboni Brigade, assisted the Ethiopians and AMISOM.[72]

Today, al-Shabaab fighters are believed to be sheltering primarily in a mountainous region in the north and in the heavy forests in the Lower Juba region.[73] There is no telling how badly their capabilities have been degraded, or how many fighters it has lost to battle deaths and defections, but they are significant. However, the group's core force of approximately 5,000 fighters is mostly intact,[74] making it well capable of carrying out bloody attacks, as evidenced by the string of car bombings and assassinations it carried out in

Mogadishu in April and May 2013[75] and the Westgate Mall Attack in Kenya September 2013.[76]

In August 2012, a new government was installed in place of the discredited TFG. A council of elders, along with a technical selection committee, huddled to pick 225 Members of Parliament (MPs) of the 275 that will constitute the full Parliament. While the process was undertaken in an atmosphere of excitement and anticipation that this could be a momentous first step on the path to getting Somalia back on its feet, there were also multiple and credible reports of irregularities that marred the process.[77]

The Parliament went on a month later to elect Hassan Sheikh Mohamud as the newest president of Somalia, in a move that a leading expert on the country hailed as the victory of moderates and civil society leaders over the corrupt "moneylords" who had dominated the TFG. Described as a "civil society leader, educator, and peace-builder," Mohamud appears, for now, to be a respected and untainted leader,[78] though the scale of the task in front of him is enormous.

2. Al-Shabaab Funding and Recruitment

The unique Somali context described in Chapter 1 provides some explanation for how al-Shabaab's leaders (and other insurgent groups as well) have been able to attract funding and new recruits. In the case of the former, much of the group's funding has been generated by various kinds of criminal activity, with some additional funds provided by international sources. The group's recruitment strategies vary from forcing locals to join and fight on behalf of the cause, to attracting foreigners (including ethnic Somalis among diaspora communities in the West) to travel to the region and join what they characterize as a jihad to protect Muslims against invading infidels.

Funding

Like any significant terrorist or insurgent group, al-Shabaab must spend a great deal of time and energy raising money, both through licit and illicit channels. Assessing al-Shabaab's linkages with revenue-producing organized crime pose some familiar difficulties and ambiguities. Many, and probably most, insurgencies and other armed opposition groups around the world have become involved in criminal activity of various types. This is especially the case if the group's existence is a prolonged one. Extortion and the imposition of "war taxes," leveraging substantial funds from drug trafficking, robbery, kidnapping, and other revenue-raising criminal enterprise are typical. Among some of the most prominent insurgencies with a documented criminal-insurgency nexus are the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC); the Irish Republican Army (and many of its variants); the Kurdish Worker Party; Chechen insurgents from major groups; the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam; Hezbollah militias; Abu Sayyaf, and many others. Their search for revenues and support took them all well beyond their immediate areas of operation and the often-common sources of arms and money-moving systems brought diverse groups into contact.

While space prevents a detailed assessment of al-Shabaab's criminal revenue-producing activities, an overview points to some main elements. Al-Shabaab engaged in the profitable extortion of local businesses in areas they controlled, particularly larger population areas. For example, the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea estimated that until al-Shabaab's

withdrawal from Mogadishu, they extorted some $60 million a year from the city's Bakara and Suuq Baad markets. The Monitoring Group judged as well that al-Shabaab generated between $70 million to $100 million per year in revenue from taxation and extortion in areas under its control, to include charcoal exporting and smuggling other contraband into Kenya[79]—the Kismayo and Marka ports were particularly lucrative for al-Shabaab in this respect. The group also leveraged its religious credentials to raise money through *zakat*,[80] annual donations that Muslims are obliged to give to fulfill their Islamic duties.[81]

In a particular embarrassment for the international community, reports have emerged that al-Shabaab likely benefited from a World Food Program food distribution project in southern Somalia.[82] Another report further details how al-Shabaab extorted $10,000 per year from international relief organizations for the right to operate in al-Shabaab-held territory.[83]

Some observers have also pointed to al-Shabaab's possible involvement in Somali piracy as another means of funding. The sums of money involved suggest a strong incentive for them to do so, and numerous reports indicated at the very least an affiliation with some pirate gangs for operations and other reasons. From the first public appearance of al-Shabaab in 2006, there was at least a hint of involvement with piracy, a growing phenomenon in Somalia as well as in other areas of the world.

However, no consensus has yet emerged on this issue among the intelligence or policy community, with myriad reports on both sides of the debate. For example, in March 2011, a senior official of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence Research (INR) sought to downplay what he considered "the recent uncorroborated open source reports of possible links, direct or indirect, between al-Shabaab in Somalia—specifically al-Shabaab-linked militia—and pirates." He noted that al-Shabaab and the pirates operated "largely in separate geographic areas and have drastically opposed ideologies," while acknowledging that al-Shabaab may have received *ad hoc* protection fees from pirate gangs."[84] Meanwhile, in June 2011, then-Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Leon Panetta, appeared to lean a bit more toward a likely al-Shabaab-piracy linkage, judging that "piracy off the coast of Somalia is possibly funding the al-Shabaab insurgent group." In contrast to the INR official, Director Panetta characterized the relationship between al-Shabaab and Somali pirates as "fairly good."[85]

If links do (or did at one time) exist between al-Shabaab and Somali pirate gangs, they were most likely based on clan identities. As ample research on the so-called "crime-terror nexus" has described, collaboration among clandestine networks most often occurs at the individual level, and is typically dependent upon "trusted handshakes"—personal bonds established through shared ethnic, tribal, religious, or community affiliation.[86] The importance of clan identity in Somalia will be discussed in Chapter 4, and it factors in heavily with the piracy trade as well; as indicated in Figure 3, clan or sub-clan identification is a central component of the most prominent Somali pirate gangs:

Location	Clan/Sub-Clan Affiliation
Eyl Isse	Mahmuud and Leelkase sub-clans, Darood clan
Garad	Omar Mahmuud sub-clan (of the Kabalah>Harti>Majeerteen sub-clans), Darod clan
Hobyo	Habar Gedir (Saad, Ayr, Suleiman), Hawiye clan
Haradheere	(Hardheere/ Haradera —Habar Gedir sub-clan (to include its Ayr, Sarur, and Suleiman subclans), Hawiye clan
Mogadishu	Habar Gedir sub-clan (its Ayr sub-clan), Hawiye clan

Figure 3: Clan Affiliations for Key Somali Pirate Groups.[87]

From this perspective, it may not be surprising to find that some al-Shabaab members of a particular clan (for example, the Hawiye clan) have close relationships with other members of that clan who are involved in piracy. For example, a media report identified a man named "Hassan Afrah" as an al-Shabaab official charged with overseeing relationships with the pirates. Afrah comes from the Saleban sub-clan of the Hawiye clan,[88] which is also the same sub-clan as one of the most important pirate leaders, Mohamed Abdi Hassan (Afweyne), who is notorious as the man who orchestrated the

kidnapping in Mogadishu of two French secret agents in the summer of 2009. In addition, Sheikh Ali Dheere, who is a major al-Shabaab spokesperson, belongs to the Murusade clan, another Hawiye sub-clan. A report has noted that al-Shabaab recruiting drew on Murusade men who began to operate near the pirate town of Haradheere (Hardheere, Haradera), at considerable distance from their clan area.[89]

According to a 2011 Reuters news article, "al-Shabaab seized a number of pirate gang leaders in Haradhere and forced them to accept a multi-million dollar deal under which the pirates would hand over 20 percent of future ransoms." Further, the report indicates that pirates began to make payments to al-Shabaab's "Marine Office" beginning in February 2011.[90] At a minimum, these reports suggest some forms of linkages between al-Shabaab and Somali pirate gangs.[91] However, the rapid decline in piracy off the Somali coast in the past 18 months has clearly diminished the incentive for al-Shabaab to view this activity as a potential source of funding. Thus, as of mid-2013, al-Shabaab's primary sources of local funding appear to be a mix of criminal activities, particularly trafficking and extortion.

But beyond local activities, al-Shabaab has also been relatively adept at raising money through international sources. They had three main external revenue streams that came from "international jihadis," remittances from the Somali diaspora, and state sponsorship from Eritrea. The "international jihadis" who contributed so readily to the group were mostly concentrated in the Arabian Peninsula and view al-Shabaab as their ideological brethren—one indicator of how important these international donations are is the fact that several of the al-Shabaab officials who handle money matters are foreign themselves. These donations are very difficult to track, and it is impossible to judge how much they added up to over the years, but the amount is significant.[92]

But beyond local activities, al-Shabaab has also been relatively adept at raising money through international sources.

Support from Eritrea has decreased substantially, likely because of "frictions between al-Shabab and Eritrea, al-Shabaab's declining success on the battlefield and increased international scrutiny."[93] Here again there is no way of knowing for certain how much money al-Shabaab was receiving from Eritrea, but UN estimates have put the number at $40,000-$50,000 per month in 2009.[94]

As with the other streams of revenue, the numbers around how much support al-Shabaab received from remittances are murky at best. But in 2013 a report estimated that up to $1.3 billion a year flows into the country from the diaspora,[95] so if the group received even a small percentage of that, it would be substantial.

Much of this money is sent through a global network of money transfer companies.[96] These money transfer organizations (MTOs), are one of the few means available to people living abroad to remit money to countries that lack traditional banking systems. MTOs, along with even more informal money transfer networks known as *hawalas*, also happen to be a useful way for terrorists to move funds about. The Afghan Taliban and al-Qaeda have both made extensive and well-documented use of MTOs.[97]

MTOs and *hawalas* are sometimes conflated, but in fact there are technical differences, although both are utilized by terrorist organizations. The primary attraction of *hawalas* for terrorists is the fact that the money is transferred between two trusted individuals who do not exchange any sort of promissory documents. The remitter simply pays the *hawaldar* the amount to be remitted, less a transaction fee, who then calls a *hawaldar* on the receiving end to find the recipient and disburse the amount. The two *hawaldar* can then settle up at a later date in a variety of ways, such as by cancelling preexisting debts or physically transferring money or other resources.[98] Since it does not need a legal infrastructure to protect the transactions, the system can still operate well in the sorts of poorly-governed places terrorists frequent. It also means that it is very difficult to track payments, as little to no documentation is created or maintained around the transfers.[99]

MTOs are similar in the sense that the value of the transfer does not move between the remitting and disbursing agents at the time of the transaction, as it does with traditional wire transfers, but there is a major difference between MTOs and *hawalas* in how they settle up. MTOs settle up the debits or credits with its various agents by transferring funds through traditional banking channels, while *hawalas*, as already mentioned, use much more informal means.[100]

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. Government shut down two of the largest MTOs with a presence in the United States—al-Barakaat and al-Taqwa—charging that they "raise, manage, invest, and distribute funds for al-Qaeda; provide terrorist supporters with Internet service and secure telephone communications; and arrange for the shipment of weapons." The

United States further accused the founder of al-Barakaat, Shaykh Ahmed Nur Jimale, of using al-Barakaat offices around the world, including 60 in Somalia, to "transmit funds, intelligence and instructions to terrorist cells."[101]

Some have questioned to what extent al-Barakaat really was used as a conduit for terrorism financing; the *New York Times* has since reported that there is little evidence that the company had links to terrorist funding,[102] and a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) report stated the Bureau "could not substantiate any links between al-Barakaat and terrorism."[103] In 2009 and 2010, several al-Barakaat entities were removed from the U.S.'s sanctions list.[104]

However, the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) "hotly disputed" the FBI's findings, charging that the Bureau had failed to consider what OFAC believed to be key pieces of evidence.[105] The UN identified Shaykh Jimale as a key financier of al-Shabaab involved in the lucrative charcoal export/sugar import trade that also enables Shabaab to launder donations coming in from overseas.[106] To believe that a major financial supporter of the group would not use his companies to assist Shabaab requires some faith.[107]

Whatever the truth of al-Barakaat's involvement in terrorist financing, money did flow to al-Shabaab through other MTOs. A Minneapolis man was convicted in early 2012 of sending $21,000 to al-Shabaab, and two Minnesota women were convicted in October 2011 of sending 12 different money transfers to the group.[108] Four men in San Diego were convicted of attempting to send funds to the group via MTOs, though they were unsuccessful.[109]

Multiple UN reports have documented al-Shabaab's use of remittance companies: at the end of 2012, the group solicited a total of approximately $100,000 on four separate occasions for a mass assassination campaign in Mogadishu. The group used, among others, a company called Dahabshiil to remit the money from different countries.[110] And it has on a number of occasions used *hawalas* to receive general donations from a variety of sources.[111]

Recruitment

Given the regional and international reach of the organization, it is unsurprising that al-Shabaab was able to recruit from a wide range of countries. Al-Shabaab made a strong push in the Eastleigh neighborhood of Nairobi,

Kenya, to the point that the area was once described as "an incubator of jihad." The organization utilized extremist teachings, literature, videos, and other propaganda materials to spread its message and to bring recruits into the fold.[112]

Kenyan government officials and less extremist Islamic instruction centers were deeply concerned this activity would help al-Shabaab's extremist message make inroads into the Kenyan Somali population. Young people were a particular worry; if radicalized, they could become current and future fighters in Somalia, as well as domestic terrorists in Kenya and other regional countries. Al-Shabaab members, for their part, used the enclave as a traditional "fish in the ocean" opportunity, swimming with impunity in the large Somali population while recruiting Somali youth, raising money, receiving medical support, and regrouping or resting.[113]

Shabaab had a very similar operation in Dadaab refugee camp in the northeastern region of Kenya. The camp is about 60 miles from the Somali border, and is now more than 20 years old and five times the size originally intended.[114] While the exact extent and nature of al-Shabaab's efforts in Dadaab are unknown, it is clear that they existed, making the camp "a rear base, rest and recreation resort, and recruiting center for al-Shabaab."[115] Another report found that not just Dadaab but other Kenyan camps housing Somali refugees were also "fertile recruitment grounds" for al-Shabaab.[116]

Refugees trying to make their way to the camps in Kenya were also attractive recruitment targets for al-Shabaab. Workers and observers at Dadaab camp have noted the shortage of young Somali men accompanying those families that made their way to the camp. Some may have died on the way, others were too poor to travel, and many others were thought to have been intercepted at home or en route, and coerced into joining al-Shabaab (or government) groups. In 2011, Amnesty International documented mass "recruitment drives" and al-Shabaab checkpoints along the border with Kenya that detained young men trying to flee. It is likely they were then forcibly recruited into the group.[117]

Al-Shabaab's regional recruitment has evolved over the last several years and now draws heavily from non-ethnic Somalis, as evidenced by its decision to release propaganda videos in English, Swahili, and Arabic.[118] Central to its efforts is its alliance with a number of extremist Muslim organizations based in Kenya, most notably al-Hijra. Al-Hijra (previously known as the Muslim Youth Centre, and before that as Pumwani Muslim Youth) engaged

in the "radicalization and recruitment of principally Swahili speaking Africans for carrying out violent militant activity in Somalia," according to a UN sanctions report,[119] and has a branch in Tanzania known as the Ansaar Muslim Youth Centre (AMYC). The AMYC has likewise been accused by the UN of engaging in "radicalization, recruitment and fund raising on behalf of al-Shabaab."[120]

All of al-Shabaab's recruitment efforts in the region have taken place in a context of growing conservatism among Muslims in the region.[121] This does not mean that these newly-conservative Muslims are going to resort to violence, but it does mean their worldviews now have more in common with radical groups such as al-Shabaab than they did previously.

Motivations of New Al-Shabaab Recruits

Al-Shabaab would probably like to think all of its recruits joined because they believed in the group's message, but in reality domestic Somali recruits joined for a host of different reasons, many of which were the result of pragmatic calculation rather than ideological commitment. According to William Reno, "in many cases people switch sides due to convenience in Somalia. Experts have noted that in Somalia, Islamists have historically been flexible and have switched sides several times—which points to the lack of an ideological core in many Somalis who join al-Shabab."[122]

Doing so is entirely in keeping with peculiarities of Somali culture that have been documented for years. "Pragmatic to the extreme,"[123] Somalis have a long history of adopting and discarding allegiances as it suited their interests[124]—perhaps the only non-negotiable loyalty Somalis have is to their *diya*-paying group[125] and to Islam, though they are prone to ignore the tenets of *shariah* that are "inapplicable to a clan society."[126]

Consider the case of Sayyid Mohammed Abdille Hassan, introduced in Chapter 1 as the "Mad Mullah." Even in the midst of his struggles against the British, a number of his allies were joining or defecting as they saw fit. A British journalist who covered the campaign against the Mullah reflected at length on this phenomenon, and claimed that a number of clans "identified themselves with him at the time and deserted him at a later period, as their interests dictated," while others, "disappointed in their prospects of loot … seceded, and made submission at the close of 1899 to the authorities at

Berbera." Furthermore, "It is … believed that … the majority of the people who have joined the Mullah in the Dolbahata have done so either through fear of him or for personal gain, and that a large seceding from his following may be expected when our expedition takes the field."[127]

A contemporary example is seen in the case of Sheikh Ahmed Madobe, the leader of the Ras Kamboni Brigade. Now allied with the Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF), Madobe was once a high-value terrorist target for the United States, and barely survived a U.S. Special Forces attack in 2007 that left him wounded. He was captured and spent time in an Ethiopian prison before undergoing an opportune change of heart; he was returned to Somalia where he took up leadership of the Ras Kamboni Brigade again, this time to fight his former ally, al-Shabaab.[128]

Think of Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed who was a prominent member of the ICU before it collapsed after an attack by the U.S.-supported Ethiopians.[129] Ahmed then partnered with Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys to form the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia, though the two eventually had a falling out.[130] Aweys' name can now be found on page three of a U.S. Treasury Department report listing Specially Designated Terrorists,[131] while

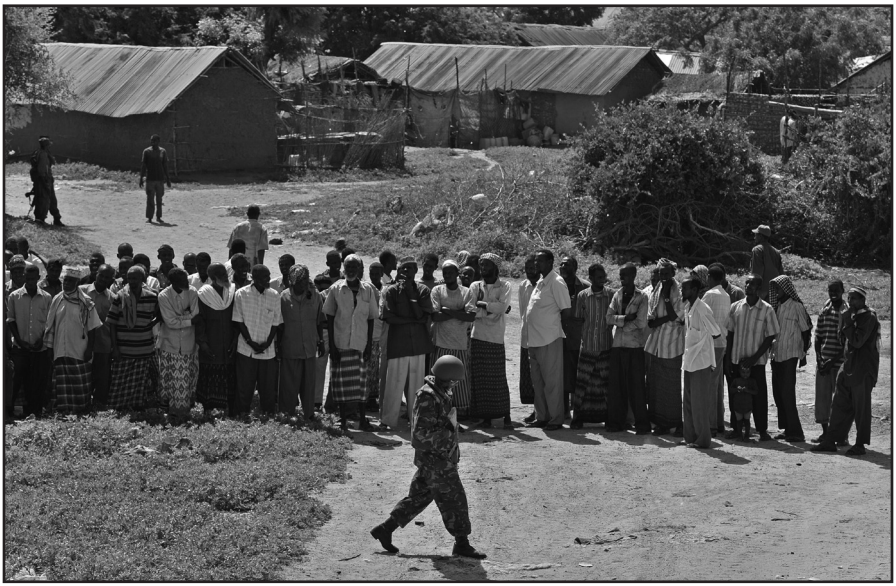

Figure 4. Kenyan Defence soldier and villagers in Burgabo, Southern Somalia. Photo used by permission of Newscom.

Ahmed went on to become the president of the TFG and was hailed by then-Secretary of State Clinton as a U.S. partner in the fight against terrorism.[132]

Madobe's evolution from a high-value target for U.S. Special Forces to trusted partner of AMISOM, and Ahmed's own impressive transition from a leader of a group overthrown with U.S. support to U.S. partner meeting with the Secretary of State, perfectly illustrates the phenomenon of Somali pragmatism. These two men deftly bartered their loyalties for greater advantage for themselves and their clan, a time-honored Somali tradition. Some recruits did the very same thing when making the decision about joining al-Shabaab.

Al-Shabaab's notorious brutality extended to its recruiting, and while its harsh measures alienated many Somalis, it also brought some into the fold who decided the sensible choice was to join rather than run the risk of becoming one of the group's victims. Several defectors have mentioned that al-Shabaab would often harass and even execute people on any pretext for the purpose of scaring other Somalis into joining the group.[133] And entire clans threw their support behind al-Shabaab rather than risk falling prey to rival clans already allied with the group. This resulted in hundreds of Somalis joining al-Shabaab's ranks who otherwise would have seen their clan and property be put at risk.[134]

Some fighters joined al-Shabaab because they believed it would enable them to exact revenge on someone who had harmed them or their family. In some cases, the grievance revolved around a clan issue; at least one al-Shabaab defector claimed to have joined the group to take revenge on the killer of a family member,[135] and al-Shabaab was able to win the sympathy of some clans eager to take revenge on other clans for past abuses.[136] Other times the grievance was a result of anger over poor behavior from the TFG and AMISOM;[137] in these cases it was natural for Somalis to join al-Shabaab as it was the most active and visible enemy of those who had wronged the angry party.

Fighting for al-Shabaab also paid well, and in a country as impoverished and with as few opportunities as Somalia, some Somalis decided it was worth joining for the paycheck—fighters could earn between $50-$150 a month, depending on what their roles were.[138]

There was also a tempting prestige associated with joining al-Shabaab. "Walking the city with a gun as a member of al-Shabab ensured everybody feared and respected you. Girls also liked you," said one defector.[139] Just as

with fighters who joined for the money, the country offered so few avenues for a young man to become "somebody" that the prestige al-Shabaab offered was all the more alluring. One recent study expands on this point: "For disaffected and jobless young people in search of avenues for influence in society, self-affirmation and recognition by their peers, joining an extremist group or criminal organization can be an attractive and empowering option."[140]

It wasn't only young men who could climb the social ladder by joining al-Shabaab; membership in the group also constituted an opportunity for entire clans to gain a level of prestige they otherwise would never have had. Minority or otherwise despised tribes comprised a major portion of al-Shabaab's foot soldiers,[141] as these second-class citizens hoped their membership would move them up in Somalia's social hierarchy.[142]

The group's Salafism is particularly well-suited to exploit the alienation and frustration that people feel, and some young Somalis were easy prey.

Finally, while many Somalis joined the group for pragmatic reasons as already discussed, al-Shabaab was able to attract some recruits by making ideological appeals. The group's Salafism is particularly well-suited to exploit the alienation and frustration that people feel, and some young Somalis were easy prey. Salafists "frame … alienation in religious terms, in which Islam is presented as the all encompassing, powerful, and only solution. Both local circumstances and global events are presented as evidence of a world threatening Islam and contradicting the will of God." Young men convinced of the truth of Salafism were able to indulge in a sense of moral superiority, as they believed they were part of a select group who understood the truth of Islam and who were going to attain salvation,[143] certainly an attractive proposition.

Al-Shabaab's efforts in these areas were bolstered by the fact that Salafism, which places a very strong emphasis on jihad, has been gaining ground in Somalia, likely fueled by money flowing out of the Gulf states that has allowed Salafist clerics to set up *madrassas* throughout Somalia. Al-Shabaab has had success in recruiting fighters, particularly young men, by appealing to their obligation to wage violent jihad, a task made easier by many of these young men's exposure to Salafist ideas.[144]

It is necessary to pause here and explore the issue of Salafism more broadly, particularly the ideology's possible link to violence. Several of the

sources cited above, including one that quotes al-Shabaab defectors, suggest that Salafist ideology facilitates the radicalization of Muslims. Unsurprisingly, this is a controversial position and experts come down on both sides of the debate. After studying the issue, the position of this report is that Muslims who adhere to certain strains of Salafism are indeed more likely to commit violence in the name of Islam than ordinary Muslims. This assessment's implications for Somalia, outlined above and in other sections of the monograph, is that the inroads Salafism has made into the population make it easier for al-Shabaab to recruit using radical religious appeals.

Not all Salafists are violent or interested in establishing an Islamic state—many even believe it is forbidden for Muslims to engage in politics. But all Salafists generally believe in a very strict interpretation of the Quran and Hadith, and reject any Islamic revelation after the time of the Prophet. There is also a small sub-set of Salafists known as Jihadist-Salafists that are fanatically dedicated to the cause of violent jihad against anyone who does not believe precisely as they do— many of the most infamous Muslim terror organizations have been Jihadist-Salafists, including al-Qaeda. The leadership of al-Shabaab, and an unknown numbers of its foot soldiers, are Jihadist-Salafists.

These Jihadist-Salafists are sometimes also known as *takfiris*, after the doctrine of *takfir*, or excommunication. *Takfir* is the convoluted religious rationale Jihadist-Salafists use to justify killing fellow Muslims, which is forbidden by the Quran. Since their brand of Salafism is the only true form of Islam, the reasoning goes, any Muslim who adheres to a different interpretation is not a true Muslim but *takfir*, and therefore a legitimate target.[145]

As alluded to above, it is probable that adherents only of certain strains of Salafism are more inclined to be persuaded by calls to violent jihad of the type al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab espouse. But it appears that those violent strains are being propagated in Somalia. As was mentioned earlier, al-Shabaab had a very sophisticated and successful recruitment program that included ideological training, particularly of children, in *madrassas* and mosques, picking up where previous radical Muslim groups such as AIAI left off.[146]

Furthermore, the growth of Salafism in Somalia, including the violent variety, fits a pattern that has seen Jihadist-Salafists make gains within the broader Muslim world. Eminent Islamic scholar Gilles Kepel has commented on the phenomenon in Europe,[147] and the International Crisis Group and

others have written about their spread in northern Africa, particularly in Tunisia.[148] And in 2010, Germany's domestic intelligence service concluded that Salafism was the "fastest growing Islamic movement in the world"[149]—again, only a minority of Salafists is violent, but the trend so far has been that the growth of Salafism in general brings with it a growth of the Jihadist-Salafists.

Unfortunately, there is precedent for a historically Sufi society, such as Somalia's, to swing into the Salafist camp. As discussed above, upheaval of the type brought by war, poverty, and disease often enhances the appeal of the Salafist message; Kashmir, for many hundreds of years Sufi, rapidly transformed into a largely Salafist society after the pressures of protracted conflict took their toll. Jihadist-Salafists are strongly represented among the Kashmiri Salafists, and violence between them and the remaining Sufis has been flaring for years now.[150]

Only a minority of Salafists are dedicated to jihad, though they wield far more influence than their numbers would suggest, and their ranks have been swelling over the preceding years. In keeping with the trend, adherence to Salafist ideology has been growing in Somalia, particularly among the youth, mirroring a pattern that has played out in other parts of the Islamic world. And while there is no way of knowing the proportions for sure, Somali testimony and other evidence from the country suggest that a significant portion of the Salafism being spread in Somalia is of the jihadist variety. This Jihadist-Salafist community provided a natural pool from which al-Shabaab was able to successfully recruit using religious appeals; if the trend continues, al-Shabaab or another radical Muslim terrorist organization will have a larger and larger constituency pre-disposed to accept the group's violent propaganda.

While all the above-mentioned motivations for joining al-Shabaab were important, the greatest boon to the group's recruitment efforts was undoubtedly the 2006 Ethiopian invasion. Three Somali-Americans who went on trial in Minnesota for joining al-Shabaab testified that they felt "compelled" to help repel the Ethiopian "invaders;"[151] other Somalis felt "driven" to fight the Ethiopians because of a "strong sense of nationalism."[152] Ken Menkhaus, in testimony before a Senate committee, noted that "the Ethiopian occupation inadvertently fueled a dramatic rise in radicalism and violent extremism in the country and among the diaspora."[153] The invasion toppled a fairly popular government in the form of the ICU;[154] worse, it was carried out by

Ethiopia, Somalia's ancient enemy. Al-Shabaab positioned itself perfectly to take advantage of the nationalist anger that erupted within the broader Somali community as it painted itself as the best defender of the country against the incursion.[155] Somalis flocked to al-Shabaab's banner; the appeal was so strong that it served as a major recruiting tool for nearly five years.[156]

Recruiting from Abroad

Foreign fighters have been an important part of al-Shabaab for years now. Different types of foreign fighters have been drawn to Somalia: ethnic Somalis from the region, often Kenya and Ethiopia; ethnic Somalis whose parents, or who themselves, grew up in Somalia but have since left and now are often citizens of Western countries; and non-ethnic Somalis.[157] A 2011 assessment, with contributions by a number of specialists having direct experience and/or deep research experience in Somalia affairs, specifically addressed the many issues of al-Shabaab's foreign fighters, supporters, or leaders. According to one author's calculation, of "the 85 member executive council of al-Shabaab today, 42 are Somalis and 43 are foreigners,"[158] where "the hardliners led by the foreign jihadis wield enormous influence and have access to resources and the means to dictate their wishes to the less powerful factions."[159]

As early as 2008, al-Shabaab directed increasing attention to the balance among al-Shabaab members, i.e., ethnic Somalis in clans, regionally and internationally displaced Somalis, and foreign cadre. An al-Shabaab spokesman underscored this in 2008, noting:

> 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 are an insufficient number of non-Somali brothers.[160]

These foreigners are central in training new fighters and in the acquisition of new arms, ammunition, and other and military equipment. They have also been key al-Shabaab field commanders, transferring and applying combat and guerrilla tactics, techniques, and procedures from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan—from firefights to improvised explosive device (IED) employment to kidnappings, assassinations, and suicide bombings.[161] In the

late summer of 2011—after the withdrawal of most al-Shabaab forces from Mogadishu—there reportedly was such a cell comprised foreign fighters from Chechnya, Pakistan, and Afghanistan operating near Baidoa.[162]

Al-Shabaab especially reached out to the Western Somali diaspora community, with so much success that its efforts in the United States have been termed "the most effective jihadi pipeline the U.S. has ever known,"[163] and the U.S. became "the primary exporter of Western fighters" to Somalia. Experts estimate that at least 40 Americans have left the United States to join al-Shabaab, and at least 15 of them were killed in the fighting.[164]

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The United Kingdom (UK) and the Netherlands are also home to significant Somali communities, and have seen some of them travel to Somalia to fight with al-Shabaab. The Royal United Services Institute in the UK estimated in 2012 that a full quarter of all foreign fighters in Somalia were British,[165] at least 20 are believed to have come from Canada,[166] as well as approximately 20 from Sweden.[167]

All of this is compelling evidence of the breadth and depth of al-Shabaab's recruitment network. In the U.S. alone, al-Shabaab recruiters have been active in Minneapolis; Boston; Seattle; Washington, D.C.; San Diego; Columbus, Ohio; and Lewiston, Maine.[168] And while the group utilized mosques and *madrassas* as recruitment centers, they also evolved their tactics to create an ever-more sophisticated recruiting web. In the UK, they began visiting "*Khat* cafes" where young Somali men would gather to chew the narcotic.[169]

They also continue to make extensive use of Western-born recruits who speak fluent American or British English. Al-Shabaab's Twitter account is obviously written by native English speakers that adeptly utilize British and American colloquialisms, sometimes to such lengths they are clearly making a point. When discussing a conference on Somalia held in London in May 2013, for instance, several al-Shabaab tweets in a row flaunted the British provenance of the author by utilizing distinctly British English words, such as "quid," and referencing two English political parties, the "EDL" and the "Tories."[170]

The group also made films that featured American-born jihadis such as Omar Hammami and Anwar al-Awlaki, as well as Somali-Americans who had already gone to the country to fight and who made appeals to others to join them.[171] In another clever innovation, al-Shabaab produced a series of propaganda videos that featured a man speaking with a London accent and mimicking the tone and style of a Western newscast. The videos are designed to create a facade of objectivity for the group's skewed interpretation of the events on which the propagandist is reporting,[172] the better to give an air of credibility to the narrative they utilize for recruitment.

A study on al-Shabaab's appeal to non-Somalis gives a good summary of the philosophy the group leverages to appeal to recruits:

> Al-Shabaab presents its mission in cosmic terms, invoking a civilizational conflict between the forces of Islam and non-Islam. This is coupled with attempts to develop an '*ummah* consciousness' in potential recruits, encouraging them to identify with Muslim causes worldwide. Typically, the suffering of Muslims around the world is juxtaposed with the ease of life in the West. The central tenet of this messaging is that faith necessitates action, and Muslims need to recalibrate their priorities by placing the liberation of Muslim lands ahead of esoteric matters of faith.[173]

Somali diaspora communities in the West often have higher rates of unemployment and lower rates of education than other immigrant groups,[174] and tend to be quite insular as well. In the UK, the Somali community lives in "mini Mogadishus" that can breed among Somalis fear and anger at the British police and even the British public.[175] In the Netherlands, the Somali community was upset at the government when, in an effort to promote integration, it began housing asylum seekers in areas scattered throughout the country, rather than allowing them to concentrate in certain towns.[176] And in 2009, then-U.S. Deputy Director of Intelligence Andrew Liepman testified before a Senate Committee that the Somali-American community was more insular than other Muslim-American communities, with higher rates of linguistic isolation as well.[177]

For alienated, adrift Somali youths, it is not hard to see how al-Shabaab's message of fighting on behalf of a global Islamic cause can inspire them. A desire for a sense of purpose; a longing to feel an accepted part of a homeland with which they have little experience; disillusionment and anger with their

host communities; and a "pure" form of Islam that claims to be the answer to all these problems, peddled by persuasive and personable recruiters, can all combine to form a powerful and toxic inducement to join the Somali jihad.

Fortunately, much of al-Shabaab's international recruitment pipeline now appears to have dried up; in Minneapolis, one of the major suppliers of American al-Shabaab fighters, there have been no public reports of Somalis leaving to fight since 2009.[178] There are a number of potential explanations: domestic law enforcement agencies in countries with large Somali populations have been concerned about the problem for years and have made a concerted effort to disrupt the pipeline. The group's current difficulties in Somalia may dampen enthusiasm for joining what could appear to be a lost cause to some, and reports trickling back of how poorly foreign fighters are treated in Somalia likely do not help either. Furthermore, many of the diaspora Somalis were recruited using a mix of nationalist and religious appeals, particularly in response to Ethiopia's invasion of 2006.[179] But since then, Ethiopia withdrew (until its latest incursion), and al-Shabaab's brutality against fellow Somalis has become better known, badly damaging its claims to be fighting on behalf of its countrymen.

However, the FBI has said that its investigation into al-Shabaab recruitment in Minnesota is "definitely ongoing." While it has not been confirmed, a young Somali-American man may have joined al-Shabaab as late as September 2012, raising fears that al-Shabaab's recruiting may once again be gaining traction.[180]

Forced Recruitment

Finally, it needs to be noted that not all recruitment into al-Shabaab has been voluntary. The group kidnapped large numbers of Somalis and forced them to fight, including, most heinously, an undetermined number of children.[181] While every party in the fighting has been associated with the practice, al-Shabaab has apparently made the greatest and most systemized use of "male or female persons under 18 years of age comprising any part of a regular or irregular armed group in any capacity and recruited against their will, mental capacity or as a consequence of their coercive circumstances," to paraphrase various definitions.

As early as 2006, when al-Shabaab became a more visible entity, researchers like Amnesty International's Benedicte Goderiaux reported, "a massive drive in Somalia to recruit young boys mostly between the ages of 12 and 18, to fight in the country's civil war," a campaign involving jihadist and government forces. Reports alleging that both militant groups and the Somali army have used child soldiers have been reinforced by many subsequent charges and direct testimony.[182] By 2009, moral outrage was accompanied by more details of how al-Shabaab used their child soldiers; the UN reported that the group utilized foreign-trained children—often orphaned and adopted into an al-Shabaab "second family"—"in intelligence collection, assassination, logistics and other roles" as well as employing them in front-line combat roles. The UN further alleged that the group employed a "tiered" system for deploying its fighters: children constituted the first line of defense, adult Somali fighters the second line, and foreigners in an elite third line.[183] These claims have not been corroborated elsewhere, but the account of foreigners staying behind Somalis during fighting fits a report of Sheikh Mukhtar Robow Ali being angry that his Rahaweyn clansmen were being used as cannon fodder while foreign fighters stayed back.[184]

According to UN reporting, children have proven effective in recruiting other children, to include at settlements for internally displaced persons near Hamar Bile, Mogadishu Stadium, in Somaliland and Puntland. Training centers for these recruits and their predominantly foreign trainers are numerous in south-central Somalia and a few other places, with combat and support skills also including indoctrination to serve as suicide bombers. Hizbul Islam was reportedly so impressed with the success of al-Shabaab's recruiting efforts among children that it too became involved, at one point supposedly having 30 recruiters whose only job was to recruit children.[185]

What is particularly worrying about this practice is that it accelerated when al-Shabaab was suffering heavy losses on the battlefield, as it became desperate to replenish its ranks.[186] Al-Shabaab does not have access to the same number of children it used to because of its territorial losses, but it is likely the group will continue and even redouble its child recruitment efforts to compensate for its recent setbacks.

It was not only children who were recruited by force into al-Shabaab. Reports emerged from Kismayo that the group had forced "most" of the men in the city to take up arms and "train for guerrilla warfare."[187] In the town of Hagar, al-Shabaab levied a tax of one camel and one fighter on every

household, leading to mass flight by residents, particularly young ones, from the town.[188]

Summary

Al-Shabaab has a number of sources for funding and recruitment, both domestic and international, that have been highly rewarding in the past. It created the most successful recruitment network for Western citizens ever seen among al-Qaeda-associated terrorist groups, and also pulled heavily from domestic and regional sources, including from non-ethnic Somalis. Its revenues surged into the millions in U.S. dollars per year, pulling from a diverse collection of funding streams that included taxes, both international and domestic donations, smuggling, and skimming from aid organizations.

However, as described in the next chapter, the group's blunders and the coalition's offensive have damaged these sources. As a result, the group's capacity to hold and administer territory has weakened, though its canny decision to withdraw from its Mogadishu and Kismayo strongholds in recognition of AMISOM's increased strength allowed it to mostly preserve its core of fighters. Shabaab has now reverted to guerrilla warfare tactics that heavily utilize terrorist attacks in a bid to discredit the new government and AMISOM.

3. The Diminishment and Evolution of al-Shabaab

As noted earlier, one of Kenya's major goals for its invasion of Somalia was to seize Kismayo. It moved slowly, in part because of the bad weather in which it had chosen to launch its invasion,[189] but also because it was wary, concerned at the prospect of being sucked into vicious urban warfare[190] of the kind that so bedeviled the U.S. in Iraq. When the Kenyan Defence Forces (KDF) finally stormed the city, they attacked from several directions, sending special forces troops leaping from boats ahead of the main amphibious assault[191] while conventional units accompanied by Somali forces bore down from the interior.[192] The KDF was poised and ready for a fight, but resistance was faint.

It soon became clear that al-Shabaab had abandoned the city in front of the onslaught, at first glance a surprising decision given that Kismayo was widely regarded as the organization's final stronghold and a major source of its funding.[193] It was the same decision it had made one year earlier in Mogadishu, suddenly withdrawing from a city for which it had battled for years.[194] But both decisions reflect a rational, well-calculated strategic decision by al-Shabaab to avoid a devastating confrontation with a suddenly robust, reinvigorated AMISOM force that possessed far superior conventional military capabilities. After the fall of Kismayo, an al-Shabaab commander said as much: "We got orders from our superiors to withdraw from the city ... this is part of broader military tactics we have set for the enemy."[195]

The "broader military tactics" to which the commander was alluding are guerrilla tactics. According to several reports, the group has been planning to switch to an insurgency strategy for more than a year,[196] and abandoning fixed positions in Mogadishu and Kismayo was a strategic decision. And it was not just the major cities that al-Shabaab abandoned, but it decided not to defend nearly all areas it held in the face of approaching troops.[197]

Another al-Shabaab commander, Sheikh Mohamed Ibrahim, articulated the strategy further when speaking of the group's withdrawal from Mogadishu: "Now we are saving money, while the enemy pays more and more to secure land it seized, recruit new soldiers, pay for services. Do you think really they can continue like that forever? Already we are in Mogadishu

every night, carrying out attacks."[198] There is a self-serving element to his statement as no group wants to be seen as weak, which is what a withdrawal from Mogadishu would suggest, but it is also an articulation of classic insurgency strategy. Ibrahim's words echo Robert Taber's arresting metaphor for an insurgent:

> The guerrilla fights the war of the flea. The flea bites, hops, and bites again, nimbly avoiding the foot that would crush him. He does not seek to kill his enemy at a blow, but to bleed him and feed on him, to plague and bedevil him, to keep him from resting and to destroy his nerve and morale.[199]

Abandoning fixed positions where one can be cornered and crushed has a long history in guerrilla warfare. One of the most successful and prolific insurgents, Mao Zedong, was a strong advocate of this strategy: "When our own forces are insufficient, if we give up the cities, we still have hope of regaining them. It is altogether improper to defend cities to the utmost, for this merely leads to sacrificing our own effective strength."[200] It also has precedent in radical Muslim terrorist organizations. *Hijra*, meaning "migration" or "flight," refers to the prophet Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina to escape a hostile force, and is used as justification by al-Qaeda network groups for fleeing to ensure survival.[201]

Al-Shabaab has undertaken other shifts in tactical emphasis that reveal its newest strategy. Hit-and-run attacks are one of the hallmarks of guerrilla activity,[202] and al-Shabaab has fully embraced them. A defector from the group described how his fighting duties changed after al-Shabaab lost control of Baidoa, a town in south-central Somalia, and how he was expected to then carry out "'hit and run' style attacks;"[203] the KDF's advance into Somalia was dogged by IEDs and sniper attacks,[204] and al-Shabaab deployed a number of roadside bombs and suicide bombers with deadly effect.[205]

Hit-and-run attacks are one of the hallmarks of guerrilla activity, and al-Shabaab has fully embraced them.

When the United States invaded Iraq in 2003, it was focused on finding Saddam Hussein's conventional military units, especially the vaunted Republican Guard, and destroying them. However, the U.S. force received a nasty surprise when it found itself primarily fighting non-uniformed men

who were extremely difficult to distinguish from ordinary civilians. The Iraqi insurgents who proved far more difficult to suppress than the conventional forces of Saddam melted into the population,[206] another standard insurgency tactic that al-Shabaab has recently employed. In the town of El Bur, for example, an al-Shabaab defector reported that fighters simply began living among the civilians after the town was taken by militias allied to the Somali government, the better to help stage ambushes against those same militias.[207] And there are reports that al-Shabaab fighters are "melting back into their clan militias" which makes it "almost impossible" for AMISOM to identify them.[208]

Assassinating government supporters is another staple of guerrilla warfare[209] that saw wide usage in the insurgent war against the U.S. presence in Iraq,[210] and a recent report by the U.S. military on the situation in Afghanistan referred to the "robust assassination efforts" of the insurgents there.[211] Al-Shabaab has adopted the same approach, publicly vowing to kill government officials[212] and launching a campaign of "daily" ambushes and assassinations in areas it no longer controls.[213] Moreover, the group's selection of targets is telling, as insurgents will often assassinate government supporters in the most public way possible in order to send a warning to anyone who dares defy them.[214] Al-Shabaab has tried to kill the newly sworn-in president of Somalia,[215] and is suspected in the assassinations of a member of parliament,[216] a famous comedian known for poking fun at the group, and so many members of the media that in 2012 Somalia ranked as the second-deadliest place on earth for media workers.[217]

Historical Precedent

And finally, it is entirely natural for al-Shabaab to adopt an insurgency strategy as they have done so in the past—indeed, the organization was born as an insurgency. Al-Shabaab sprang from the remnants of the ICU after it was toppled by an Ethiopian invasion[218] in 2006, and launched a classic guerrilla campaign that included the use of IEDs, suicide bombings, and political assassinations.[219] "Harassed and bruised," the Ethiopians were eventually compelled to withdraw,[220] just as the UN forces had done in the face of General Aideed's guerrilla campaign in 1993.[221] Given al-Shabaab's and Somalia's success in using insurgent tactics against foreign invasions,

the group has every reason to believe it can be successful again using the same sorts of techniques.

Key Mistakes by al-Shabaab

The tale of al-Shabaab in Somalia is one of arrogance, brutality, miscalculation, and in-fighting. After riding a wave of anti-Ethiopian nationalism to prominence, it managed to maintain and expand its control by mixing its radical Islamic appeal with nationalism to draw in both foreign and domestic recruits. It tamped down clan tensions within the group (though was never free of them), and won Somalis' support or acquiescence by bringing a measure of harsh peace to its areas of control.

However, it also made a series of blunders that badly damaged its reputation with Somalis. Its three biggest were its widespread use of brutality against Somalis, its embrace of foreign fighters and their Salafism, and the messy in-fighting it waged which in June 2013 reached a fevered pitch. As a result, it alienated many within the Somali population it needs to survive, and has made it more difficult for the group to resist AMISOM.

Brutality

Al-Shabaab would have been well-served to consider the example of insurgencies that had failed in the past due to mistreatment of civilians. The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia in Turkey saw its support decline precipitously in the 1980s when it began to utilize "random, brutal violence" that "created a polarized and hostile" local population.[222] There were also examples closer to home to which al-Shabaab could have looked: the Somali rebels during the 1960s *Shifta* War (described in Chapter 1) failed in part because they alienated the local population by resorting to kidnapping, assassination, and a disregard for the impact their acts had on the population.[223] Recently, the Islamic extremists in northern Mali squandered whatever support they had garnered when they began whipping women for clothing violations and chopping off the limbs of suspected criminals.[224]

Al-Shabaab's brutality manifested itself in a variety of destructive ways, beginning with the forced recruitment of children, as has already been

discussed. Unsurprisingly, Somalis did not at all like that their children were being kidnapped, sometimes kept in chains, and trained to be suicide bombers.[225]

A particular sore spot among Somalis was al-Shabaab's treatment of women. Women and girls were sometimes kidnapped and gang-raped by al-Shabaab insurgents, and the group forced families to give women to its fighters as "wives." They also instituted widow inheritance, where any fighter could inherit the widow of a fallen comrade without the consent of the woman or her family. Al-Shabaab also banned women from interacting in public with unrelated men, wearing bras,[226] and working,[227] none of which sat well with ordinary Somalis.

Some of al-Shabaab's brutality was related to its Salafism, which calls for a particularly unpleasant type of *shariah* anathema to most Somalis. Ioan Lewis has described al-Shabaab's beliefs as "strict and primitive,"[228] while another article says that al-Shabaab imposed an "austere form of conservative Islamic rule" that inspired hatred for the group among Mogadishu residents.[229] The group even went so far as to stone a young girl for "adultery"[230] in an act that had echoes of Taliban-style punishments.

Other complaints have emerged about al-Shabaab. Suicide is taboo to Somalis, so many were shocked at al-Shabaab's introduction of suicide bombing,[231] a shock that only deepened as the group began to use children to carry out the terrible attacks.[232] Others have complained about the general violence and repression—a port administrator at Kismayo described how "Shabab kill everyone. Kill mothers, kill babies, kill everything." And while al-Shabaab was good for business in some respects, such as bringing a measure of security, no matter how brutal, to the places it controlled, he also groused about the exorbitant taxes the group levied in the markets and at ports.[233]

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The Problem with Foreigners

Meanwhile, as noted in the previous chapter, foreign fighters provided significant fighting strength, leadership, and expertise to the group; however, they also were yet another unpopular aspect of al-Shabaab. Somalis are committed xenophobes, and particularly do not like foreigners who bring brutality and a domineering ideology. More than two years ago, Ambassador David Shinn speculated that the foreign fighters in al-Shabaab's ranks might prove to be the group's undoing,[234] and it has indeed become a rallying cry for opposition to al-Shabaab. Many Somalis feel a "rising anger" toward the foreign fighters; a commander of the anti-Shabaab ASWJ militia tapped into this sentiment during a speech to rally his troops. "[Al-Shabaab] are destroying our home for the sake of Iraqis? The foreign devil is leading them!"[235]

Al-Shabaab should have known this could happen, particularly as al-Qaeda had already suffered travails in the past trying to gain acceptance among Somalis. During the 1990s, al-Qaeda established a cell in Nairobi and tried to establish links with AIAI that was operating in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and in Somalia. The mission failed as the cell discovered that Somalia was a "difficult, non-permissive environment for foreign operatives."[236] And during the U.S. presence in Somalia that ended with the infamous "Black Hawk down" episode, al-Qaeda sent an unspecified number of fighters to Somalia who were "treated in a bad way" by the locals. The leadership concluded from the experience that the country was not suitable at the time to serve as a sanctuary.[237]

Al-Shabaab is animated primarily by a Salafist ideology, while most Somalis are Sufis,[238] setting up a clash that badly damaged al-Shabaab's standing in many Somalis' eyes. Al-Shabaab views many Sufi practices, particularly ancestor worship, as heretical,[239] and as a result desecrated the tombs of several Sufi saints, enraging many Somalis with the sacrilege.[240] Al-Shabaab went even further and reportedly beheaded a well-respected Sufi cleric in July 2012[241]—it is precisely this sort of Salafist crackdown against local forms of Islam that led to the "breaking point" in locals' support for the radical Muslim organizations in northern Mali,[242] and which turned many Somalis against al-Shabaab. The group's campaign against Sufiism was so extreme that the ASWJ, originally committed to a nonviolent agenda, took up arms to defend their sect against the Salafists.[243]

Of all of al-Shabaab's miscalculations, restricting aid flows into the famine-affected areas of Somalia in 2011 was one of its most severe. Nothing could have more clearly shown Somalis how little the group actually cared about Somalis' fate, and it cost them dearly in turns of support. Abdi Rashi, an analyst at the International Crisis Group, believes that al-Shabaab's response to the famine "enormously weakened" them as Somalis blamed the group for exacerbating the crisis.[244]

And Somalis were right to be outraged. Hundreds of thousands of starving Somalis were forced to flee the drought-stricken areas controlled by al-Shabaab[245] as foodstuffs became more expensive and mortality rates spiked.[246] A recent report commissioned by the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization estimates that there were 258,000 "excess deaths," meaning those above the normal mortality rate, in south-central Somalia between October 2010 and April 2012, 52 percent of which were children under five years old. And most damning of all, 90 percent of the famine-related deaths occurred in south-central Somalia,[247] or in other words, in areas under al-Shabaab's control.[248] The extraordinarily callous response to the famine may well have been the proverbial final straw for many Somalis' patience for the group.

Internal Schisms

Al-Shabaab has managed to exacerbate its own problems by becoming entangled in squabbling among its leadership that has at times paralyzed the organization and even resulted in killings. It is unclear, however, how its most recent and dramatic round of in-fighting will affect its ability to wage its insurgency.

One of the most rancorous clashes within al-Shabaab is between those leaders who wish to pursue nationalist goals and those more interested in global jihad. This debate is a microcosm of the dilemma Muslim terrorists face all around the world. Global jihadis are drawn to struggles that feature Muslims resisting some sort of aggression, at least according to their interpretation of the conflict. But oftentimes, local Muslims can only be mobilized to wage a defensive jihad, and have little or no interest in the global jihadis' vision—in fact, the global jihadis' presence can sometimes antagonize local Muslims,[249] as has happened in Somalia.

When the terrorist groups were recently pushed from northern Mali, in their haste to depart they left behind a fascinating letter from Abdelmalek Droukdel, Emir of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), to his men operating in Mali. It is worth quoting as it perfectly illustrates the point about tensions between global and defensive jihadis:

> We should also take into consideration not to monopolize the political and military stage. We should not be at the forefront. Better for you to be silent and pretend to be a 'domestic' movement that has its own causes and concerns. There is no reason for you to show that we have an expansionary, jihadi, al-Qaeda or any other sort of project.[250]

Droukdel captured in his letter the strains his globally-oriented men were experiencing in dealing with locally-oriented fighters. It is the very same problem al-Shabaab struggled with for years. In general, the two ideological camps within al-Shabaab break down as follows: two of the four founders, Ahmed Abdi Godane and Ibrahim al-Afghani (since deceased), are interested in global jihad. They share this interest with another prominent al-Shabaab leader, Fuad Mohamed Khalaf (Shongole),[251] a Swedish Somali who acts as the group's financier.[252] A third founder, Sheikh Mukhtar Robow Ali, is a nationalist,[253] along with Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys.[254]

Aweys has publicly attacked the group's leadership for "globalizing the Somali conflict,"[255] and felt so strongly about his complaints that he withdrew Hizbul Islam, the wing of al-Shabaab that he leads, from al-Shabaab.[256] His principled stand should be taken with a grain of salt, however; Aweys is a wily opportunist who was compelled to join al-Shabaab after the group hammered his forces in 2009 and 2010. He also has well-documented links to the al-Qaeda network,[257] so he is not completely offended by international jihad. Aweys may have been looking for any excuse to leave the group anyhow, but whatever his motives, his departure suggests that he believed al-Shabaab was a sinking ship, and that it was not powerful enough to force him to stay. As will be seen, that proved to be a miscalculation.

Another player in all of this is Omar Hammami (Abu Mansour al-Amriki), the American jihadi, prolific Tweeter,[258] and no-doubt proud owner of the number two spot on *Foreign Policy* magazine's list of "Nine Disturbingly Good Jihadi Raps."[259] Hammami is believed to have joined al-Shabaab in 2006, but eventually had a falling out with Godane. He then went into hiding, though not well enough, apparently, as he was wounded in the neck

during an assassination attempt in April 2013 launched by elements of al-Shabaab.[260] All indications are that his luck finally ran out later five months later when it was reported that he was killed in an al-Shabaab ambush.[261]

Hammami documented at length the fighting between the global and nationalist factions, as have others.[262] What may have irritated him the most, however, is the tension within the group between its Somali and foreign members. As has already been discussed, foreign fighters occupy places of power within the organization, which does not sit well with everybody. Here again al-Shabaab's challenges reflect a wider problem that international jihadis have:

> The perceived legitimacy of the conflicts in the Balkans, Chechnya, Iraq, Afghanistan, Kashmir and Somalia drew foreign actors who did not act in the best interests of the local communities they grafted on to. This often created tensions among the jihadist factions themselves, or between the local populace and the militant actors. As a result, al-Qa'ida rarely succeeded retaining popular support among the populace or reorienting jihadist groups *en toto* to their tactical and targeting preferences.[263]

This is related to the issue of global jihadis versus nationalist jihadis, but is not the same. The Somali leadership do not trust some of the foreign fighters, believing them to be "possible spies and agents."[264] Apparently this distrust extended even to Fazul Abdullah Mohamed, al-Qaeda's leader in East Africa; it is rumored that the globals, Godane and al-Afghani, partnered with the nationalist Robow to have Fazul killed as they feared he was plotting to have them replaced.[265]

This distrust is not confined just to high-ranking foreign jihadis; most non-Somali fighters appear to have been at the very least disliked and treated poorly, and sometimes worse. Members of the *Amniyat* division, fighters loyal to Godane, were tasked with spying on foreign fighters,[266] and Hammami publicly griped about the "torturous training" that Shabaab recruits, particularly foreign ones, had to undergo. He also was displeased by the practice of summarily executing any foreign fighter suspected of being a spy.[267]

Another theory concerning Fazul's betrayal suggests there might have been jockeying for position by al-Zawahiri adherents after the death of bin Laden. Some analysts have suggested that the killing of Fazul, as well as Bilal al-Barjawi (another al-Qaeda leader) and an al-Shabaab official named Sakr,

were all orchestrated in order to eliminate bin Laden disciples.[268] Fazul was particularly known as a "bin Laden man," and Shabaab leaders may have believed his killing would curry favor with Zawahiri.[269] Hammami in the past accused the Shabaab leadership of betraying Fazul, but did not postulate on why they might have done so.[270]

There have also been more prosaic concerns over tactics that have led to dissension within al-Shabaab. Defectors have complained about Shabaab's "mass killing of innocent people, the hijacking of trucks carrying aid for civilians, the forceful taking of animals and taxes from people and child abuse in the name of jihad."[271] Aweys echoed the theme in one of his broadsides against the Shabaab leadership, criticizing the group's "wanton violence" that too often involved "aimlessly killing" civilians.[272]

And it would not be Somalia if there were not tensions over clan and resources issues. Despite al-Shabaab's best efforts to remain aloof from clan wrangling, it crept into the organization at the highest level. Robow reportedly became enraged at one point as he believed his fellow Rahaweyn were being used as little more than cannon fodder, placed at the front lines while foreign fighters malingered in the back.[273] He also refused to execute a captured TFG parliamentarian who was a fellow clansman, despite calls from other Shabaab leaders to do so. Instead, he allowed the man to go free, angering some of the others so greatly they threatened military action against Robow.[274] And when the Rahaweyn were suffering badly during the famine of 2011, Godane refused to allow aid into Shabaab-controlled areas. Godane is from Somaliland, and his people, the Isaq, were largely untouched by the disaster.[275]

One defector offered this bleak assessment of clan relations within al-Shabaab:

> I remember there were many times we waged a war against the TFG and its allies, and when one of us got injured and his clansmen were not near him to support him, the other fighters ran from him, carrying only those whom they knew personally or to whom they were related. That shocked me greatly. I asked myself many times, 'what will happen to me if I get wounded and I am left in the battle field and none of my relatives were in the group with me.' The answer was clear that I would be abandoned and be killed, which is not the end I wanted to see.[276]

Much of the information about the Byzantine struggles within al-Shabaab is difficult to corroborate, and contradictory at times. For instance, one report states that Bilal al-Barjawi, the al-Qaeda leader rumored to have been betrayed by Zawahiri adherents, was actually killed by an American UAV strike.[277] It is possible that al-Shabaab's leadership did somehow tip off the United States or an ally about al-Barjawi's whereabouts, thus making him vulnerable to a UAV, but it seems unlikely they would go to such lengths. There are also competing explanations for why Fazul was betrayed (if he was); it is possible he was betrayed both because he was a "bin Laden man" and because he was a distrusted foreigner, but no one apart from a handful of al-Shabaab leaders knows for sure.

Yet all these schisms were eclipsed in dramatic fashion in the first half of 2013. In April of that year, al-Afghani released an open letter to Ayman al-Zawahiri. In it, he accused Godane of consolidating control and brooking no opposition to his leadership, even building secret prisons to hold those who questioned him.[278]

Hard on the heels of al-Afghani's public rebuke came another one, this time from al-Zubayr al-Muhajir, a member of the Shura Council who was appointed to mediate between Godane and his rivals. Al-Muhajir wrote his own open letter, entitled "Yes, there are Problems," that decried Godane's abuse of foreign fighters—the letter reportedly also mentions the secret prisons al-Afghani was protesting in his own letter.[279] On 30 April 2013, Robow, al-Afghani, Aweys, and al-Muhajir signed a *fatwa* forbidding the killing of Hammami,[280] yet another rebuke directed towards Godane.

The letters were a surprise, particularly al-Afghani's as he and Godane were seen as being united in their global vision for al-Shabaab. But the letters proved to be simply a harbinger of the deepening of Shabaab's most serious rift by far, one that would be resolved in a spasm of violence that has left al-Shabaab's future unclear indeed.

After surviving the assassination attempt that left him wounded, Hammami had accused Godane of starting a civil war.[281] While Hammami was sometimes a self-involved blowhard prone to melodrama, it looks now that he was prescient in this case. In mid-June, patchy news reports began trickling out of Somalia claiming that Shabaab factions clashed in Hudur[282] and Brava/Barawe, and that al-Afghani had joined the anti-Godane faction led by Aweys, who was also joined by Robow and Hammami.[283] Soon, the reports were confirmed, and after the dust settled, it was clear that Godane

had moved swiftly and with extraordinary ruthlessness against his challengers. His men killed al-Afghani and another Shabaab leader, a man named Abul Hamid Hashi Olhayi. Robow fled to the shelter of his clansmen,[284] and while there are no reports on al-Muhaji's whereabouts, he may well be dead (as is Hammami, though it took Godane an extra month to finish him off). Aweys, ever the survivor, managed to escape the purge, and eventually traveled to Mogadishu where he was arrested, though it appears he may have been trying to defect.[285]

It was a dramatic and potentially game-changing series of events, and the implications for the group are unclear. This obviously has the potential to seriously weaken it; several of its most important leaders are dead, and others have fled or been captured. Hizbul Islam had already split from the group before Godane's coup, but this ensures their services will remain off-limits to him; indeed, depending on what happens with Aweys, they may be willing to fight against Shabaab, as might any militia Robow could raise from among his clansmen.

And this Muslim-on-Muslim violence will further damage Shabaab's reputation with Somalis. As discussed earlier, Islam forbids Muslims from killing fellow Muslims, hence the use by terrorist organizations of the distorted *takfir* ideology. But most Muslims see through the thin *takfir* justification; in fact, al-Qaeda lost significant support in Iraq because so many of its victims were fellow Muslims, to the point that several high-profile al-Qaeda ideologues voiced concerns about the animosity the group was inspiring.[286] Godane's brazen assault on co-religionists will only further prove to Somalis that he and the group he leads are not at all good Muslims, despite their rhetoric.[287]

This will also hurt the group's ability to recruit internationally. Given Godane's fixation on global jihad, one would expect that he would have a good rapport with foreign fighters who have traveled to Somalia to help him fight it. Yet he stands credibly accused by three prominent (former) al-Shabaab leaders of badly mistreating foreign fighters, was publicly at odds with their leader in Somalia, al-Muhaji, and distrusted prominent foreign terrorists so much that he may have conspired to have Fazul, the al-Qaeda leader, killed, as discussed earlier. Foreign fighters will be now very hesitant to come join such a man.

Furthermore, Godane could be left with a clan mess on his hands. The Emir is an Isaq from the North, and has no clan base at all in the South

(which perhaps partly accounts for his antipathy for clannism within al-Shabaab).[288] He has just purged a Rahaweyn (Robow) and a Hawiye (Aweys) from the ranks; given that the Shabaab *Shura* Council has been defunct for more than a year after Godane removed its emir,[289] Khalaf (Darod) appears to be the only high-profile leader still aligned with Godane who could inspire clan loyalty for Shabaab.

This episode likely cost the group some overseas financial support as well, as some foreign donors will take a dim view of Godane's attacks. Even before this most recent round of blood-letting, the group's brutality had alienated many within the diaspora, leading one Somali analyst to conclude that diaspora donations have "all but dried up."[290] Godane's actions will only tighten the purse strings of any supporters already concerned by the group's brutality.

But Shabaab has been killing Muslims for years, so donors still supporting the group before the purge had already proven they are not deeply concerned by Muslim-on-Muslim violence. And Khalaf, one of the group's money men with foreign contacts, remains. He was previously on the record in opposition to Godane,[291] but apparently underwent some introspection as fellow dissenters were mowed down. He has now acquiesced to the Emir's rule,[292] likely maintaining Shabaab's link to some foreign donors. But despite that, it is still reasonable to conclude that Shabaab lost foreign donations, even if only minimally, rather than gained any as a result of Godane's rampage.

However, these recent events have left Godane, the most radical of all of al-Shabaab's leadership, in firm control of the still-formidable group. It is hard to believe that anyone will question his authority after his bloody display, and his feared *Amniyat* assassins will command even greater respect. There is no one left now to challenge Godane's vision for the group, or to slow his pursuit of the most radical brand of Islamic terrorism.

Al-Shabaab has been divided before, and still managed to survive and even grow at certain points. As far back as May 2010, an International Crisis Group article described the group as "deeply fragmented,"[293] while another news report in March 2012 stated that the group was "on the verge of splintering."[294] Godane's recent purge has probably quelled the possibility of any more splinter groups forming for the time being, as most of his would-be challengers are now dead, in hiding, or in custody. But while there is reason to hope Shabaab's feuding has irreparably damaged the group, it is not wise to allow that hope to become a strategy.

Successes by the International Community

Carl von Clausewitz in his famous work *On War* declared, "public opinion is ultimately gained by great victories."[295] While he was referring to rallying domestic support for a government's war, his observation could just as easily have applied to the task of winning a population's support in an insurgency. Many people caught in conflict will wait to see which side is going to win, and then will throw their support behind the victor. As Eliot Cohen and others have written, "People will not support a government until they are convinced the counterinsurgent has the means, ability, stamina, and will to win."[296] It is a perfectly rational and understandable decision.

The coalition's offensive against al-Shabaab, then, deserves much credit for the group's recent problems, though since June 2013 it has stopped most of its major offensive operations against the group.[297] Al-Shabaab's losses have signaled to Somalis that the group is in serious trouble, and that it might be no longer worth supporting or tolerating. One of the clearest manifestations of this dynamic is the large number of defectors abandoning al-Shabaab after its recent territorial losses. One report from inside Somalia stated, "Over the past year, the number of al-Shabaab defections has increased steadily due largely to the group's continued loss of territory and support amongst Somalis."[298] Numerous defectors have echoed the same theme,[299] revealing not only the importance of the coalition's offensive, but the pragmatic and non-ideological nature of many of the fighters.

The coalition's capture of al-Shabaab's strongholds has damaged the group's income. No longer able to rely on the same level of taxes from Kismayo's port or Mogadishu's Bakara Market, it has had difficulty providing the same sort of financial benefits to its fighters that induced many of them to join in the first place,[300] and this has led to further defections. Furthermore, al-Shabaab has lost much of the infrastructure it used for transmitting propaganda, such as several of its radio stations,[301] another happy outcome of the coalition's offensive. Finally, while there are no solid numbers on just how many insurgents have been killed in the offensive, they are likely significant.[302]

The U.S. and its allies deserve some credit for al-Shabaab's difficulties as well. While the extent of U.S. assistance to the coalition is unclear, the Obama administration has acknowledged that it exists. In a letter to Congress 15 June 2012, the administration wrote:

> In Somalia, the U.S. military has worked to counter the terrorist threat posed by al-Qa'ida and al-Qa'ida-associated elements of al-Shabaab. In a limited number of cases, the U.S. military has taken direct action in Somalia against members of al-Qa'ida, including those who are also members of al-Shabaab, who are engaged in efforts to carry out terrorist attacks against the United States and our interests.[303]

There is no telling what a "limited number of cases" means, but *Wired UK* has characterized the U.S. campaign in Somalia as one of "jet bombing runs, naval gun bombardment, cruise-missile attacks, raids by Special Operations Forces, and assistance to regional armies such as Uganda's." *Wired* also speculated on the extent of the United States' UAV use, and estimated that the U.S. may have as many as 12 Predators and Reapers in the region at any one time, and an "unknown number" of the smaller Ravens[304]—the U.S. has provided up to eight of these unarmed Ravens to the AMISOM forces to assist in their intelligence gathering efforts.[305] There are also credible reports of the CIA operating a base in Mogadishu.[306]

The U.S. has had some success in targeted killings of high-level al-Qaeda and al-Shabaab terrorists in Somalia. Open source reports indicate that the U.S. has successfully targeted the following men:

- Aden Hashi Ayro, one of the founders of al-Shabaab, was killed in an airstrike May 2008.[307]
- Sheikh Muhyadin Omar, a senior ICU leader, was killed in the same airstrike that killed Ayro.[308]
- Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, leader of al-Qaeda cell in East Africa that carried out the bombing of an Israeli hotel on the Kenyan coast in 2002. Nabhan is also believed to have been heavily involved in the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998.[309]
- Bilal al-Barjawi, suspected mastermind of the 2010 Kampala bombings[310]
- It is unclear whether Abu Talha al Sudani, a senior al-Qaeda member, was killed by a U.S. airstrike or by the Ethiopians during their invasion of Somalia to topple the ICU in 2007.[311]

These are all high-level leaders who were important to either AQ or al-Shabaab, or both, and Somalia is well rid of them. It is difficult to quantify the affect their deaths had on the group, but at least one Somali commentator

has said that the loss of Shabaab leaders has led to poor morale among the fighters.[312] And U.S. Representative Tom Cotton, in remarks on al-Qaeda, made a point that applies to Shabaab's leadership as well: "When you have to worry about personal security, you barely have time to plan a meal, much less plan and execute a mass attack."[313]

The same is true of the bounty that the United States announced in June 2012 that offered more than $30 million total for information leading to the capture of seven of al-Shabaab's leaders. Robow, Godane, al-Afghani, and Khalaf are all on the list,[314] and there was a $5 million bounty each on Hammami and a Wisconsin native, Jehad Serwan Mostafa, currently fighting with Shabaab.[315] But nearly a year into the bounty period, none of them have been killed or captured by anyone other than Godane, who likely won't be claiming the reward. But that does not mean the project has been a failure, as it may have led the nine to be distrustful of associates or otherwise hide themselves so thoroughly as to be ineffective.

As has already been discussed, there is credible evidence that al-Shabaab had some links to the piracy industry that flourished for years in Somalia. While the relationship has never been proven, there are enough reports to constitute a convincing body of evidence. Furthermore, it is unrealistic to think that al-Shabaab would ignore the potential financial windfall piracy represented; the World Bank calculated in April 2013 that $315-$385 million was paid in ransoms since 2005.[316] While al-Shabaab probably did not commit acts of piracy, it is very likely they taxed or otherwise benefited financially from the industry.

The fact that Somali piracy has fallen on truly hard times recently likely hurts al-Shabaab as well. There has not been a successful hijacking since May 2012, and hijacking attempts have fallen by at least 75 percent in the same time span.[317] The piracy game has gotten so grim that the most notorious pirate ringleader, Mohamed Abdi Hassan, nicknamed "Afweyne" (big mouth), announced his retirement in early 2013.[318]

Hassan has probably shrewdly calculated that piracy is becoming a losing game given the increased maritime patrols from different countries, armed guards on the ships, and long prison sentences for captured pirates. He now is likely maneuvering for a respectable position, perhaps as a businessman, as he needs to do something with the millions of dollars he earned as a pirate ringleader. Or he might be looking toward becoming a humble servant of

the people—at a recent interview, he came prepared with a letter supposedly nominating him to the position of "Anti-piracy Officer."[319]

The international community has also heavily sanctioned al-Shabaab members, people and countries that support it, as well as the group as an entity. In March 2008, the U.S. officially designated al-Shabaab a terrorist organization under Executive Order (EO) 13224, opening the group up to a variety of sanctions;[320] in April 2010, President Obama in EO 13536 again named al-Shabaab as an entity to be sanctioned, and included several prominent al-Shabaab leaders such as Ahmed Abdi Godane, Hassan Dahir Aweys, and Fuad Mohamed Khalaf, and anyone "engaged in acts that directly or indirectly threaten the peace, security, or stability of Somalia."[321] A subsequent Executive Order, 13620, revised EO 13536 and included anyone involved in the Somali charcoal trade,[322] a major source of Shabaab revenue. The UN, for its part, has had sanctions of one kind or another on Somalia since 1992; in August 2012 it formally approved a list of Shabaab members and associates it was subjecting to a "travel ban, assets freeze and targeted arms embargo" pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1844.[323]

As with so many other aspects of al-Shabaab funding, it is impossible to fully quantify what effect these sanctions had on the organization, particularly as the ones imposed by the U.S. are relatively new. However, it is difficult to believe that the impact has been non-existent, given the formidable power of U.S. sanction regimes. The UN sanctions, however, were ripped by the UN's own report as the "limpest form of embargo imaginable" that were routinely and brazenly violated by a variety of countries and individuals trafficking weapons and sending money into the country.[324] Now that the United States has installed a sanctions regime, there is reason to hope it will begin to wear on al-Shabaab and its supporters, though initial reports are not encouraging. Saudi Arabia in October 2012 announced that it would stop importing charcoal from Somalia after previously dragging its feet on complying with the sanctions governing charcoal,[325] but a recent UN report claims that the charcoal export industry continues to thrive, and that Saudi Arabia remains a major destination for the illicit product.[326]

Summary

Al-Shabaab has reverted to guerrilla tactics not by choice, but by necessity. Its problems have resulted from its own blunders, particularly its brutality, its Salafism and reliance on foreign fighters, and internal bickering, but also from an aggressive AMISOM offensive the group has been unable to withstand.

Al-Shabaab is full of accomplished insurgents, and to ensure the group does not begin to regain traction, the coalition needs to mount a disciplined and coherent counterinsurgency campaign in support of the new government's state-building project. Yet, as the next chapter will explore, by all indications the coalition is not doing so. Rather, there are disturbing signs that it not only does not have a comprehensive counterinsurgency plan, but that some of its component countries are pursuing their own national interests and eroding the goodwill the coalition has accrued by pushing al-Shabaab back.

4. The Challenges of Counterinsurgency in Somalia

The fundamental principle of an insurgency is simple: it is a contest for the people. Both insurgents and counterinsurgents are locked in a battle over the ultimate prize of the people's support, or at least their acquiescence. Without it, there can be no victory—insurgents would find themselves with no base from which to recruit, no safe haven from which they could obtain food and shelter, and no source of intelligence. Local support is the source of an insurgent's greatest advantage, his ability to easily fade in and out of the population, thereby avoiding a crushing blow from his opponent. The same is true of the counterinsurgent force. Without the cooperation or submission of the people, it will find itself chasing a ghost and unable to bring its superior weapons to bear, harassed on all sides, betrayed and misled, utterly frustrated, and ultimately defeated.

Theorists and practitioners on both sides of the fight have commented on this for generations. Mao Zedong characterized guerrilla warfare thus: "Because guerrilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and cooperation."[327] General Giap, the brilliant North Vietnamese general, had this to say: "Without the people we have no information … they hide us, protect us, feed us and tend our wounded."[328] Robert Taber writes that without the support of the population an insurgent would merely be a "bandit" who "could not long survive,"[329] and David Kilcullen notes that counterinsurgency is "a competition with the insurgent for the right and the ability to win the hearts, minds, and acquiescence of the population."[330]

So the support of the people is critical, but what induces them to back the insurgents or the government? As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, al-Shabaab is primarily led by a radicalized Salafist, a "true believer" in the sort of Islam that demands an extraordinarily harsh *shariah* and which has a global agenda.[331] But many of al-Shabaab's fighters joined for reasons that had little to do with ideology; they were far more pragmatic,[332] having no particular loyalty to al-Shabaab, as evidenced by the high rate of defections from the group once its fortunes started to turn. It was only when it was in their interests to fight for al-Shabaab that they did so, otherwise they were

very willing to leave for a better offer—indeed, some have now been integrated into the Somali National Army (SNA), for instance.[333]

The same observation can be made about the Somali population at large. It is impossible to accurately gauge public opinion in Somalia, but it is likely that a significant majority are not "true believers"—indeed, many Somalis are Sufis who al-Shabaab routinely appalled and outraged with their brutal Salafism.[334] Much of the toleration and even support for al-Shabaab was likely for pragmatic reasons only, the most obvious of which would be a desire to survive al-Shabaab's reign.

Many of the tribes that were most firmly in al-Shabaab's camp, and which might still harbor some loyalty to it, are minority tribes[335] against whom the majority "noble" tribes discriminated.[336] Al-Shabaab constituted a better offer for minority tribes, and they very rationally chose it. And some of the businessmen who supported al-Shabaab in certain areas did so because the relative peace that the group imposed was good for business,[337] not because they all believed in the group's radical message.

So counterinsurgency in Somalia will be about presenting the better offer, convincing the mass of Somalis who very rationally are concerned about "what's in it for them" that the government best suits their needs. Everything the coalition does must bend toward this imperative, and needs to be specifically designed to convince Somalis that the government is their protector and facilitator of a better life. If the coalition can do so, it will win; if it cannot, it will lose.

Al-Shabaab did not understand, or at least did not care, about this lesson. As documented in the previous chapter, the group consistently alienated Somalis with, among other things, its brutality,[338] its Salafist excesses,[339] and its utter indifference to Somalis' suffering in the terrible 2011 famine.[340] In short, most Somalis living under al-Shabaab came to learn it was not in their best interests to have al-Shabaab in power, though for years they had no choice given how feckless and weak or nonexistent the Somali government had been for decades. This is what gives the government and AMISOM any chance at all in this fight—Somalis are looking for a better offer, and a heavily-federalized government that can deliver services and resist the urge to indulge in a level of corruption beyond what Somalis will tolerate might be it.

However, the coalition does not have an unlimited amount of time in which to convince Somalis it is indeed a better option. Al-Shabaab will

continue its attacks, seeking to create chaos and disruption at every opportunity, and cause Somalis to doubt the government. It also has launched its version of a charm offensive with Somalis: in Barawe it hosted a series of games to mark the end of Ramadan in 2013, and made a point of dispensing charity to the poor.[341] So there is an expiration date on Somalis' acceptance of the coalition's presence and their tolerance or support of the new government.

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And no matter how unpopular the previous regime, people of any country do not enjoy being occupied by foreign armies. This is a fundamental reality that affects all counterinsurgency campaigns; any foreign "liberator" will eventually come to be seen as an occupier whose presence will arouse resistance. David Kilcullen has written at length on how this dynamic has manifested itself in the global war on terror, describing what he terms the Accidental Guerrilla phenomenon. In this scenario, some citizens become guerrillas fighting against the invading force, not because they believe in the ideology of the insurgents, but for nationalist reasons—they just don't like being occupied by foreigners.[342]

In the documentary *Meeting Resistance,* several Iraqi insurgents interviewed for the film articulated this dynamic precisely when describing how they became involved in the fight against the international coalition. A man who had been imprisoned and tortured for three and a half years by the Baathist regime still took up arms against the Americans:

> The next morning I saw the American tanks and the American soldiers passing. I felt a fire in my heart … I began to see just one thing, that we'd become an occupied country. When they occupied Iraq, they subjugated me, subjugated my sister, subjugated my mother, subjugated my honor, my homeland. Every time I saw them, I felt pain. They pissed me off. So I started working.[343]

The counterinsurgents then find themselves fighting people they never had any intention of fighting and who are not their true enemy. The actual target of the invading force, the insurgents, benefit enormously as they can paint themselves as the defenders of local people against foreign aggression. Even if the locals still reject extremist ideology, they end up forming

a loose alliance with the terrorists against the intervening force.[344] The counterinsurgents are in deep trouble in this scenario, and only a massive expenditure of manpower and wealth deployed in pursuit of a sophisticated and competent counterinsurgency strategy can turn the tide.

We need look no further than the last ten years to see what happens to coalitions whose expiration dates come due and the Accidental Guerrilla phenomenon manifests. Kandahar, Afghanistan, in December 2001 "erupted in joy" after Mullah Omar fled the city,[345] and in the summer of 2003 in Baghdad, Iraq, "most Iraqis there still viewed [Americans] as liberators."[346] The insurgencies that followed constituted a brutal lesson of which the coalition should take note, as the danger of it becoming trapped in the Accidental Guerrilla spiral is very real.

In fact, Ethiopia has experienced this once already, though the backlash was even more immediate and determined than normal as it overthrew an ICU regime that was fairly popular with Somalis.[347] As a result, when Ethiopia invaded Somalia in 2006, it found itself violently resisted from the start by a variety of different groups, not just foreign al-Qaeda fighters and Somali Islamic extremists.[348]

So if a foreign force invades to topple a popular regime, we can rest assured that the nationalist backlash will be almost immediate. But in a case such as Somalia's, when an unpopular regime is being replaced, how long is the grace period for the foreign force's involvement? When is the tipping point before which the foreign forces are necessary to protect a weak government struggling to establish legitimacy, but after which the forces serve only to inflame an insurgency?

No one can know for sure, of course, as every intervention is unique in time, place, and the actors involved. But what we can do is analyze whether the coalition has been doing the sorts of things that will make the population support or at least tolerate its presence, and resist al-Shabaab's. If so, the grace period will be longer, giving the Somali government a chance to establish legitimacy and AMISOM to withdraw peacefully. If not, the scenario will play out in a far different, and decidedly less pleasant manner.

Geographical, Cultural, and Historical Factors

A critical first step in this analysis is to understand the relevant parts of Somali history and culture that will affect the window of opportunity. People are largely products of their culture and history, so the counterinsurgent must be intimately familiar with both to best know how to make a bid for their support. Unfortunately for the coalition, there are a number of factors at play that are going to reduce its margin of error.

Inhospitable Terrain

Counterinsurgency doctrine has much to say about how inhospitable terrain is highly appealing to insurgents looking for an area in which to hide and negate their foe's advantages in conventional weaponry. Gebru Tareke, a historian at Yale who has studied the Ethiopian insurgencies, describes the "ideal terrain" for insurgents as an "expansive area of forests, marshes, or mountain ranges and gorges."[349] Another scholar describes "swamps, mountains, and forests" as being an advantage for guerrillas,[350] while the U.S. Marine Corps *Small Wars Manual* warns that Marines should expect to battle insurgents in "mountainous, wooded terrain."[351]

A number of history's most famous insurgencies have made ample use of forbidding terrain. Since its inception, the FARC has hidden in the thick jungles of Colombia,[352] and the Malayan Races Liberation Army was so adept at jungle warfare that in response the British began a school that became known as the Jungle Warfare School.[353] The Taliban escaped to the Tora Bora mountains from which it launched its insurgency,[354] the Viet Cong hid so deeply in the jungle it was "virtually impossible" for the U.S. military to hunt them down, and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua survived the U.S.'s best efforts to eliminate them, in part because they made use of a mountain surrounded by jungle terrain. [355]

Unfortunately for the coalition, Somalia is endowed with several heavily forested and mountainous regions that are ideal for harboring an insurgent base, and al-Shabaab insurgents have already sought them out: the forests in Lower Juba, near Kismayo, and the Sanaag mountains in the semi-autonomous region of Puntland. The forests near Kismayo have served as a traditional sanctuary for extremists for nearly 20 years, and have been described as "a vast area of inaccessible jungles"[356] and "remote bush."[357] These areas

have already caused the coalition problems as the KDF's advance toward Kismayo was slowed when its mechanized units had trouble navigating the forests and al-Shabaab guerrillas made good use of the heavy cover.[358]

Perhaps more concerning is the mountainous Galgala region of Puntland with its network of caves and training camps. The area is notoriously inaccessible[359] and has explicitly been compared on more than one occasion to Afghanistan's Tora Bora Mountains.[360] One recent report noted that the vegetation is so thick in the mountains, and the weather hot enough during the day, that fighters may be able to evade targeting systems from weapons platforms, including infrared targeting.[361] Somalia's proximity to Yemen has in the past made it an ideal base from which to both send and receive weapons and fighters across the Gulf of Aden; reports of boatloads of al-Shabaab fighters in that area,[362] and of skiffs stuffed with weapons likely meant for al-Shabaab,[363] suggests the group is utilizing this traditional smuggling route.

Worse yet, a militia led by Yasin Kilwe operates in that area and now hosts several hundred al-Shabaab fighters, including senior leaders.[364] The Puntland authorities have never been able to subdue Kilwe's group, and it has reportedly even captured parts of the Galgala region while also launching a deadly attack against a military base in Puntland; in February 2012, the militia formally joined al-Shabaab.[365]

The Culture

Perhaps the most famous feature of Somalia is the clan system that still dominates its society today. The country has six major clans and "countless subdivisions"[366]—apart from a few small groups located primarily in the South,[367] every Somali belongs to a clan, the lineage of which he can likely recite back 20-30 generations.[368] Clans, in conjunction with a type of political contract known as *her*, serve as the fundamental ordering principle of Somali society. Smaller sub-groups within clans, known as *diya*-paying groups, have first demand on an individual Somali's loyalty.[369]

This has had severe ramifications for governments trying to rule Somalia. Ioan Lewis points to the existence of clans as a primary reason for the Somali state's collapse in the early 1990s and its subsequent failure to revive itself. Lewis' book, *A Pastoral Democracy*, describes the "call of kinship" that resulted in a "centrifugal polity" within Somalia, and which was ultimately

"incompatible [with a] centralized nation-state."[370] J. Peter Pham believes that it is "no surprise" that a centralized government within Somalia has not been able to succeed given the country's clan dynamics, and offers that it may well have been the unique pressures of the Cold War that kept the most centralized regime Somalia has ever experienced, that of Siad Barre, intact for as long as it was.[371]

Somalis are also fiercely independent people who dislike nearly all systems of authority. Long-time Somali scholar Lee Cassanelli has remarked upon "the tendency of Somali nomads to resist any form of political authority imposed from outside the clan,"[372] and another author notes that Somalis are "invariably described as independent in nature."[373] Yet another author tells of how Somalis still recount with pride the story of a local Majerteen leader, Sultan Hussan, who refused to allow the Imam of Muscat to build a fort on Majerteen land, and returned the valuable gifts the Imam had offered. As the author notes, "It is not so much in the story itself but in the telling of the story, in seeing it as a story worth relaying as a point of pride, which reflects on the Somalis as a people who valued their autonomy."[374]

This strain of autonomy is directly related to the pastoral existence the majority of Somalis lead[375]—in the late 1980s it was estimated that nearly two-thirds of Somalis earned their living from animal husbandry and related work.[376] In a country frequently subjected to droughts that has only one river that flows year-round,[377] pastoralism is a difficult existence marked by a constant struggle with nature and human competitors for water and grazing areas—in such an environment, pastoralists have little choice but to be highly independent. This has obvious implications for the Somali government's task of establishing legitimacy and a level of control: the pastoral culture is "essentially anarchic"[378] and does not allow a centralized system to develop.[379]

Trying to fight against an insurgency in the midst of a deeply divided society with narrowly-defined, but fiercely-held, loyalties is going to be very difficult for the coalition. David Kilcullen has written that "local people in tribal societies will always tend to side with closer against more distant relatives, with local against external actors, and with coreligionists against people of other faiths."[380] In fact, the most extreme manifestation of that dynamic is captured in a chilling but famous Somali saying: "My cousin and I against the clan; my brother and I against my cousin; I against my brother."[381]

The KDF has already received a taste of this reality. Some al-Shabaab fighters have simply melted back into their clan militias and elders have been unwilling to share information on them,[382] while many families have members in both al-Shabaab and the militias allied with the coalition. KDF troops believe they tip each other off,[383] and they are probably correct.

Not only does the clan system make it more difficult for a government to form and win Somalis' loyalty, but the system makes Somali society highly volatile. One of the very first Europeans to write about the Somalis, Richard Burton, remarked upon the "blood feud[s]" that had existed "for ages" between some of the Somali tribes.[384] Ioan Lewis believes that it is "unrealistic … to expect a complete absence of conflict and raiding in Somali society"[385] given that Somalis are "warlike and their society highly militaristic."[386] The nomadic/pastoral culture of Somalia weighs heavily here again, as "traditionally, nomadic contexts such as the one in Somalia lack an authority that can enforce agreed-upon laws or common-sense requirements."[387]

Related to this is the tradition of taking blood revenge for a killing; at least one al-Shabaab defector claimed to have joined the group to take revenge on the killer of a family member, [388] and al-Shabaab was able to win the sympathy of some clans eager to take revenge on other clans for past abuses.[389] Yet in Somali society there is the added twist of "collective punishment." Revenge does not have to be taken on the actual killer—simply killing a member of the murderer's clan will suffice.[390]

Even in the midst of the violence associated with the offensive against al-Shabaab, there has been a separate current of clan violence. Clashes in the central region of the country between clans competing for land and water killed 26 people,[391] and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from minority or otherwise despised clans are being abused in IDP camps at the hands of Somalis from other clans.[392]

A 2012 *Foreign Policy* article argued that "Somaliland, the former British colony, Puntland, Galmudug, and southern Somalia has always been governed and delineated within clan boundaries, rather than foreign-engineered fantasies."[393] This trend seems to only have strengthened during the last two decades of chaos,[394] and may have accelerated in the vacuum being left as al-Shabaab is pushed out of various areas. Abdi Rashid, the International Crisis Group analyst, is quoted as saying that there now is a "free-for-all contest in which clans are unilaterally carving up the country into unviable clan enclaves and cantons."[395] The major cities are particular flashpoints: the

Figure 5. Leader of al-Shabaab in Mogadishu Sheikh Ali Mohamed Hussein. Photo used by permission of Newscom.

Hawiye, by virtue of their having wrested control of Mogadishu from Siad Barre, believe they should control the capital and, by extension, the country.[396] Meanwhile, most of Somalia's major clans have a presence in Kismayo,[397] and a recent history of fighting for control of the city. In 2009 the Marehan helped al-Shabaab oust Madobe, Ogaden leader of the Ras Kamboni Brigade, from the city; Madobe is now back, and the Ogaden may feel it is their turn to rule this highly diverse city.[398]

It is also impossible to disentangle clan dynamics from the conflict between al-Shabaab and the coalition. Some Somalis say that the fighting between Atam's group, now allied with al-Shabaab, and the Puntland authorities was triggered in part because of a clan fight over territory.[399] And al-Shabaab gained some legitimacy from being able to bring a measure of peace among clans under its rule, and by successfully portraying the TFG as a "group of disparate clan chauvinists."[400] However, it also was unable to avoid becoming entangled with clan issues. One defector said that he had to leave the group because his clan had a falling-out with al-Shabaab,[401] while Somalis from the town of Hagar viewed al-Shabaab administrators with deep suspicion because they were from a different sub-clan.[402]

Unsurprisingly, the clan issue hovered over the recent selection of MPs and the forming of the new government. There is an "unwritten rule" that key government positions must be divided among different clans: if the president is a Hawiye, the prime minister should be a Darod, for instance. The new government appears to have adhered to this rule. President Mohamud

is an Abgal, a sub-clan of the Hawiye; Speaker of the Parliament Mohamed Jawari is a Rahaweyn, and Prime Minister Abdi Farah Shirdon is Darod. Furthermore, the so-called "4.5 Formula" is still in effect; it is a "template for distributing jobs in a fixed ratio, stipulating that in each set of appointments, the four major clans get one post each and the minor clans get the equivalent of half of a post."[403]

It is not necessarily a negative development that clan sensitivities are accommodated in the new government; it is unrealistic to expect any Somali government could be free of the issue, and any that was would have little legitimacy in the eyes of Somalis still firmly immersed in the clan culture.

But clans introduce an extraordinarily thorny complication to the state-building project. Somalis will always side with their own clan before they will with any government. The increased levels of violence that clan fighting brings will make it difficult for the coalition to convince Somalis that the government is their best guarantee of stability and a better life. And clans create a tangled social and political landscape that is almost mind-numbing in its complexity. As was mentioned earlier, the Ogaden and Marehan fought for control of Kismayo, but yet are sub-clans of the same Darod clan; similarly, the fighting in Puntland referenced earlier was between sub-sub-clans of the Darod, the Majerteen and Warsengeli.[404]

Navigating these pitfalls is made even more difficult as the loyalties and alliances within the society are constantly shifting. Chapter 2 discussed Somali pragmatism, which leads to such fluidity; this situation has obvious implications for AMISOM as it is currently allied with several local clan-based militias such as the ASWJ and the Ras Kamboni Brigade. It should not fool itself into believing that these militias can be relied upon in a pinch, or that they have the coalition's best interests at heart. The goals of these militias align for the time being with the coalition's, but if that stops being the case, they will do what they believe is best for themselves and for their clan, even if it includes turning on their former allies.

And finally, this means that non-Somalis will constantly struggle to understand the complex and constantly-in-flux alliances within the Somali world. It is a minefield where a single false step can alienate one clan or another, or even turn them into enemies. It is going to be a colossal challenge for AMISOM to avoid being manipulated by wily Somalis whose first loyalty lays elsewhere, and who understand the intricacies of how allegiances in the Somali clan context are assumed and discarded.

There is also no getting away from the fact that Somalia is almost exclusively Muslim while AMISOM and the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) is composed primarily of Christian troops. Al-Shabaab has already been at pains to paint the AMISOM intervention as an infidel invasion that obligates other Muslims to come to the group's aid. The group's spokesman, Shaykh Ali Mohamud Rage, urged Somalis to "take up arms" in "defending Islam and the country,"[405] while a senior commander spoke of "defending their religion and land from the invaders."[406] And when Kenyan Prime Minister Raila Odinga recently sought assistance from Israel, al-Shabaab gleefully trumpeted the visit as proof that Kenya was a Western puppet fighting a war against Islam.[407]

Al-Shabaab's Twitter account has been pinging with the same theme: coalition forces are routinely referred to as "crusaders," "*Kuffar*," and "apostate allies."[408] Al-Shabaab also notoriously posted photos of the body of a French commando killed in a botched hostage rescue attempt; while they posted the photos both to mock the French and boast about having thwarted the attack, there was another reason as well. One of the photos prominently displayed a gold cross the commando had been wearing with the first part of the accompanying caption reading: "A return of the crusades."[409]

As has already been discussed, however, Islam is not monolithic, and Somalis are primarily Sufi and reject many of the Salafist beliefs of the al-Shabaab leadership.[410] However, broader Islam still has a strong "obligation to defend by force component" that makes it obligatory for any "good" Muslim to defend other Muslims that have been attacked, particularly by unbelievers.[411] In fact, a political science lecturer at Baghdad University estimated that 85 percent of the violence directed at the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq was "motivated by religion. Because of the religious upbringing of those young men they perceive every aggressor, every occupier, as an enemy they should fight."[412]

There is no way of knowing how much resonance among Somalis the idea that Muslims have an obligation to wage jihad against infidel invaders has. But what we do know is that al-Shabaab very successfully appealed to this obligation in the past when rallying support against the Ethiopian invasion in 2006.[413] In fact, al-Shabaab has had success in recruiting fighters, particularly young men, by appealing to their obligation to wage violent jihad, a task made easier by many of these young men's exposure to Salafist ideas. As established in Chapter 2, Salafism, which places a very strong

emphasis on jihad, has been rapidly gaining ground in Somalia, likely aided by money flowing out of the Gulf states that has allowed Salafist clerics to set up *madrassas* throughout Somalia.[414]

The noted Somalia expert Ken Menkhaus has argued that Islam has historically not served as a mobilizer to action for any sustained amount of time in Somalia—it is normally more able to rouse Somalis in diaspora communities that believe themselves to be under threat by the surrounding culture. So Somalis in Kenya and Ethiopia, for instance, are more prone to look to Islam for inspiration than the average Somali inside of Somalia. The exceptional circumstance when Islam, including calls to violence, does gain increased resonance inside Somalia is when a "foreign, non-Muslim threat" enters the country;[415] or in other words, a force precisely like AMISOM.

...there is danger that the Somali people, particularly young men, have been growing more radicalized as years of insecurity, corruption, and lack of opportunity have taken their toll.

Furthermore, there is danger that the Somali people, particularly young men, have been growing more radicalized as years of insecurity, corruption, and lack of opportunity have taken their toll. While there is no one path to radicalization, such negative factors drive "resentment and anger, which radical Islamists use in their recruitment program."[416] For years now Somalia has had a stranglehold on the top spot on *Foreign Policy's* Failed State Index, which ranks countries on a variety of factors including "delegitimization of the state," "group grievance," and "economic decline."[417] It similarly has been the worst performer in Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index for years;[418] more than two decades of such bleakness likely make radical Islamists' claim to be able to deliver a peaceful and just state attractive indeed.

Radical Islam's appeal may also be growing in Somalia because of the discrediting of so many other ideologies. Socialism, clannism, liberalism, and militarism have all been tried to some degree at one time or another in Somalia's history, and none have brought peace, stability, or prosperity.[419] But radical Islam has not been tried as a solution for any length of time, which likely inclines some Somalis to give it a chance. Again, many Somalis reject the extreme views of al-Shabaab, but if they grow tired of the coalition, appeals to their Muslim obligation to resist infidel invaders will become persuasive.

Al-Shabaab's appeal to young men highlights another reality of Somalia that is problematic for the coalition: Somalia has a very young population, with a median age of 17.8.[420] What makes it such a problem is that the unemployment rate in Somalia for young people aged 14-29 is 67 percent,[421] and multiple reports have drawn links between high youth unemployment and violence, including terrorist violence.[422] In fact, one goes so far as to predict that in the future "the dramatic rise of youth unemployment is likely to constitute the fundamental engine of political violence and terrorism."[423]

The so-called "Youth Bulge" has already created problems throughout Africa and beyond. Youth are strongly represented in African terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram and AQIM,[424] and constitute the majority of al-Shabaab fighters.[425] Furthermore, 24 of the 29 countries with the highest population growth rates in 2006 were also experiencing "high levels of violence"[426]—Somalia's current birth rate is estimated at 6.2 births per woman,[427] and the country's population is estimated to grow more than 500 percent by 2100.[428] The competition for very limited resources and jobs is only going to get more intense in Somalia, and the government faces a formidable challenge in keeping millions of Somali youth away from the seductive calls of terrorists promising a radical Islamic solution.

Given the highly parochial nature of their clan loyalties, it is unsurprising that Somali society has a serious xenophobic streak, a complication that gave al-Shabaab trouble as well, as documented in Chapter 3. Mary Harper, the BBC World Service's Africa Editor, has documented some of the creative slurs Somalis employ to describe outsiders, including *gaalo*, which means "nonbelievers" or "infidels."[429] And Omar Hammami, an American citizen and al-Qaeda member, in a letter peevishly remarked upon Somalis' "mistrust of foreigners" and their "nature that prevents outside interference and prohibits suggestions from others."[430] Ioan Lewis simply remarks that Somalis traditionally have "an open contempt for other people."[431]

This contempt turns to racism at times. Somalis do not consider themselves Africans—Somalis in northeastern Kenya felt this so strongly that they demanded British colonialists classify them as "Asian," which probably was "less due to seeking benefits of being considered 'Asian' and more to their conviction of ethnic superiority." In fact, Somalis' distaste for being ruled by "dark-skinned, Bantu people" may have been a major cause of the *Shifta* War in Kenya. [432]

Mary Harper writes that many Somalis see themselves as "somehow apart and often make cruel jokes at the expense of people they describe as 'Africans,' 'blacks,' or 'those with broad noses.'"[433] "Black" African tribes such as the Bajuni and Bantu in Somalia are despised by other Somalis[434] who sometimes refer to the Bantu as *Adoon* ("slave"), an inflammatory practice that continues even among some Somali communities in the U.S.[435] In other words, many Somalis have a certain disgust for people who incidentally comprise most of the countries contributing troops to AMISOM.

It is tempting to consider Somalia essentially a homogenous society given that its people have the same language, religion, culture, and ethnicity,[436] but in reality, Somalia is a very deeply divided society. Clans, for instance, are highly complex entities that are riven by class and status divisions between "commoners" and "nobles." The latter trace their lineage back to the mythical founders of their clans, while the former's forebears were either assimilated into a clan or were in some other fashion not "lineally pure."[437] These class divisions generally can be traced between the pastoralists (the "nobles" from the *Samale* line—the Darod, Dir, Hawiye, and Isaq) and the agropastoralists (the "commoners" from the *Sab* line—the Rahaweyn[438]) who farm the area between the Shebelle and Juba Rivers. These class divisions have historically been a source of tension as the northern "noble" clans indulge in feelings of "proud superiority and contempt" for the Rahaweyn in the South, while for their part they engage in "resentment and isolation."[439]

The 1980s hosted the rise of a new class distinction within Somalia, that of the urban elites. Flush with money and with access to the halls of power, they used land registration laws (backed with a healthy dollop of armed intimidation) to claim large swathes of the rich agricultural land in the South. The rural agriculturalists were helpless to stop the expropriation,[440] leading to yet another fissure within Somali society.

Related to the class divisions within Somalia are the racial divisions that have already been discussed. An exception to the superficial homogeneity of the Somali people, the Bantus are a small minority of ethnically distinct agriculturists who settled along the Juba and Shebelle Rivers and who appear more "African" than the average Somali.[441] These Bantus are referred to as *jareer* ("hard, kinky hair") in the Somali language, and constitute "denigrated minorities [who are] socially inferior."[442] The Bantus suffered terribly during the civil war as they had no way to protect themselves, making them easy prey for rapacious bands on the prowl for plunder.[443]

These class and racial divisions lead directly to regional divisions. The Rahaweyn and Bantu clans are clustered in the South along the Juba and Shebelle Rivers, making the South a target of disdain for the pastoralist-dominated North. This has resulted in differing regional interests[444] with real consequences; just before independence and during the years before the 1969 coup, the Hizbia Digil-Mirifle Somali political party that represented the (Rahaweyn) Digil-Mirifle clans, advocated for federalism "with a large measure of regional autonomy" because they feared that centralized rule "would mean discrimination against them and rule by northerners."[445] In the early 1900s the Shidle and Eile, Bantu agriculturalists upon whom Somali tribes looked down "as inferior and by nature slaves," welcomed the Italian occupation because it "meant additional security and protection for the Bantu against the incursions of the Galjal Somali."[446] And as a final example, after unifying with southern Somalia in 1961, Somalilanders became "second-class citizens" and "junior partner[s] in the state"; "the overwhelming majority" of the brutality inflicted by Siad Barre's regime on the North was perpetrated by "Southerners whom the people of Somaliland came to no longer see as co-nationals, but as an alien occupying force."[447]

Even some of Somalia's most revered nationalists from its history were not immune to these divisions. Despite his success in rallying a diverse collection of Somalis to his cause, Sayyid Hassan's appeal was by no means universal. When the dictator Siad Barre lionized the Mullah during one of his never-ending campaigns to wring some legitimacy from whatever source he could, a number of clans and Islamic sects clandestinely distributed an alternate, and much less flattering, history of the Mullah.[448] Furthermore, many of the clans associated with the Geledi state (to be discussed shortly), as well as a number of other Southerners, saw the Mullah and his dervishes "not as liberators but simply as predatory northerners."[449]

A Political History

This brings us to Somalis' history of resisting foreigners. The story is mixed here as in the past Somalis have been happy to strike bargains with foreign powers if they believed it was in their interest to do so. For instance, in 1896 two Northern sultans, Yusuf Ali and Osman Mahmud, graciously offered to raise a Somali force to assist the Italians in defeating the Somalis' ancient

foe, the Ethiopians.[450] And along the Benadir coast, a number of clans signed treaties with the Royal Italian East African Company that in essence pledged loyalty to the company administration because of the economic benefits it had brought.[451]

But there are also tales still famous today in Somalia of nationalists resisting foreign forces. The most well-known example is that of Sayyid Hassan, the "Mad Mullah," already discussed in Chapter 1 and above. Still known as "the Master" in Somalia,[452] the Mullah served as a model for some violent jihadist groups in Somalia.[453] Similarly, Somalis still romanticize certain warlords who resisted British colonialism, and view them as Robin Hood-type characters who used cunning and violence to get ahead.[454]

The most concerning aspect of Somalia's history for the coalition is the country's deep antagonism toward Ethiopia and Kenya. Ethiopia is Somalia's greatest enemy; Somalis and Ethiopians have been fighting with each other since the 15th century,[455] with their most recent tussle, known as the Ogaden War, ending in 1978 after the Somali army was driven from Ethiopia.[456] Ethiopia's 2006 invasion of Somalia sparked riots in Mogadishu,[457] and fighters determined to resist the ENDF streamed into al-Shabaab's ranks,[458] including some Somali-Americans.[459] President Mohamud characterized Somalia's history with Ethiopia as one of "conflict, a history of hate, a history of violence, a history of animosity."[460] Though he went on to say that both countries were dedicated to putting that history behind them, 600 years of rancor cannot be easily swept away.

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Somalia's relationship with Kenya is also difficult. As described in Chapter 1, the *Shifta* War was fought from 1963-1968 between the newly-independent state of Kenya and ethnic Somalis in the northeastern part of the country who were fighting to join with Greater Somalia. The *shifta* were for several years supported by the Mogadishu government, but after some hard fighting the uprising was eventually quelled.[461] Since the war, however, there have been "numerous instances" of the Kenyan government abusing Somalis in that area.

> Most notable was the implementation of a shoot-to-kill policy in the North East Region, two massacres in Garissa and Wajir … and a nationwide 'screening' of all ethnic Somali's [*sic*] residing in Kenya during late 1989 and early 1990. According to Africa Watch these measures led to instances of rape, beatings, stock seizures, detentions, arrests and potentially many thousands of deaths that remain officially unrecognized.[462]

Al-Shabaab has pounced on Kenya's presence in Somalia as a propaganda opening; one of its very first tweets recalled the Wajir massacre cited above.[463] Relations between Kenya and Somalia continue to be "severely strained," especially given Somalia's irredentist claims on northeastern Kenya.[464]

The new Somali government no doubt understands better than anyone that Somalia does not have a strong history of centralized government. The critical piece around which AMISOM's entire endeavor revolves, a viable and legitimate Somali government, has very little precedent in Somali history. One author writes, "other than the combined effect of the clan system, tenets of Islam, and *xeer* [the legal system of Somalia under which elders serve as judges and help mediate cases using precedents], there was no centralized Somali authority or centralized state on any level previous to the colonial era."[465]

There have in fact been instances in Somalia's history of government-like structures, but none of them possessed the breadth or depth of control associated with the government of a modern nation-state. In the 9th or 10th century, the Adal Sultanate grew to possess large swathes of northern Somalia,[466] but it is unclear how much control over Somalis the Sultanate actually had.[467] From the mid-13th century until the 17th century, a confederation of tribes known as the Ajuran Confederation, led by a sub-clan of the Hawiye tribe, the Ajuran,[468] controlled large parts of what is today south-central Somalia.[469] However, the confederation never formed "a cohesive territorial entity," but rather controlled a patchwork of areas in the south-central region.[470]

The Ajuran dynasty was eventually driven from power in the 1700s by the joint efforts of the Wacdaan (a sub-clan of the Hawiye) and the Geledi. Thereafter these two clans, though divided by differences "in way of life, language, and tradition," nonetheless "formed a close and lasting alliance." They were also eventually joined by another clan, the Murusade, and took as clients a *jareer* group farming along the banks of the Shabelle River. This

state, now known as the Geledi state, became modern-day Afgoye town, and the same clans still control it today.[471]

The Geledi state is interesting as it was composed of disparate clans and ethnicities spontaneously allying, and then maintaining that alliance after the exigencies of war faded. The state "possessed a quite elaborate system of government with ranked office holders," likely inspired by the structure of the coastal Arab city-states,[472] and during the height of its power was also able to demand tributes from its allies.[473]

However, the Geledi state cannot be considered the equivalent of a modern nation-state. The ruling sultan "never actually administered his confederation's constituents; he did not stand at the head of any hierarchy of officials who attended to the day to day affairs of the various clans,"[474] nor was the state ever anything more than a "loose confederation of southern clans." Furthermore, the Geledi state was held together by "shared economic needs, the threat of a common enemy, and strong leadership;" when that leadership began to appear weak, as when Sultan Yusuf Muhammad was killed in battle in 1848, clans began to desert the alliance,[475] no doubt feeling their interests were no longer being properly served. The Geledi state eventually fell apart after several ill-advised military campaigns and a cattle plague, and ended up being "torn by internal conflicts."[476]

During the colonial era, Britain did little to set up in what is now Somaliland the sort of government institutions that marked much of its imperial efforts in other colonies; it saw Somaliland as little more than a convenient spot from which to supply its garrison in Aden,[477] and so was mostly disinterested in exerting its control over the colony.[478] The British did not, then, even try to put a government structure in place that bears any resemblance to the current Somali government.

There is some dispute among scholars over the intrusiveness of the Italian colonization project in the southern part of the country. One author contends that while Italy did extend control into the hinterlands, it utilized a level of indirect rule even more benign than that normally employed by the British.[479] But others write that Italy ruled its colony in a very aggressive manner;[480] this fact, coupled with an anti-slavery law the Italians passed, resulted in a sharp rebellion erupting from the Bimal clan.[481] But whether the Italians' colonization was so light as to be barely noticeable by Somalis, or highly intrusive, neither model bears much resemblance to the structure of the new Somali government.

As already discussed in Chapter 1, the democratic government formed after independence in 1960 lasted only nine years and was characterized by "inexperienced and inefficient bureaucracy, which became increasingly corrupt with the passage of time."[482] During its brief life, this "top-down democracy"[483] struggled to harmonize the strong political differences within Somalia that led to an eruption of political parties—by the time of its last multi-party elections in March 1969, Somalia had more parties per capita than any other democratic country apart from Israel.[484] Clannism was rampant; in their fierce competition for electoral support, the parties made appeals along regional and clan lines, which served to exacerbate the already-existing fractures within the society.[485]

The longest lasting, and most centralized, of modern Somali governments was the uninspiring and brutal regime of the dictator Mohamed Siad Barre. He ruled with an iron fist until 1991 when his regime could no longer bear the weight of multiple rebellions and collapsed into a bloody shambles.[486] Since then, Somalia has seen no true governance; a series of weak transitional governments rose and fell seemingly with the seasons,[487] while the ICU held power only briefly.[488] Ostensibly, AMISOM and the rest of the international community are dedicated to helping a sovereign, legitimate national government that controls all the land within its borders take root in Somalia; if this happens, it will be the first time in that country's history it has.

To sum up: a foreign force composed primarily of black, Christian troops that hail from several countries that are Somalia's traditional enemies have invaded a xenophobic, Muslim country infamous for its violent tribal politics and which has a history of resisting foreign armies but no history of supporting a centralized government.

5. Assessing Counterinsurgency Efforts in Somalia

The cultural and historical realities of Somalia, as described throughout this monograph, are going to narrow the coalition's window of opportunity, but it still has the fact of al-Shabaab's unpopularity giving it time. And history is not destiny; the coalition can conduct itself in such a way as to make a case to the Somali people that the government is worthy of their loyalty, or at the very least of their tolerance. So how is the coalition doing so far with this task?

The first step to countering a problem is accurately identifying it, and there are indications that coalition forces recognize the group's latest evolution. In January 2013, an AU official working on Somalia issues explicitly described al-Shabaab as waging a guerrilla war,[489] and a *Foreign Policy* article has reported that Kenya does not want to risk becoming entangled in a guerrilla war like the one in Mogadishu.[490] And nearly two years before Kenya invaded Somalia, it promised to U.S. officials that "not a single Kenyan boot" would enter Somalia for fear of stirring up Somali resentment at a foreign invasion.[491] Of course, Kenya ultimately did put Kenyan boots on the ground in Somalia, but it seems safe to say the coalition understands the potential for an insurgency.

So if the coalition recognizes al-Shabaab's insurgency, has it responded with a robust counterinsurgency campaign? The answer is a resounding "no," and the problems started at the very beginning.

Planning: Too Little, Too Late

Counterinsurgency campaigns are difficult, complex undertakings fraught with peril for the unprepared or inexperienced. Because of this, meticulous planning must be conducted before any military adventures begin. A RAND report spells out just what is required:

> The lead-up to most nation-building missions affords ample time for detailed planning, which should involve both the civilian and military components of the mission. Among the first issues to be addressed are the mission's objective, the intended scale of

> commitment, and the institutional arrangements for managing the intervention ... Most interventions are launched for some immediate, usually negative purpose, e.g., to halt aggression, civil war, famine, genocide, or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This purpose may be achieved quite quickly, but the intervening authorities will then be left with the more difficult, time-consuming, and expensive task of refashioning the society in which they have intervened.[492]

The most recent cautionary tale about the perils of not planning a COIN campaign is the U.S.'s experience in the Iraq War. Gordon and Trainor's essential book on the invasion of Iraq, *Cobra II*, lays out in painful detail how serious planning for the post-war phase of the intervention was undertaken only several months before the actual invasion, and then was only done with a strong aversion for nation-building. Once the insurgency erupted, the military had no comprehensive plan for suppressing it, and the repercussions were dire.[493]

There are a number of indicators that suggest that AMISOM has neither planned nor is executing an effective counterinsurgency strategy. More than a year after Kenya began its incursion, it had "only just begun planning for the peace" and "neither AMISOM nor the KDF appear to have a long-term counterinsurgency strategy."[494] Nor does it look as though AMISOM has an agreed-upon definition of victory, which suggests it has not done critical long-range planning that would include an exit strategy. In August 2012, Lieutenant General Andrew Gutti, overall commander of the AMISOM forces, said that AMISOM would pull out once it had trained a Somali army.[495] An official at the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in February 2012 that the offensive would continue until al-Shabaab was "wiped out" or unable to launch any significant military strikes.[496] For its part, Kenya's Defence Ministry Spokesman initially projected Kenya's incursion lasting for "three or four weeks;" Kenya has since said the campaign will be long but that it will "see it through."[497] And another article reports that the taking of Kismayo, accomplished in October 2012, was the military "endgame" of AMISOM's efforts.[498] Such confusion suggests that either AMISOM does not have a grand strategy, which would obviously imply it does not have a COIN strategy, or that it is not being forthcoming about it.

If AMISOM did have a coordinated COIN plan, it should be manifesting itself now that its troops have gained control of large parts of the country. But tellingly, there is only slight evidence of coalition troops employing COIN tactics now that they have pushed al-Shabaab out of many areas. The commander of Ugandan forces in Somalia, Brigadier Paul Lokech, did claim that the Ugandan People's Defence Force has already been conducting COIN operations in Mogadishu,[499] and there have been several reports of AMISOM taking pains to avoid civilian casualties.[500] But in Kismayo, Kenyan soldiers are not running regular patrols into the city and have little presence there at all, instead staying inside their bases on the outskirts of town.[501] Nor are they collecting intelligence from the local Somalis, cordoning villages, conducting house raids, or performing any other tactics of a counterinsurgency campaign.[502]

It is possible that Kenya is deliberately keeping its profile as low as possible in the Kismayo region in order to avoid the perception of an occupation, which would explain its lack of high-profile COIN activities. There is merit to that motivation, as it might delay the creation of Accidental Guerrillas, but it is a delicate balance to strike. As will be discussed later, security is absolutely critical to establishing the legitimacy of a government and winning the population's support, and the KDF runs the risk of encouraging armed challenges to its control if it does not aggressively pursue counterinsurgency.

There is another, more troubling explanation which we will explore in more detail later. The KDF might be implementing its alleged plan to carve out Jubaland, part of which could entail allowing its allied militia, the Ras Kamboni Brigade, to take over security in the area. If this is the case, it is a very bad development indeed for the Somali government's prospects of unifying the country.

Training: "Shoot and duck"

Whatever the actions and motivations of the different AMISOM actors, the coalition is not conducting COIN in a coordinated or planned fashion, which means it is not doing it well. But this is, unfortunately, far from the last mistake the coalition has made.

A foot soldier's role in fighting an insurgency is critical. Soldiers interact most frequently with the population whose support is so important, so

soldiers blundering about with no idea of how to properly execute the tasks of counterinsurgency can be very damaging. Counterinsurgent troops need a different skill set from the traditional warrior's, which means that specific training and even a certain mentality is required, a "flair for dealing with civilians."[503] The U.S. Marine Corps believed so strongly in the necessity of training troops specifically for fighting insurgents that its *Small Wars Manual* devotes an entire chapter to the subject.[504]

Without such training, the results can be damaging indeed. The Nigerian army is currently having extreme difficulty suppressing Boko Haram in the northern parts of the country, in part because its soldiers are untrained in COIN tactics.[505] President George W. Bush's administration focused on building a force designed for conventional conflict, which left it ill-equipped to go about necessary nation-building activities in Iraq and Afghanistan,[506] and contributed to the Iraqi population turning against the American presence.[507] And in the war that haunts the U.S. still, Vietnam, part of the blame for the loss has been pinned on the fact that U.S. servicemen were untrained in counterinsurgency tactics.[508]

Counterinsurgent troops need a different skill set from the traditional warrior's, which means that specific training and even a certain mentality is required, a "flair for dealing with civilians."

The bulk of the troops trying to suppress al-Shabaab have no training in the specific skill set necessary to succeed in counterinsurgency. Kenya's elite rangers and special forces have had some counterinsurgency training from the British and Americans.[509] Yet the rest of Kenya's forces are a different story; one KDF soldier offered the following analysis of fighting insurgents: "In guerrilla warfare you don't need training … You just need to know how to shoot and duck."[510] And one of Kenya's allies in the current fight, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, publicly questioned whether the Kenyan military was prepared for guerrilla fighting.[511]

The records of the other security forces that make up the coalition are mixed, but none are crack counterinsurgent forces. The ENDF has fought a number of domestic guerrilla movements in the Oromia, Afar, and Ogaden regions of Ethiopia,[512] but failed in Somalia to quell the al-Shabaab-led insurgency that began in 2006, and which resulted in the ENDF being driven from the country. The Ugandan People's Defense Force has experience fighting

insurgents in the north of Uganda, yet its actions there have been stained by credible allegations of human rights abuses, and it remains feared and disliked by some Ugandans in those areas.[513] And Somalia's national security forces have a whole host of problems, not least that they are largely composed of "groups of untrained young men" used to the power a weapon brings.[514] These are serious issues as relying on troops untrained in counterinsurgency is an ongoing liability for the coalition, and increases the chances for mistakes that will narrow its window of opportunity.

Government Legitimacy: "Legitimacy-deficit"?

Central to the task of defeating an insurgency is the efficacy of the indigenous government. Prospects for a successful counterinsurgency campaign depend greatly on the "creation of an effective local government that earns the support of the people."[515] The U.S. Army's current doctrine on counterinsurgency describes how "success requires the government to be accepted as legitimate" by the majority of the people,[516] while Eliot Cohen has written that government legitimacy is the "main objective" for counterinsurgents.[517] In short, there is little hope for success if the government is unable to establish legitimacy.

The U.S. has learned this lesson through sad experience in the past. In one of the seminal accounts of what went wrong in Vietnam, Robert Komer fingers the "incapacity of the regimes [the U.S.] backed" as "perhaps the greatest single constraint" to U.S. chances of success in that conflict.[518] General Westmoreland echoed the idea when he said that "none of our efforts had any chance of success in the periods during which the government was weak, divided, and thus ineffective,"[519] while another observer simply described the South Vietnamese government as a "travesty."[520] More recently, some knowledgeable Afghanistan watchers believe the venality, corruption, and incompetence of the Karzai government is to blame for the difficulties the International Security Assistance Force faces in that country.[521]

The international community might take heart when listening to the remarks made by UN representative to Somalia, Augustine Mahiga, upon the occasion of new Somali parliamentarians being sworn in to office in August 2012. The ceremony marked the end of the TFG and the beginning of the process of forming a new government, the one currently in power as

of this writing. Mahiga declared, "The new MPs, selected after broad-based, grass roots consultations and representing all of Somalia's clans, have been successfully screened against objective criteria and are now ready to start their important work."[522] Having a truly representative government, free from corruption and ready to work for the good of the Somali people, is truly an important first step.

However, the process of selecting the new MPs has seen allegations of corruption, nepotism, and clannism. Reports have alleged "political bickering, seat-buying schemes and threats of violence … with unprecedented levels of political interference, corruption and intimidation,"[523] "vote buying and influence peddling,"[524] and "intimidation and corruption."[525] Perhaps not surprisingly, 14 warlords have reportedly been selected as MPs, and seats have been sold for as much as $40,000[526] or as little as a few thousand, a scandal that may well have already damaged the new government's legitimacy.[527]

Discontent swirls about other aspects of the process of forming the government. The UN's September 2012 Forecast for Somalia expressed concern that the new government may be associated with its TFG predecessor[528] that was in 2011 the subject of a withering report from the International Crisis Group that characterized it as "inept, increasingly corrupt and hobbled by President Sharif's weak leadership."[529] Any association by the new government with the previous one can only be negative, yet most of the new MPs are linked with the TFG in some fashion.[530] Nor does it help that the process of selecting the new government is similar to the one that was used to form the TFG, particularly the so-called "4.5 formula" that is supposed to guarantee sufficient representation for all Somali clans.[531]

We have already discussed Somalis' suspicions of foreigners, so any hint of foreign involvement in the new government has the potential to harm its legitimacy as a true representative of the Somali people. Such was the fate of the transitional governments that preceded the current one: they "lack[ed] popular legitimacy because Somalis tend to see them as foreign creations."[532] Al-Shabaab made good use of the opportunity and was able to convince swathes of the population that the most recent TFG was a "foreign concoction."[533]

Some Somalia watchers believe association with external powers has already tainted the new government.[534] And al-Shabaab is desperately trying to make the case: "A spokesman for the Shabab denounced Mr. Saaid as a stooge of foreign powers. 'The new prime minister is not different from those

before him—they were all brought by Westerners,' [said] Ali Mohamud Rage, the spokesman."[535] It is unclear how average Somalis feel about the issue, but it will be damaging if they view the new government as a foreign creation.

The new constitution drafted before the selection of the parliamentarians has not escaped criticism either. The document was drafted by a panel of independent experts that did much of their work outside of Somalia until the latter stages of the task. Once the draft was completed, a number of powerful Somali interests, including the President of Puntland and representatives of the ASWJ militia, reworked it; the constitution was edited yet again by a committee according to the wishes of those same powerful interests. All of this editing and re-editing angered some Somalis who felt the independent experts' work had been hijacked, particularly the work they had done on the question of federalism.[536] One Somali writer offered this unhappy assessment:

> The process is fundamentally flawed because political expedience, secrecy, exclusion and hastiness mar the mandate and selection of the commission members, the drafting of the document and the adoption of the draft constitution. Therefore, like the previous charter, the current draft-constitution has legitimacy-deficit.[537]

The process for creating a new government and constitution will never be perfect, and there will always be discontent among those who believe they have lost out. This is especially to be expected in a country as fractured as Somalia that has been without a properly functioning government for so long. But while it is impossible to accurately gauge how deep Somalis' discontent with the new government goes, and therefore how much damage to the government's legitimacy has been inflicted, the variety and specificity of the reports suggests that there is cause to be concerned. The ill-will that the process has stirred up in some will not alone derail the government's ability to stand as an alternative to al-Shabaab, but it has narrowed the already-small window of opportunity the government has to make its case.

Security: "It is hard not to worry."

The government may have gotten off to a shaky start, but legitimacy can be built. Counterinsurgency theory offers an important suggestion for where

the Somali government should start: establishing security. The "Beginner's Guide to Nation-Building" identifies "public security" as one of two "first-order priorities" for counterinsurgents.[538] Another theorist lays out the reasons why: "If the great mass of the population knows it will be protected by a strong, just government, it has no reason to cooperate with the guerrillas, and the system of intelligence and supply that sustains all guerrilla movements breaks down. Without popular support the mopping up of the hard-core die-hards is fairly easy."[539]

The converse of that, of course, is that if citizens feel the government cannot protect them, they are not going to cooperate with it in opposing the insurgents. For example, locals in Kandahar are hesitant to resist the Taliban for fear of retribution, as there is no guarantee the government in Kabul can protect them;[540] the counterinsurgency expert Max Boot wrote that the "key to winning the [Vietnam] war was to provide security for … villagers, to reassure them that it was safe to side with the government … the most immediate need was to provide villagers with security against the guerrillas."[541]

It is not just counterinsurgents who recognize the need to woo the populace by ensuring their safety. When Islamic extremists took over northern Mali in 2012 they imposed order on a previously unstable situation, similar to what the Taliban did in Afghanistan, and even created a hotline people could use to report crimes.[542] The ICU brought a level of stability and peace to Mogadishu after years of vicious conflict, and by doing so elicited "broad and even passionate public support" from many Somalis.[543] It is a testament to people's need for security that al-Shabaab, despite its notorious brutality, gained a good deal of legitimacy by bringing a level of peace to the areas it dominated, something multiple Somali governments had failed to do.[544]

It is hard to overstate the importance of delivering security to the population during counterinsurgency campaigns, as evidenced by how much emphasis al-Shabaab has placed on the security it supposedly provided. After being driven from its strongholds, the group embarked on a propaganda campaign attempting to paint AMISOM as spoilers of the peace that al-Shabaab had worked so hard to bring to the region. The group even offered statistics for the town of Baydhabo, claiming that crime had decreased by 98 percent in the region under their rule.[545] It also regularly takes to Twitter to make its case, such as this tweet from 24 February 2013: "With the #Kenyan

invasion, however, looting, extortion & bloodshed is now the order of the day where stability, peace & tranquility reigned."[546]

The coalition has already failed several times to protect Somalis from retribution. The ENDF and an allied militia, the ASWJ, captured El Bur in Central Somalia from al-Shabaab in March 2012, but withdrew several months later. The terrorists moved back in, and a gruesome series of beheadings of suspected coalition sympathizers followed, with several of the bodies being publicly displayed as a warning. A Somali commenting on the events stated, "many residents want to support the TFG, but they cannot because the TFG is unable to prevent al-Shabaab retribution."[547] In March 2013, al-Shabaab retook the key town of Hudur after coalition forces and residents who feared retribution from the terrorists left it.[548] Whatever the reason for the withdrawal, it was damaging as it suggests to civilians that the coalition may abandon them at any time, leaving them vulnerable to reprisal attacks. It will now be more difficult to persuade understandably frightened Somalis, particularly from that region, to cooperate with the coalition.

There are other security trends that will not help to assure a fearful population. Al-Shabaab still controls parts of the country, and as recently as November 2012 they launched well over 100 attacks that resulted in nearly 300 deaths.[549] And as the group has been forced out of various cities and towns, security vacuums have often opened up behind them—a number of nongovernmental organizations have reported on insecurity increasing in towns freed from al-Shabaab's grasp,[550] and some Somalis have reported that life was more secure, and therefore better, under al-Shabaab.[551] One journalist reported a "sense of fear" among Somalis he interviewed, and a reluctance to speak about al-Shabaab.[552] AMISOM acknowledged the "gap" that is left behind its advancing forces, and says that it is filling that hole with Somali National Army (SNA) and other Somali security forces.[553]

But part of the problem lies with the SNA forces. As mentioned earlier, troops fighting a counterinsurgency must not only be trained to do so, but must also be good troops to begin with. Walter Laqueur has described how "success or failure of a guerrilla movement depends ... on the tenacity and aptitude of the enemy"[554] (meaning the counterinsurgent troops), and as Gebru Tareke notes, "disgruntled, demoralized, and ill-disciplined troops do not fight tenaciously."[555] The truth of those words was perfectly demonstrated recently in Mali when its army crumpled in front of an onslaught by radical

Islamists, with *Time* magazine characterizing the troops as "demoralized, rarely paid, sometimes barely fed, and poorly armed."[556]

It is alarming, then, when one hears reports of SNA troops fighting among themselves, as happened in August 2012.[557] A report in November 2012 found that SNA troops had not been paid for months and were getting "restless;"[558] that restlessness manifested itself in March 2013 when hundreds of them deserted their posts in Baidoa in protest at not receiving their wages.[559] And the SNA's performance was so poor in Afgoye that AMISOM moved in to replace it, fearing that it was pushing people into the al-Shabaab fold.[560] Add to this the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea reporting that al-Shabaab has infiltrated the Somali security forces,[561] and there is reason to be concerned about the SNA and other Somali security forces' ability to establish security.

There is positive news, however. There has been a noticeable increase in peace in Mogadishu,[562] and the largest market in the city, Bakara, has seen renewed life. Yet what AMISOM and the SNA must do is convince people that the peace is permanent, as every insecure day that passes will bring another small dose of doubt to Somalis about who is best suited to protect them. One of the merchants in Bakara Market benefiting from the new peace summed the situation up perfectly: "Now truly there is opportunity here and I have many new customers ... Al-Shabaab, though, it is a group full of clever tactics. I am concerned they can come back. Already they are killing government officials. It is hard not to worry."[563]

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Coalition Politics: With Friends Like These

The anti-al-Shabaab coalition that has formed to battle the terrorists is a diverse one, composed of a hodgepodge of local clan militias and national armies. These local militias upon which AMISOM has to rely add a destabilizing dynamic to the already creaky coalition. There are rumors that

the ENDF's and ASWJ's withdrawal from El Bur may have been due to an "unspecified conflict" between the groups;[564] another report warns of the "rising power" of local militias,[565] and fighting over spoils has broken out between supposed allies in some areas.[566] And while local militias are critical to AMISOM's control of Mogadishu, AMISOM commanders don't trust them, a justified wariness given that at least one militia allied with AMISOM has since become the personal army of a warlord.[567]

And as was explored earlier, Sheikh Ahmed Madobe, the leader of the Ras Kamboni Brigade, was once considered a terrorist by the U.S. He is now the KDF's fast friend in the Lower Juba region, and is running Kismayo for the time being. No doubt this is precisely the sort of pragmatic arrangement that is necessary to bring a measure of peace to Somalia, yet it also does not inspire confidence in the stability of the coalition.

There are squabbles both within AMISOM and with other parts of the international community as well. *The East African* newspaper ran a story that mentioned the rivalry among AMISOM troops from different countries, and contended that an arms race was ongoing between Uganda and Ethiopia.[568] "AMISOM sources" have groused about Kenya pursuing its own national interests ahead of the AMISOM plan agreed upon at the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which has led to "strains in the alliance."[569] And Uganda, enraged by a UN report that alleged it was meddling

Figure 6. Police Units of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) stand in position after concluding training in the Somali capital Mogadishu. Photo used by permission of Newscom.

in the Democratic Republic of Congo, threatened in November 2012 to withdraw entirely from AMISOM.[570]

Perhaps the area with the greatest potential for AMISOM disunity is the rich prize of Kismayo and its surroundings. There was disagreement between factions within the Kenyan government and military as to which candidate, Dr. Mohammed Abdi Gandi or Madobe, should lead the autonomous enclave of Jubaland, while the Ethiopians supported Madobe.[571] Meanwhile, the Somali government opposes altogether the creation of an autonomous Jubaland.[572] Madobe is currently the interim governor and held talks with the Somali government in March 2013, yet those talks failed utterly,[573] but that has mattered little, especially since Madobe has been in charge since Shabaab's ouster.

On top of the obvious dangers that come with coalition in-fighting, Kenya's actions in the Lower Juba region risk plunging it, and by association the entire coalition, into the truly Byzantine and ruthless world of Somali clan politics. An Ogaden, Madobe's control of Kismayo gives credence to reports emerging from Kismayo that Kenya has focused on propping up the Ogaden clan, rather than focusing on winning all Somalis' support in this critical region.[574] Some believe this is because the Kenyan military effort has largely been planned by Kenyan-Somalis, most notably Minister of Defence Mohamed Yusuf Haji, with ties to the Ogaden sub-clan.[575]

As was discussed earlier in this chapter, the Kismayo region is highly diverse,[576] which means there are a number of tribes in the region that have a minority presence there, such as the Rahaweyn, Bantu, Dir, and Hawiye. These tribes are extremely suspicious of Kenya's attempts to position the Ogaden as the dominant clan, and supposedly have shifted their support to al-Shabaab because the group was perceived as being largely even-handed with the area's patchwork of clans.[577] Furthermore, the Marehan sub-clan sided with al-Shabaab against Ras Kamboni when it was driven from Kismayo in 2009; the Marehan now fear they will face reprisals given the militia's cozy relationship with Kenya.[578]

This convoluted saga highlights a difficult and fundamental problem that puts the entire project of stabilizing Somalia at extreme risk. As has already been established, the only way to truly defeat al-Shabaab and bring stability to Somalia is to establish a decentralized, legitimate Somali government. Some of the national armies inside Somalia that should be dedicated to helping the government become such are instead pursuing their own

country's interests first. This is unsurprising, but in doing so these countries are making the Somali government's uphill climb to legitimacy only steeper.

The so-called Jubaland Initiative is a perfect example of this. It has been rumored in many circles that Kenya is in fact attempting to set up a friendly, autonomous proxy state in the Lower Juba area where all the jockeying for position described above has been going on. Jubaland, from Kenya's perspective, would provide a buffer against al-Shabaab, the better to protect Kenya's people, its tourism industry, and the new port being constructed at Lamu.[579] Kenya hopes Jubaland will stem the flow of Somali refugees into Kenya and provide an area into which refugees currently in the country could be repatriated, thereby removing an unpopular source of instability from within Kenya's borders.[580]

Kenya has denied its intention to form Jubaland, though leaked diplomatic cables show that in talks with the U.S., Kenya had been advocating for precisely that.[581] The Kenyan prime minister at the time, Raila Odinga, later tried to soothe the international community's fears about such plans, but Ethiopia, for one, remains skeptical.[582] Kenya has also recently urged the international community to assist in repatriating Somali refugees from Dadaab back to liberated areas of Somalia,[583] one of the reasons Kenya wanted Jubaland to be formed in the first place.

The Somali government, unsurprisingly, has been largely cut out of the negotiations around the issue,[584] and does not have much say in anything that goes on down there. Kenya allowed charcoal exports from Kismayo to resume over the protests of the government, and even went so far as to refuse to allow a Somali government delegation on a fact-finding mission to leave the Kismayo airport in November 2012. A tentative first step to resolve the issues was taken recently when the SFG and Madobe signed an agreement in Addis Ababa establishing an interim administration, but the agreement essentially punted on most of the most contentious issues.[585] The fundamental disagreements remain, and a confrontation is inevitable, barring some extraordinary negotiation and statesmanship from Somalia's leadership.

Treatment of Somali Civilians: Do No Harm

While the need to protect civilians from retribution has already been discussed, it makes good sense that any campaign to woo the support of the

population includes treating them well, and at the very least not harming them. *Small Wars Manual* stresses that "tolerance, sympathy, and kindness" should characterize a Marine's interactions with the local population.[586] John Nagl writes that only "minimum force" should ever be used when fighting an insurgency, as doing otherwise diminishes people's support for the government.[587]

This is the same truth al-Shabaab failed to understand, outlined in the section on al-Shabaab's brutality in Chapter 3, just applied to counterinsurgents. A quick look at several other insurgencies is enough to highlight the counterproductive effect any brutality, even inadvertent, from counterinsurgent forces can have. When the Dergue regime in Ethiopia was waging its fight against insurgents, its troops at times engaged in "indiscriminate brutality" against civilians that, rather than cowing them, motivated them to further support the rebels.[588] During a security operation in 1998, Nepali police forces engaged in violence so arbitrary and brutal that it ended up driving civilians into the ranks of the Maoist insurgents.[589] Iraqi civilian casualties "hardened the attitudes of many Iraqis against the Americans;"[590] a member of the Iraqi insurgency interviewed by journalists describes precisely this dynamic when he recounted a battle between coalition forces and Fedayeen fighters near a mosque:

> Seeing the black smoke, the fumes, the destruction that was inflicted on Abu Hanifeh ignited the passionate aggressions, created a very strong reaction among the citizens—the normal citizens—those who are not Party members. They rushed with the Fedayeen to defend Abu Hanifeh.[591]

In fact, al-Shabaab has already benefited in the past from its foes abusing civilians. A former al-Shabaab fighter described how he yearned for revenge after TFG soldiers behaved like "animals" by harassing Somalis and inappropriately touching women at checkpoints. Other former fighters cited AMISOM's bombing of towns, a practice that built "intense hatred" toward the international force,[592] while "the corruption and misbehavior of the transitional government was one of the jihadi group's biggest recruiting tools."[593]

The unacceptable behavior of TFG forces was unfortunately common and has been widely documented in news articles as well as reports by human rights organizations. After al-Shabaab was driven from Afgoye, complaints emerged that government forces were looting the food aid intended for the

residents,[594] and that "widespread robbery" of local merchants by armed men wearing government uniforms broke out soon after.[595] A 2011 Human Rights Watch report stated,

> The population in areas controlled by the Transitional Federal Government and its allies has also been subjected to violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. These include arbitrary arrest and detention, restrictions on free speech and assembly, and indiscriminate attacks harming civilians.[596]

It is unclear how much this distaste for the TFG will be transferred to the new government. However, as has already been discussed, a number of parliamentarians also served in the TFG, and of course AMISOM propped up the TFG for years, while TFG soldiers and allied militias that perpetrated abuses are still affiliated with the government. These past abuses are going to stain the new government.

Too many reports have also emerged documenting abuses against civilians by the post-TFG coalition forces. Human Rights Watch has issued several reports that are cause for serious concern, including its most recent in March 2013 concerning the plight of IDPs in Somalia:

> Members of displaced communities in Mogadishu faced serious human rights abuses including rape, beatings, ethnic discrimination, restricted access to food and shelter, restrictions on movement, and reprisals when they dared to protest their mistreatment. The most serious abuses were committed by various militias and security forces, often affiliated with the government.[597]

The BBC documented abuse in IDP camps as well, reporting that 1,700 women were raped in 2012 in the camps, and quoting a UN estimate that 70 percent of the assaults were perpetrated by "men in uniform."[598]

Human Rights Watch has also reported on "summary executions and torture" perpetrated by pro-government militias in Beletwayne and Baidoa,[599] and in December 2012 urged Kenyan authorities not to repatriate Somali refugees to liberated areas because of "ongoing fighting and abuses against civilians in areas controlled by Kenyan forces and allied militias."[600]

One case in January 2013 sparked an international outcry and is particularly concerning as it suggests the government tried to cover up a crime committed by government security forces and then engaged in reprisals against

those who reported the abuse. A woman who reported being raped by members of the Somali security forces was arrested along with several others for "insulting a government body," among other charges.[601] The charges against her were eventually dropped, though the journalist involved in the case remained in jail for months afterward.[602]

In April 2013, President Mohamud in a speech to police cadets in Mogadishu admitted for the first time that Somali security forces had engaged in rapes against civilians—he went on to say that security forces who rape and rob Somalis need to be fought the same as al-Shabaab.[603] It was an important and helpful step by the president, and hopefully it will serve as a warning to the Somali security forces that mistreatment of civilians will not be tolerated. Every incident of such abuse badly hurts the coalition's cause, and will make some Somalis wonder if they might not be better off withholding support from the coalition or even actively assisting al-Shabaab.

Who is Winning?

It would be most helpful to conduct a broad-based survey of Somalis in order to determine how they feel about the coalition's efforts so far, thereby giving a clue as to how long the coalition has to make its case to the Somali people before they start to resist it. But the only evidence currently available about their views is anecdotal or based on deduction, and it gives a mixed picture.

The coalition is still ensconced in the window of opportunity provided it by al-Shabaab's unpopularity, as there is not a broad-based insurgency under way at the moment. Violence continues, but that was to be expected. However, there are rumblings that show the coalition's mistakes have been noticed. Kenya's actions in the Kismayo region are a particular sore spot with some Somalis: as early as October 2012, some Somalis were referring to the KDF as "foreign invaders."[604] And a group of Somali MPs threatened to bring forward a motion to kick the KDF out of Kismayo because it allowed charcoal exports to resume in defiance of the government; they were also upset by the KDF's mishandling of the security situation. Some in the Somali government tried to downplay the MPs' reaction by saying that they were simply upset because they saw the KDF incursion as a "foreign occupation."[605] If that is the case, it is even more worrisome than if the MPs had merely been upset about security and charcoal.

A significant number of Somalis believe that Kenya has tampered with Somali politicians in order to reach a favorable agreement on contested sea borders, an issue Kenya would like to clear up so they can pursue hydrocarbon exploration in the area.[606] This rumor likely has particular resonance with Somalis as it touches on an old fear of foreign exploitation that dates back to at least the 1800s, when interriverine clans were suspicious that the British were trying to grab their land.[607]

Another sticking point is Kenya's withdrawal schedule. One journalist reported in March 2013 that there was a growing expectation among Somalis that the KDF would be leaving "soon."[608] But Kenya has given no indication that it plans to leave in the near future; in fact, it has nearly doubled its force strength inside Somalia since December 2012.[609] This is setting up a serious incongruity between Somali expectations and reality, and could easily spark the Accidental Guerrilla phenomenon when Somalis begin to wonder why Kenyan soldiers are still inside their country.

But there is evidence that at least some Somalis support the coalition for the moment. Locals do occasionally tell coalition forces, or at least journalists traveling with them, of the presence of roadside bombs.[610] Authorities in Puntland claimed to have seized a cache of weapons meant for al-Shabaab after being tipped off by locals.[611] And Kismayo residents alerted coalition troops to the presence of al-Shabaab's highest-ranking female terrorist, who was arrested along with other al-Shabaab fighters in October 2012.[612]

More tangible evidence of how Somalis feel about the situation inside the country is found among the stories of expatriates, refugees, and IDPs. People vote with their feet, as the saying goes, and if Somalis are returning to the country in large numbers, it is a quite strong vote of confidence in the coalition. If they continue to stay away, or even continue to flee their homes or country, it would be a worrying sign.

The evidence seems to be clear that expatriates are starting to return in unprecedented numbers, at least for now. A BBC article published in August 2012 claimed that "thousands" of expatriates are returning to Mogadishu,[613] largely to take advantage of business opportunities that have suddenly opened up. While reliable numbers are hard to come by, cash and investment seems to be accompanying the expatriates,[614] another indicator of people's confidence (however shaky) in Somalia's stability.

The numbers on refugee and IDP returns is mixed, but at best there appears to be a slow trickle of displaced Somalis returning to their home

regions, though there also continues to be refugees leaving the country and other Somalis being displaced internally. UN High Commissioner for Refugees data shows an increase in spontaneous IDP returns every month January to March in 2013, and as of April 2013, more than 14,000 refugees had returned in the first three-plus months of the year. But the number of returnees is still a very small fraction of the overall displaced population,[615] and some of the repatriation is likely due to Kenya cracking down on refugees inside its borders.[616] So the data on refugee and IDP flows do not support any conclusions on how much optimism average Somalis feel, but watching these numbers for trends in the future could be a strong clue for how the coalition's project is faring.

6. Concluding Thoughts and Lessons for SOF

This study of al-Shabaab and counterinsurgency in Somalia is meant to contribute meaningful insights for SOF education and pre-deployment research. Surely there are lessons that can be learned from the efforts of Ethiopian, Kenyan, Ugandan, and AMISOM forces who have been fighting this terrorist group for many years. There are also important lessons that can be drawn from the way in which a terrorist group like al-Shabaab can severely undermine its own effectiveness. One of the most recent promising areas of research in the field of security studies has explored ways in which governments and security forces can exacerbate the internal challenges and vulnerabilities faced by all clandestine armed non-state actors. However, before highlighting these and other lessons for SOF, it is important to say a few words about what we believe lies ahead for Somalia and al-Shabaab.

Projecting the Possible Future of al-Shabaab

One of the quickest ways for anyone to look foolish is to try to predict the future, particularly for a situation as complex and fluid as the one in Somalia. The reality is that no one can know with any great degree of certainty how the next months and years will unfurl in Somalia—dramatic, game-changing events could occur tomorrow, fundamentally altering the outlook for al-Shabaab. But al-Shabaab's and Somalia's history suggest several possible scenarios that are worth considering. Counterinsurgency doctrine is also useful for analyzing al-Shabaab's possible future trajectory, particularly the influence the new government will have on the group's fortunes.

Al-Shabaab's future depends very much on how the coalition conducts counterinsurgency operations and how the government manages the formidable task of state-building set before it. If the coalition is able to carve out enough time and space for the government to build legitimacy with its people, al-Shabaab will wither and die. It will be unable to recruit or replenish its ranks, other than forcibly, which brings many of its own problems with it. It could still receive money from the Gulf and from the areas it controls, but all of its other major sources of revenue will remain lost to it. Attracting

international fighters would be very difficult, both from the diaspora and from international jihadis, and would contribute to the group remaining unpopular in Somalis' eyes. With a legitimate, representative government in Mogadishu, al-Shabaab will never return to prominence in Somalia.

But the chances of such a government forming are remote, for all the reasons discussed in this report. At the very least, it is going to take a very long time—whether or not Somalis have patience for waiting as long as it will take is an open question.

If the government begins to increasingly resemble the TFG, as opposed to a fresh start, there are several different scenarios that could play out for al-Shabaab. First, it could find that its old playbook of combining nationalist and religious appeals could become increasingly effective as Somalis begin to resent the presence of Christian, foreign troops on their soil propping up an illegitimate government. Its Salafist appeals could gain greater traction as Somali society would be thoroughly disillusioned, again, with the failure of every other "fix" to bring peace to the country. Salafism feeds off such disappointments, and the country could tilt further into the Salafist camp, broadening and deepening al-Shabaab's potential base of support.

In this scenario, al-Shabaab would rise once again to prominence; an al-Shabaab-led guerrilla campaign that garnered broad-based, popular support among Somalis would be impossible for AMISOM to defeat. Al-Shabaab's international networks would be reinvigorated as well, and countries contributing troops to AMISOM would continue to suffer domestic terror attacks of the type Kenya recently suffered at the Westgate Mall, increasing pressure on their governments to withdraw from Somalia. AMISOM would have little choice but to depart the country anyway because of the insurgency, and would leave in its wake an emboldened al-Shabaab likely to again pursue its destabilizing agenda.

This cannot happen in the near future as al-Shabaab's brand is currently so badly damaged it will be difficult for Somalis to rally to it, no matter how compellingly it pitches its nationalist/religious solution. The depredations it committed against Somalis, particularly when it refused to allow food aid into the South during the 2011 famine, proved to many Somalis that the group did not care about them at all. The nationalist side of al-Shabaab's rhetoric is no longer convincing, as it is clear that powerful leaders were pursuing an internationalist agenda in which most Somalis were not interested.

But Godane purged the most outspoken nationalists from leadership, and now espouses an internationalist agenda in which most Somalis are not interested. If the coalition does not do better, it would be unsurprising if it was battling a white-hot, al-Shabaab-led insurgency in two or three years, one that it would have little chance of defeating.

...Godane purged the most outspoken nationalists from leadership, and now espouses an internationalist agenda in which most Somalis are not interested.

Another possible scenario is that a splinter, or entirely new, group takes up the banner of radical Islamic terror, though this scenario is now less likely since Godane cleared the decks of any would-be challengers—were it to happen, it would not be in the near future. Radical Islamic groups in Somalia have a long history of splintering, re-forming, and merging, so this would be a natural solution for militants looking to regain power but who understand the direction in which Godane has led them has been damaging. As have other terrorist groups that have suffered setbacks, elements of al-Shabaab are likely in the midst of undertaking a critical assessment of their movement. They will see that their brutality, internationalist agenda, and reliance on foreign fighters has cost them dearly in terms of Somali support. If a splinter group were to emerge, it is likely, then, that it would cast itself as a nationalist movement looking to expel the foreign, infidel AMISOM force and its proxy government, and either explicitly disavow an internationalist agenda, if they are led by committed nationalists, or hide their true agenda.

As with al-Shabaab, an overtly nationalist radical group has a strong chance of making gains in Somalia the longer AMISOM and its foreign troops lingers. The grace period the coalition is currently experiencing has already been eroded because of the reasons mentioned earlier in this report; a group with Salafist credentials but the good sense to brand itself properly and distance itself from al-Shabaab will dramatically shorten the grace period further. AMISOM is critical to the security of the new government, and must remain for the time being, but it will eventually become a liability driving Somalis into the arms of radicals.

The difficult question a radical nationalist group poses for Somalia's neighbors and the West is how much of a threat it would be to their interests. If it is truly nationalist, by definition it is interested only in Somalia and would not pursue an agenda beyond Somalia's borders. But if it is Salafist, it

could make Somalia into a tempting haven for international jihadists, though in the past they have at times received a chilly reception. Furthermore, it would be very difficult to ascertain the group's true ideology; groups can evolve or they can have different factions within them pushing different agendas, as did al-Shabaab. If such a group rose to power, its neighbors and the West would have to do a very thorough analysis of the group's goals to formulate the best response.

A third possible scenario is a return to the days of warlords. Al-Shabaab may not just have discredited its own brand, but even the wider Salafist brand. A discredited Salafist ideology and an illegitimate government is a recipe for Somalis to return to what is still the fundamental ordering principle of their society, clans. The resurgence of a clannism that never really went away would entail clan-based militias led by warlords struggling for control of resources and power, and the further balkanization of the country. Kismayo is the most likely flashpoint in this scenario, given the richness of the prize, the number of clans represented in the area, and their history of fighting over the city.

Somalia would again become the sort of failed state in which terrorists find convenient safe havens, and despite Somalis' dislike of foreign fighters, there would still be Salafist networks in the country that would welcome international terrorists. These terrorists would not have any success leading a radical organization trying to control Somalia, but they could find space in which to plan attacks on the far enemy.

Furthermore, it could be only a few years before Salafism, despite the damage done to it by al-Shabaab, could again prove appealing. A failed, fragmented state ruled by poverty, insecurity, and warlords would be just the sort of environment in which Salafism, with its promises of pure Islamic rule, could make gains. Such a state would be highly destabilizing to its neighbors and the region, as it would again produce tens of thousands of refugees, would be awash in loose weapons likely to seep over the borders, and invite intervention from countries playing out their rivalries with one another, such as Ethiopia and Eritrea.

These are all medium- to long-term scenarios full of uncertainty. There is more certainty to be found in analyzing the short-term outlook for al-Shabaab. The group will seek to do everything it can to discredit the new government, primarily by carrying out guerrilla attacks that rely heavily on terrorist tactics, as it already has in the months since it was pushed out

of Kismayo and Mogadishu. It will utilize the worst tactics international terrorism has to offer, including suicide bombers, IEDs, car bombs, infiltrating Somali security forces to carry out attacks, and many more. The group understands that any insecurity is a seed of doubt in Somalis' minds that the government is the solution to their problems, and a chance for al-Shabaab to make its own case.

Al-Shabaab's sophisticated propaganda operation has been damaged during the AMISOM offensive and by Twitter's decision to shut down its accounts, so its ability to make that case is far more limited than it used to be. But a group that has put so much time and effort into, and been so successful with, information campaigns will find ways to broadcast its message.

Al-Shabaab has been pushed to the edge of destruction before, only to come storming back. It has proven that it is tough, adaptable, and resilient, and it started to commit serious blunders only when it became responsible for ruling large swathes of southern Somalia. It is now back to what it knows best: a guerrilla insurgency model of combat that makes ample use of terror tactics designed to undercut the legitimacy of the government and rally support against a foreign invader. It is wounded, but is still a highly dangerous foe.

Lessons for SOF

There are clear lessons from this analysis for SOF units deploying to sub-Saharan Africa in the future. Of course, the following suggestions are only a starting point, as it is widely understood that anyone deploying on counter-insurgency missions will be best served by learning as much as possible about the specific environments in which they will be operating. While this JSOU report cannot provide the sort of granular knowledge and lessons necessary for a SOF unit to be fully successful, the following are general lessons that should be borne fully in mind when operating in Somalia or other parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

Avoid Clan Politics at all Costs

One of the greatest mistakes U.S. forces could make would be to involve themselves in clan politics. Clan politics is a blood sport in Somalia, and

almost entirely inscrutable to outsiders. These politics are informed by long-standing historical and cultural grievances, which are difficult enough to understand, but also are shifting almost constantly. Trying to play politics within this unbelievably complex world, with a shrewd people with lifetimes' of experience in navigating it, will only lead to outsiders being badly manipulated and inadvertently making enemies.

On a related note, and as has already been explored at length in this monograph, Somalis are highly pragmatic people, prepared to switch allegiances if it gains them an advantage. Furthermore, they are constantly looking for an edge over competitors, and powerful outsiders often present such an opportunity. Understand that when operating in the Somali environment, Somalis, particularly ones with any sort of leadership position or responsibility within their clan, will try to use you to further their own interests—and they generally are very good at it, as they have decades of experience in fleecing international organizations and workers trying to operate on their turf.

Train Somali Security Forces

There is a desperate need to train Somali security forces that currently are in dire shape. While there is no hard and fast prescription for the number of troops necessary in an environment such as Somalia, a RAND study found that the average troop levels during counterinsurgency campaigns in permissive environments were 2 soldiers per 1,000 residents, while for non-permissive environments they were 13 soldiers per 1,000 residents.[617] Somalia is only a permissive environment in certain places, so as a very conservative estimate we could say that 7 soldiers for every 1,000 residents is necessary. The CIA estimates that the Somali population is currently about 10.2 million people,[618] it is unclear if that number includes Somaliland's 3.5 million people,[619] but that number can be subtracted as Somaliland generally does a good job of providing its own security. For 6.7 million people, then, the country requires about 47,000 troops. As of June 2013, AMISOM was at full troop strength with just under 18,000 soldiers in the country,[620] though the African Union wishes to bump that number up to about 24,000.[621] Diplomats estimate that Ethiopia has about 8,000 soldiers inside Somalia, though no one knows the number for sure.[622] It is very difficult to determine how many

troops currently serve in the SNA; there are "theoretically" 10,000,[623] though likely the number is far lower. There are also a number of allied militias providing security[624] whose numbers are similarly vague; in early 2010, U.S. intelligence officials estimated Ras Kamboni had between 500 and 1,000 fighters,[625] and in 2012 it was estimated that ASWJ had around 2,000 fighters.[626] Numbers for the various other militias are even more difficult to find.

Whatever the actual force levels at the coalition's disposal, they are likely to be far too few. And in many ways, the numbers are irrelevant as it takes the right kind of forces to be effective in counterinsurgency. Some of these militiamen and SNA troops are adept fighters, simply because of the experience they have had at it, but they are also generally ill-disciplined young men with little to no formal training.[627] Some factions of the Somali Security forces have received training from a variety of international partners—Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and the EU have all spent time trying to whip various SNA and militia forces into shape—but most of the training appears to be for the most basic fundamentals[628] and not the more sophisticated counterinsurgency training that is necessary.

This monograph has already explored at length how critical it is to provide security for the population during a counterinsurgency campaign. The coalition will not be able to provide the appropriate level of security without the aid of more, and better-trained, Somali forces supplementing the AMISOM and Ethiopian forces. Furthermore, the problem is only going to worsen if al-Shabaab is pushed from more of its territory, requiring more follow-on forces to secure the areas. AMISOM will soon be stretched too thin, and most security personnel should be Somali anyway, in order to mitigate the appearance of a foreign occupation. SOF are highly adept at training foreign security forces, and this is an area in which their specific skill set would be valuable.

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Kill or Capture the Irredeemables, Negotiate with the Pragmatists

In the continuing fight against al-Shabaab, it will be important to distinguish between the "irredeemables"—hardcore ideologues dedicated to violent, global jihad—and those who have joined for more pragmatic reasons. The former cannot be negotiated with, and must be captured or killed—decapitating strikes against the irredeemables, particularly Godane, would be useful.

Of course, any such strikes must be undertaken with immense caution, both to avoid collateral damage that will enrage the population, and to avoid getting mired in a protracted battle that invites swarming attacks from the Somali population, similar to what happened in the First Battle of Mogadishu. No matter al-Shabaab's unpopularity, if the U.S. or other forces carry out a boots-on-the-ground strike against a high-value target in areas still controlled by al-Shabaab, which is where these targets would likely be, a protracted exchange will draw many otherwise-unaffiliated Somalis into the battle against the strike team.

The pragmatists, on the other hand, can be negotiated with and likely convinced to switch sides if a compelling enough case can be made. The pitch would have to revolve around the idea that siding with the coalition is ultimately what is best for the individual in question and his clan, that switching sides would guarantee justice, prosperity, and security, especially against abuse by other clans. There is room for ideological appeals as well, such as calls for them to reject the imposed and alien Salafist doctrine, and to resist a group whose agenda is set by foreign fighters who care not at all for ordinary Somalis. But a simple proposition that appeals to Somalis' pragmatic nature is likely to gain the most traction in this situation.

There is an obvious difficulty in determining who is an irredeemable and who is a pragmatist. It is safe to say that nearly all foreign fighters are irredeemables, as they were motivated by ideology to join al-Shabaab. There is no way of distinguishing among the rank-and-file, but it is worth considering that, given how badly al-Shabaab has been damaged, and how many opportunities for defection have existed, most who have remained with the group have a deep ideological commitment to it, as it makes little practical sense to stay. The exception here would be for fighters from areas still under al-Shabaab's rule; they may continue to fight to ensure their own and their

family's safety, or because their clan has obligations to provide fighters to the group. If AMISOM and the SFG continue to alienate Somalis, however, this equation will change as fighters will join the group out of distaste for the government and what is seen as its proxy force, and not necessarily because of an ideological affinity with al-Shabaab.

Fight the Propaganda War

Al-Shabaab spends a lot of time and energy trying to get its message out. It utilized Twitter extensively,[629] once operated four radio stations,[630] financially supports radical imams, and periodically releases propaganda videos that are often produced and distributed in neighboring Kenya. All these efforts resulted in al-Shabaab running what has been described as "one of the most effective media recruitment programs ever developed by a militant Islamist organization."[631]

The coalition should not take for granted the population's distaste for al-Shabaab. It is there, but al-Shabaab propaganda and coalition missteps could cut into support for the coalition. The coalition must fight this battle on all fronts, including through information campaigns designed to counter the dangerous perceptions al-Shabaab is trying to instill in the population. The coalition should be at pains to remind Somalis about why they dislike al-Shabaab so much by emphasizing al-Shabaab's:

- **Brutality in the areas it ruled.** Its version of *shariah* is repugnant to most Somalis, and the group's refusal to allow famine aid into the areas it controlled was a particularly unpopular decision.
- **Foreign fighters.** It is possible that there are not many left in the country, but the coalition can make the point that they will certainly come back if al-Shabaab returns to power.
- **Leadership's Salafist ideology.** Related to the issue of *shariah*, the coalition should remind Somalis the contempt in which al-Shabaab holds Sufism. Al-Shabaab destroyed Sufi tombs and shrines, a grievous blow to many Somalis. The narrative should be that Salafism is a foreign, non-Somali interpretation of Islam that outsiders are trying to impose on the Somali people.
- **Obvious unconcern for Somalia.** Al-Shabaab has pursued an internationalist agenda that has little to do with the nationalist issues about

which most Somalis care. It shows that they are not really concerned about Somalia or Somalis, but rather are using them to further their own interests. Al-Shabaab's foreign adventures have brought down an invasion on Somalia's head.

- **Corruption and deception of the youth.** Young children who should have been at home helping their families instead were manipulated and in many cases kidnapped by al-Shabaab who used them as cannon fodder and suicide bombers.
- **Harassment, rape, and abuse of Somali women.** Al-Shabaab forced Somali women into fake marriages with their fighters and then discarded them, and punished them for simply wearing traditional Somali dress.

There are many other themes the coalition can stress as al-Shabaab made a laundry list of mistakes in its occupation of Somalia. Any message that emphasizes the non-Somali, anti-Sufi nature of the group is likely to have traction.

Keep a Low Profile

Anything the U.S. does in Somalia must be with as light and low-profile a footprint as possible. Ambassador William M. Bellamy, writing for the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, notes the counterproductive effect a visible U.S. military presence can have in African countries:

> Among the most common mistakes made by U.S. planners is to assume that a robust American military presence is both a reassurance to friendly governments and a deterrent to extremists and potential terrorists. In fact, many friendly African governments regard a large and visible U.S. military presence as a handicap and potential magnet for both domestic political opponents and terrorists in search of high-value targets in an otherwise target-poor environment.[632]

This is particularly true for the U.S. in Somalia, as the anger over the First Battle of Mogadishu lingers on in that country.[633] The coalition is already going to have enough difficulties refuting the al-Shabaab narrative that AMISOM is a foreign, invading, infidel force; an overt U.S. military presence

would only bolster al-Shabaab's claims, and would draw in more hardcore foreign jihadis eager to try to bleed Enemy Number One.

Adapt

Insurgents are often adept at learning and then applying their lessons. Fighters in the recent Iraq War were constantly improving their tactics against U.S. forces—the increase in the sophistication and lethality of the IEDs they deployed throughout the conflict is perhaps the most obvious example of their ability to learn. Today in Syria, a terrorist organization known as al-Nusra has become one of the most powerful groups fighting the Assad regime in the country, largely because they learned important lessons from mistakes they made in Iraq—they now buy off rather than kill tribal leaders, "while keeping their extreme beliefs to themselves."[634] And remember the letter that Abdelmalek Droukdel, Emir of AQIM, sent to his fighters in Mali, warning them to keep quiet about their internationalist agenda and allow locals to take the lead in operations. Droukdel learned from al-Qaeda leaders' experiences elsewhere that locals can resent foreigners' agendas, and so took steps to adjust his group's tactics.

As has already been discussed, al-Shabaab has proven in the past that it is a highly resilient organization willing to learn and adapt. It rose to prominence leading an insurgency, evolved into a more conventional force that held and administered large areas of Somalia (and continues to do so), then had the foresight to accurately gauge AMISOM's growing strength and responded by making a strategic decision to shift back to fighting a guerrilla war in the areas out of which it had been pushed. Counterinsurgents should assume that al-Shabaab is now in the process of assessing what went wrong and trying to adjust its approach—it made egregious mistakes during its rule, but it has shown its capacity to adapt in order to survive and grow.

Counterinsurgents must be prepared and willing to do their own adapting to meet al-Shabaab's inevitable adjustments. In his authoritative work on the Marines' campaign to pacify Anbar Province in Iraq, Richard Shultz, a counterinsurgency expert and professor at the Fletcher School at Tufts University, repeatedly makes the point that the Marines were able to succeed in the shifting, highly complex environment in which they found themselves because they had an institutional commitment to learning and adapting to

their enemies.[635] Another author points out that the British were victorious in Malaysia against an insurgency largely because they "successfully adapted to overcome the challenges of a Communist insurgent war and an obsolete doctrine."[636] *A Military Review* article on this subject is worth quoting here at length:

> A COIN force must be a learning organization. Insurgents shift between military and political phases and approaches. In addition, networked insurgents constantly exchange information about enemy vulnerabilities. A skillful counterinsurgent must be able to adapt at least as fast as the opponent. Every unit must be able to make observations, draw lessons, apply them, and assess results. Higher headquarters must develop an effective system to circulate lessons learned throughout the organization. Insurgents shift their areas of operations looking for weak links, so widespread competence is required throughout the counterinsurgent force.[637]

A commitment to adaptation and learning is necessary because it is not just one's foe who will adapt during a conflict, but the broader context is always fluid and likely to change as well. Winston Churchill made this point best when he wrote that "ugly surprises" always have a seat at the table during war, and that "there would not be a war if the other man did not think he also had a chance."[638] There will be many surprises in the coming years in Somalia, any of which could fundamentally alter the complexion of the conflict. Counterinsurgents must be ready to change as well in order to maintain advantage.

Conclusion: Dangerous Times

Somalia might be the most difficult and complex country on earth in which to build the state institutions. Even if the coalition is able to get the insurgency part right, there still remain the deep and difficult problems that have plagued Somalia for decades, long before al-Shabaab rose to prominence. Somalia is fractured along a dizzying number of lines: clan, region, class, race, and perhaps religion if Salafism continues to gain prominence and clashes with Sufism. It has seen horrific violence for the last 20 years and even before, and is steeped in grievance.

The already-daunting task has been made more difficult by coalition mistakes. The most dangerous one is the still-unfolding situation in Lower Juba. If coalition partners continue to undercut the government's authority in Kismayo, and strike deals with local groups or prop up certain clans and/or militias, Somalis in those areas will understandably align themselves with the local power brokers rather than with a government that has no influence. Furthermore, different factions within the coalition pursuing their own objectives, or working at cross-purposes to one another, makes it impossible for anyone to implement a coherent state-building plan.

And while the anti-Shabaab coalition remains largely intact, it is entering the phase of the conflict with the potential for the most disunity. The coalition has remained united, however imperfectly, because of the clear and immediate threat of al-Shabaab. Now that the group has waned in power, the different factions of the coalition will be tempted to turn their energies to pursuing their own interests more vigorously.

The situation is fragile, and sustained instability will cause Somalis to wonder if the government is not the answer. The more it struggles to govern effectively, the more Somalis will be willing to listen to al-Shabaab's message that the government is merely a foreign and apostate puppet, and that AMISOM is an occupying force. Somali cultural norms, as well as the country's history, incline Somalis to be suspicious of the coalition, given their long and rancorous history with Ethiopia and shorter but still sharp history of conflict with Kenya, its people's xenophobia and extreme autonomy that will bridle against a government's attempt to impose authority, and its fractious clan, regional, and class dynamics. The longer the government is unable to establish legitimacy, the better the chances for al-Shabaab or another group to rise to prominence.

Somalis have for now largely rejected foreign jihadis because of the jihadis' extreme interpretation of Islam, but Salafism, fueled by radical imams with money from the Gulf, is making gains in the country. Given that so many other ideologies have been tried and found wanting, Somali society, particularly a frustrated, unemployed, battle-scarred youth, could turn its eyes to Salafism and other types of radical Islam. If the country becomes more accepting of radical Islam, radical Islamic groups, including those with an international agenda, will become more palatable.

The coalition still has the advantage, but it is frittering away its limited amount of time. Before its window of opportunity closes, the coalition can

enjoy the goodwill of Somalis grateful to be rid of al-Shabaab, and the Somali government can use the space to pursue the non-kinetic but critical tasks of state-building. After the window closes, the coalition will find itself vulnerable to attack in nearly every place there are Somalis, and the pockets of peace it painstakingly carved out over the last two years will collapse and the state-building project will shatter.

The results would be dire. The country would descend back into violence and the sort of failed state model in which terrorist organizations thrive. Al-Shabaab or a similar group could rise to prominence again, bolstered by Somalis' increasing embrace of Salafist principles and disillusionment with other failed ideologies, and provide active shelter and aid to international terrorists. Neighboring countries would be destabilized again by large refugee flows and acts of violence along their borders and beyond. The U.S. and the West would have to assume radical Muslim fighters, particularly any foreign fighters, would be interested in waging global jihad at some point. In this scenario the U.S. would have few tools at its disposal, and would have to resort to stop-gap counterterrorism measures that could quicken and deepen the radicalization process in Somalia.

The trends thus far are not encouraging, but neither is the battle lost. If the government single-mindedly devotes itself to transparency, anti-corruption, a devolved power structure, reconciliation, and service delivery, and if AMISOM wages a disciplined and coherent counterinsurgency campaign in support of a government building legitimacy, the majority of Somalis will see no reason to ever again support or tolerate al-Shabaab or a similar radical group. Admittedly, these are extraordinarily difficult tasks, but such is the undertaking confronting Somalia and the international community. There is a small window of opportunity to help a country recover from one of the worst, most sustained crises in the world, and help stabilize a fragile region. But it is closing, and the truly difficult part of this struggle has only just begun.

Epilogue

Al-Shabaab's horrifying attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi occurred after virtually all of this monograph had been written. Analysts are still grappling with what the attack tells us about Shabaab, but two contending narratives are emerging. One suggests that the attack shows Shabaab is desperate and lashing out as it has been too badly damaged by the coalition offensive to mount any sort of other attack. Others suggest that the attack instead shows Shabaab is ascendant, that it was never defeated in the first place and that it is far stronger than people had been predicting.

There are elements from both analyses that are correct, but the attack is better understood as warning of the group's largely-intact capabilities rather than as a death rattle. Those who argue Shabaab is grasping at the "tools of the weak" are correct in the sense that al-Shabaab cannot face the coalition in a conventional battle. But that is not because the group has been irreparably degraded in the last several years; it is because Shabaab has *never* been able to face in conventional battle the sort of force AMISOM is currently fielding.

AMISOM was desperately weak throughout much of al-Shabaab's ascendancy; it was only in 2010 that AMISOM was reinforced, allowing it to break out of the box it was in Mogadishu. Ethiopia and Kenya then entered the fray, bolstering the coalition further, while other members of the international community provided intelligence support, surgical strike capabilities, training, and money. So Shabaab's territorial losses are less a reflection of its weakening and more of the coalition's strengthening.

And Shabaab has launched an awful regional terrorist attack before, on Kampala in 2010. No one argued at the time that al-Shabaab was desperate and weak for doing so, because it was so clearly not—Shabaab was at its zenith in July 2010. So why would an equally sophisticated, successful, and vicious terror attack now be seen as a sign of weakness?

As this report highlights, Shabaab's leadership well understood the new dynamics of a strengthened AMISOM, and concentrated on weathering the storm while not sacrificing its core capabilities. Al-Shabaab has always been a remarkably resilient group, and understands its limitations. It fought a guerrilla war against Ethiopia, evolved into a somewhat more conventional force that administered large areas of the country, and then reverted back to a guerrilla campaign after AMISOM was reinforced, though it still administers

significant portions of the country. It is not going to stand and fight a superior force that can crush it, but will instead attack when and where it can, as opportunities arise. The Westgate mall was one such opportunity given that it was in Kenya, barely defended, high-profile, and frequented by a lot of Westerners as well as Kenyans.

Shabaab's core force of around 5,000 fighters remains remarkably intact, and they have access to safe havens in Lower Juba, the Galgala Mountains, and probably parts of northeastern Kenya. They have avoided a devastating confrontation with a superior force, are bringing in money, and still control significant sections of Somalia. Meanwhile, the coalition offensive has stalled and its prospects for effectively restarting are slim.[639] Al-Shabaab's tactic of withdrawing in front of the coalition as part of its guerrilla strategy has worked very well, in other words.

So the attack does not herald a fundamental shift in the group's approach or ideology or status. The attack was not a tool of the weak, but a tool of the strategic. It is simply business as usual for a ruthless and cunning terrorist group.

A related question is whether the attack signals Shabaab is turning its attention away from the fight in Somalia and towards global jihad. Much of this speculation centers around the fact that Godane, a man absolutely interested in global jihad, now firmly controls the group. Western policymakers are, understandably, particularly concerned given al-Shabaab's proven ability to recruit within their countries, and now fear the group could utilize their Western recruits in a variety of ways to attack their adopted homelands.

The attack does not indicate that Shabaab is now going to primarily focus on hitting international targets, including the United States. All three of the countries Shabaab has struck with terrorist attacks—Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia (indirectly, when the Ethiopian restaurant was bombed in Kampala)—have forces inside of Somalia right now. The Westgate attack can easily be understood as part of the Somalia struggle.

Shabaab also has not noticeably altered its rhetoric or recruitment propaganda. Al-Shabaab's outreach to Somali-Americans—including a recent effort, a film featuring three Minnesotans killed fighting for the group[640]—focuses on calling them *to* Somalia to wage jihad, not on them remaining in place to attack the United States.

And there are practical difficulties in attacking the United States or other Western countries. Al-Shabaab almost certainly lost a lot of the support it

used to garner among its diaspora communities, particularly now that its brutality has become common knowledge. It would be hard for a clandestine cell planted by Shabaab to escape detection, either from the Somali community or domestic law enforcement agencies, which have been involved in combating Shabaab's efforts for years now. Given this level of scrutiny, it would be similarly difficult for a fighter to return from Somalia.

The biggest danger posed by the group is its potential ability to inspire so-called "lone wolf" attacks, individuals who have neither been trained by a terrorist organization nor have a formal affiliation, but who seek to emulate the group's attacks. Lone wolves are dangerous because they are so difficult to detect, particularly if they do not attempt to communicate with anyone about their plans. But, given their lack of expertise, they also are generally too inept to inflict wide-spread damage. And again, the group has not put much effort into trying to inspire lone wolf attacks, so it does not appear to be a priority for them at the moment.

This report documents how resilient and adaptable al-Shabaab is, so it would be foolish to dismiss out of hand Shabaab's potential interest in re-orienting to the Far Enemy. Al-Qaeda undertook the very same evolution in the 1990s,[641] and there is no doubt that Godane would be thrilled at an opportunity to directly attack a Western country. And as this report has repeatedly warned, AMISOM will eventually be seen as occupiers rather than liberators, which would at least partially resuscitate al-Shabaab's foreign recruitment networks and give the group more options if it wished to attack the West.

None of that has happened yet, and hopefully never will. Even given the Westgate attack, al-Shabaab is still best understood as being interested in the Somalia struggle (which given its irredentist claims in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti, necessarily means a regional struggle). But if a Western target is available in the region, the group will likely not hesitate—during the Westgate massacre, for instance, the terrorists were specifically seeking Americans, along with Kenyans.[642] And if Shabaab leaders do start issuing calls to diaspora Somalis and other Muslims to wage jihad in the West, it would be cause for concern and could signal a shift in the group's focus towards the Far Enemy.

Policymakers responsible for protecting their citizens do not have the luxury of a wait-and-see approach on this issue, and already are stepping up their pressure on the group.[643] As this report has pointed out, there is a larger

role for the international community to play, and hopefully the Westgate attack will serve to galvanize further action. But as always in these situations, there is the danger of over-reach; so while the world needs to move against Shabaab with resolve, it is imperative it do so in a well-coordinated and strategic fashion. It is what al-Shabaab has already been doing against its own enemies, with far too much success.

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