Homeland Security Policy Institute
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

HSPI Issue Brief Series

Somalia's Al-Shabaab: Down But Not Out

HSPI Issue Brief 22
August 27, 2013
Navanti Group

✕ NAVANTI

Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahedeen, meaning "Mujahedeen Youth Movement" in Arabic, is an al-Qa'ida affiliated terrorist organization that seeks to establish an Islamist state in Somalia. In its short history, al-Shabaab has evolved from a small militia group to a formidable insurgent force that once controlled significant amounts of territory. Extending beyond Somalia, al-Shabaab has pursued a global jihadist agenda by launching terrorist attacks in countries such as Uganda and Kenya, and soliciting support from the Somali diaspora and external extremist groups.
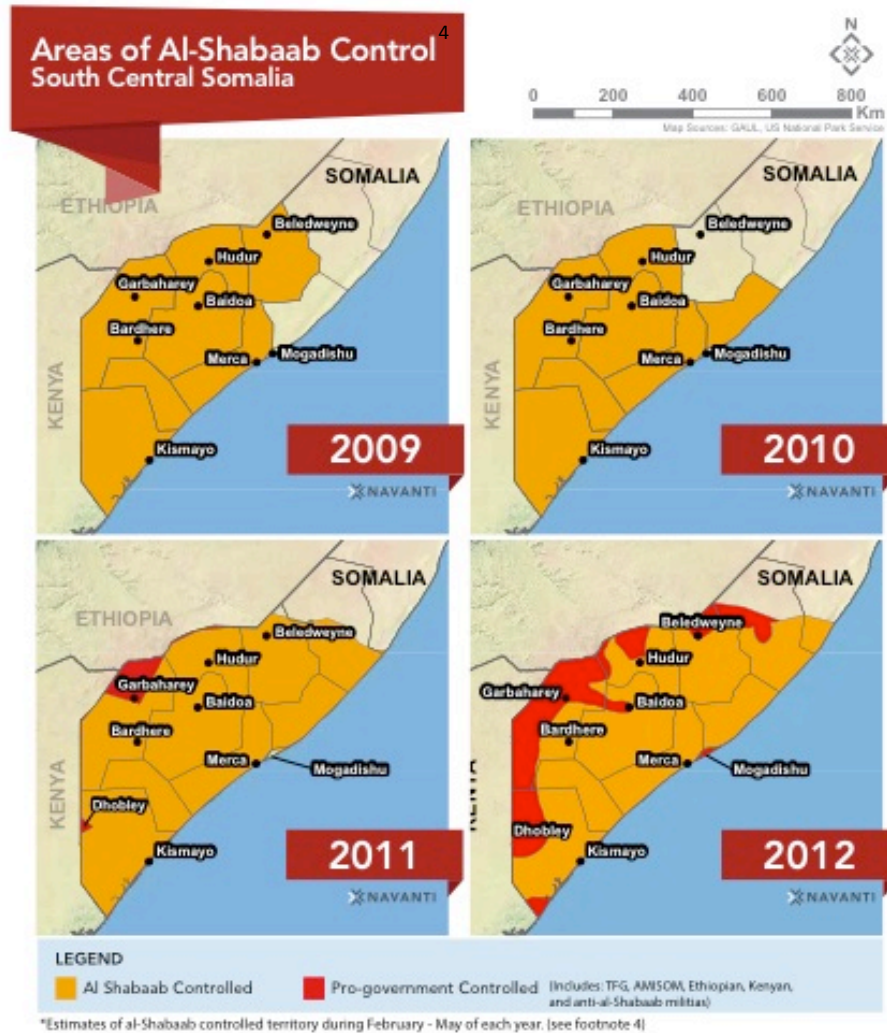
Following the 2006-09 Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, al-Shabaab rose to national prominence as a symbol of resistance against Ethiopian 'occupiers.' Filling the

Al-Shabaab Fighters. *Source: Barigaafrika.net*

void in the wake of Ethiopia's withdrawal and the collapse of the Islamic Courts Union, the group rapidly expanded becoming Somalia's dominant governing entity.[1] By August 2010, al-Shabaab controlled the majority of south and central Somalia, and launched its first international attack targeting Uganda's capital Kampala with multiple suicide bombings.[2]

However, by late 2011, al-Shabaab's fortunes had turned. A three pronged offensive led by government-allied African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), Kenyan, and Ethiopian forces, combined with a

---

[1] "Al-Shabaab," *Council on Foreign Relations,* 05 February 2013, Accessed online 29 April 2013 at: http://www.cfr.org/somalia/al-shabaab/p18650

[2] "Al-shabaab oo sheegatay qaraxyadii Kampala," *Waamownews.com,* 12 July 2010, Accessed online 02 May 2013, http://waamonews.com/?p=2860

famine in south and central Somalia, forced al-Shabaab to withdraw from Mogadishu and reassess its strategy. Over the next year, internal divisions, a loss of public support, and continued offensives by government-allied forces throughout the country significantly weakened the group. Although al-Shabaab remains a major threat to security in Somalia, today, the group's resources, territory, and influence have diminished significantly.[3]

Areas of Al-Shabaab Control[4]
South Central Somalia

LEGEND
Al Shabaab Controlled — Pro-government Controlled (Includes: TFG, AMISOM, Ethiopian, Kenyan, and anti-al-Shabaab militias)

*Estimates of al-Shabaab controlled territory during February - May of each year. [see footnote 4]

---

[3] Azalone, Christopher, "Al-Shabaab's Tactical and Media Strategies in the Wake of its Battlefield Setbacks," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (27 March 2013): 1-2.

[4] Information for maps was derived from BBC Somalia maps and other open source material. Estimates were made when information was uncertain or lacking.

Estimate of al-Shabaab controlled territory as of 2013.

Origins

While al-Shabaab emerged as an organization in 2006, the group's roots extend back to the 1980s and the nascent stages of the militant political Islamic movement in Somalia.[5] In particular, the militant group al-Itihad al-Islam (AIAI) provided a platform for the growth of religious extremism and the training of future al-Shabaab leaders in Somalia.[6]

By 2005, al-Shabaab had emerged as a loose organization of militia leaders running the military wing of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), a conglomeration of religious courts competing for control of south

---

[5] Hammami, Omar, "The Story of an American Jihadi, Part 1," 16 May 2012: 56. Stig Jarle Hansen, "Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005 – 2012," (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 36.

[6] "Al Ittihad Al Islamiya," *Mapping Militant Organizations,* 25 April 2012, Accessed online 26 April 2013 at: http://www.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/99. "Sheekh Atam Waa Nin Caynkee ah?" Warsheekh.com, 14 August 2010, Accessed online 01 May 2013 at: http://www.warsheekh.com/view.php?id=8034

and central Somalia. As of 2006, the UIC had rapidly become the dominant political body in south and central Somalia, taking full control of Mogadishu.[7] Facilitated in part by financial backing from Persian Gulf and Somali businessmen, The UIC's increasing strength along with the inclusion of extremist elements, was deemed a threat to Ethiopia and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia, based in of Nairobi.[8] In late 2006, with international support, Ethiopia invaded Somalia and ousted the UIC.

The collapse of the UIC led to the emergence of several groups engaged in a bloody insurgency against Ethiopian forces.[9] Nonetheless, al-Shabaab dominated the struggle, and by the time Ethiopia withdrew in January 2009, the group had evolved to become Somalia's most effective fighting force.

2009 - A Political Vacuum in Somalia

Several independent factors helped facilitate al-Shabaab's ascendency in Somalia, the most prevalent of which is the failure of various political ideologies and governments to establish lasting law and order. After Siad Barre's military dictatorship fell in 1991, Somalia lapsed into nearly two decades of clan-affiliated warlordism and the absence of central government rule.[10] During this period, 14 internationally backed efforts, such as the 2000-04 Transitional National Government (TNG), tried and failed to rehabilitate the country – earning it the reputation of the world's worst failed state.[11]

Following years of fighting, a new order began to emerge in Somalia around 2000.[12] Influenced by political Islam and proselytizing Wahhabi Islamists from the Gulf, religion took on an increasing role in Somali society.[13] Islamic charities and leaders rose to prominence helping facilitate an environment for the increased acceptance of Islamist organizations.[14]

---

[7] "Islamic Courts Union," *Mapping Militant Organizations,* 06 March 2012, Accessed online 26 April 2013 at: http://www.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/107

[8] Stig Jarle Hansen, "Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005 – 2012," (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 33-40.

[9] Others groups emerged in the aftermath as well, such as Hizbul Islam (HI), but have eventually been absorbed by al-Shabaab.

[10] The clan system is a social structure by which Somali society organizes itself. Every Somali knows his or her clan kinship genealogy through patrilineal ancestors.

[11] "Somalia Profile," *BBC,* 17 April 2013, Accessed online 25 April 2013 at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14094503

[12] Stig Jarle Hansen, "Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005 – 2012," (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 4-18.

[13] Ibid

[14] Ibid

Al-Shabaab's Relationship with Clans

Clans remain at the heart of Somali society and identity, and understanding clan politics is key to understanding local dynamics and the failures of central governance. Since its inception, al-Shabaab has been critical of clannism, attempting to present itself as above clan politics. During its rise to prominence, al-Shabaab espoused a narrative of "Somali Nationalism" to unify Somalis under al-Shabaab and mitigate clan conflict. Nonetheless, al-Shabaab has engaged in clan-based military and economic alliances throughout south and central Somalia at times.[15] In many instances, al-Shabaab intervened in conflicts between clans or backed minority clans against rival dominant clans. Additionally, many top al-Shabaab leaders are also prominent clan figures and al-Shabaab has drawn support from

Al-Shabaab Leader Muktar Robow (center)
Source: Nairobiwire.com

these connections to strengthen the organizations position in Somalia. (Senior al-Shabaab commander Muktar Robow from the Rahanweyn clan is one such example).[16]

Conversely, clan rivalries have also caused turbulence within al-Shabaab. For example, during the 2011 famine that ravaged south and central Somalia, some analysts felt al-Shabaab's blocking of relief agencies caused conflict amongst its leadership, as the clan members of certain leaders, such as Muktar Robow, suffered immensely, while those of other leaders, such as Amir Ahmed Godane's Isaaq clan did not experience the same fate.[17]

Governance Structures

In 2010, al-Shabaab controlled the majority of south and central Somalia, establishing centralized governance structures and instituting a chain of command that controlled thousands of fighters and managed territory from the national to the local level. At the national level, al-Shabaab is led by Amir Abdi Ahmed Godane (Abu Zubeyr), who heads the main Shura council - a committee of key al-Shabaab

---

[15] "Al-shabaab Oo Bilaabay Waji Kasameysiga qabiilada iyo Beel Katirsan Mareexaan oo aay Heshiish wada," Calanka24.com, 30 March 2012, Accessed online 30 April 2013 at: http://www.calanka24.com/al-shabaab-oo-bilaabay-waji-kasameysiga-qabiilada-iyo-beel-katirsan-mareexaan-oo-aay-heshiish-wada/

[16] "Sheikh Mukhtaar Roobow (Abuu Mansuur) oo gebi ahaan qaadacay in uu wax xil ah ka qabto kooxda Al-Shabaab," *Somaliswisstv.com* 10 June 2009, Accessed online 29 April 2013 at: http: http://somaliswisstv.com/2009/06/10/sheikh-mukhtaar-roobow-abuu-mansuur-oo-gebi-ahaan-qaadacay-wax-xil-ah-inuu-ka-qabto-xarakada-alshabaab/

[17] "Factors Responsible for Al-Shabaab's Losses in Somalia," *Combating Terrorism Center,* 26 September 2012, Accessed online 01 March 2013 at: http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/factors-responsible-for-al-shababs-losses-in-somalia

leaders that ranges from eight to roughly forty members.[18] Under the Shura council are a series of national ministries or "Maktabatu," which are responsible for the group's national military, media, financial, and religious/legal operations.[19] This administrative structure is replicated at the regional level, where al-Shabaab divides into regional governing bodies or "Wilaadaya." In 2010, the size and strength of these regional administrations varied significantly, with the largest footprint in major urban centers such as Baidoa and Kismayo.[20] Today, al-Shabaab largely retains a similar operating structure, but has been forced to adjust to territorial losses.

Al-Shabaab Messaging

While not monolithic in its ideology or goals, al-Shabaab employs several key narratives to present itself as the true and righteous power in Somalia and a unifier of Muslims around the world. Al-Shabaab's messaging strategy has also proven to be dynamic and innovative, marked by the group's early embrace of social media and communication in multiple languages in an attempt to attract wider support from the global Somali diaspora.[21]

At its core, al-Shabaab subscribes to an extremely conservative religious ideology, Salafi-Jihadism, which runs counter to Sufism, a mystical form of Islam that has been practiced in Somalia since the 15th century.[22] While Sufism is embraced by many different elements of Somali society, it is

> *Al-Shabaab and its supporters utilize a variety of mediums to reach a wide audience including Internet radio, websites, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook.*

Cover of Al-Shabaab's English Twitter Page (As of 13 August 2013).

---

[18] "Daawo Sawirada+Dhageyso:Shirkii Odayaasha Wilaayada Islaamiga Jubbooyinka Oo Lasoo Gabagabeeyay," *Somalimemo.net,* 16 March 2013, Accessed online 02 May 2013 at: http://somalimemo.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4703:daawo-sawiradadhageysoshirkii-odayaasha-wilaayada-islaamiga-jubbooyinka-oo-lasoo-gabagabeeyay&catid=1:warar&Itemid=95

[19] "Al-Shabaab Leadership Profiles," *AEI Critical Threats Project*, Accessed online 14 April 2013 at: http://www.criticalthreats.org/somalia/al-shabaab-leadership

[20] Hansen, "Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005 – 2012," 83 – 95.

[21] Al-Shabaab's online activities first started in 2007 with articles published by Omar Hammami and discussions posed by other leaders on online forums. Al-Shabaab media publications have been in several different languages including Somali, Arabic, Swahili, English, and others. Stig Jarle Hansen, "Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005 – 2012," (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 59-67.

[22] Lewis, I.M., "Saints and Somalis: Popular Islam in a Clan Based Society," 1998," (United Kingdom: Haan Associate Publishing), 7-21.

considered heretical by al-Shabaab.[23] Portraying itself in a global battle against non-Muslims, al-Shabaab calls for the reunification of the *Ummah* (global Muslim community) under the Caliphate, a global Islamic state.[24] In 2009, al-Shabaab leader Ahmed Abdi Godane stated, "We will fight and the wars will not end until Islamic sharia is implemented in all continents in the world."[25]

At the national level, al-Shabaab utilizes religious and nationalist sentiments to depict itself as defenders of Islam and Somalia in the face of invading forces.[26] Tapping into the wave of nationalism spurred by the 2006 Ethiopian invasion, al-Shabaab expanded its ranks from hundreds to thousands, and pushed for the establishment of an Islamic Emirate of Somalia.[27] The organization initially generated considerable local and international support with this narrative, as many Somalis living in diaspora countries returned to Somalia to fight alongside al-Shabaab against the Ethiopians or provided financial support to the group.[28]

In the United States, several individuals have either provided financial support for al-Shabaab or left to fight

Al-Shabaab Video: No Peace Without Islam, Part 1 (Posted on YouTube 01 April 2013)

Cover of al-Shabaab's 2013 video "Path to Paradise." The video celebrates the 2009 martyrdom of three Americans (two of Somali descent) who left Minnesota in 2007 to fight with al-Shabaab. Source: Jihadology.net

---

[23] Mary Harper, "Getting Somalia Wrong? Faith, War and Hope in a Shattered State," (London/New York: Zed Books, 2012), 74. "Al-Qaida's (Mis)Adventures in the Horn of Africa," *The Harmony Project: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point,* 02 July 2007, Accessed online 03 June 2013 at: http://www.princeton.edu/~jns/publications/AQ_HOA.pdf

[24] "Lights, Camera, Jihad: Al-Shabaab's Western Media Strategy," *The International Center for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence (ICSR),* 2012, Accessed online 22 April 2012, at: http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/ICSR-Lights-Camera-Jihad-Report_Nov2012_ForWeb-2.pdf

[25] Mary Harper, "Getting Somalia Wrong? Faith, War and Hope in a Shattered State," (London/New York: Zed Books, 2012), 86.

[26] "Al-Shabaab," *Center for Strategic and International Studies: Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Program Transnational Threats Project, Case Study 2,* July 2011, Accessed online at: http://csis.org/files/publication/110715_Wise_AlShabaab_AQAM%20Futures%20Case%20Study_WEB.pdf

[27] Shuriye, Abdi O., "Al-Shabaab's Leadership Hierarchy and Its Ideology," SAVAP International (2012): 7-11.

[28] "Terrorist Pipeline Continues To Flow From Minn. To Somalia," *MPR News,* 26 October 2012, Accessed online 02 March 2013 at: http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2012/10/26/news/terrorist-pipeline-continues-to-flow-from-minnesota-to-somalia. "British Muslims Recruited To Fight For 'Al-Qaeda' In Somalia," *The Telegraph,* 18 February 2012, Accessed online 02 March 2013 at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/somalia/9090606/British-Muslims-recruited-to-fight-for-al-Qaeda-in-Somalia.html. Stig Jarle Hansen, "Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005 – 2012," (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 4-11; 82-90.

alongside the group in Somalia.[29]   Since 2007, more than twenty young men have left Minnesota – the home of the largest Somali Diaspora community in America – to fight with al-Shabaab.[30]

External Linkages

Al-Shabaab maintains a formal affiliation with al-Qa'ida. Nonetheless, al-Shabaab's initial appeals for a merger went unheeded by al-Qa'ida's leader Osama Bin Laden, who believed a public alliance would bring undue pressure on Somalia.[31] However, following the death of Bin Laden, al-Qa'ida's new leader Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri and al-Shabaab Amir Godane released a video announcing the formal merger of the two groups in February 2012.[32]

Al-Shabaab Fighter carrying an Islamic battle flag
Source: Africanarguments.org

While the alliance remains in place, al-Shabaab did not adopt the al-Qa'ida name and the relationship has created significant internal rumblings amongst al-Shabaab's leadership. In April 2012, senior al-Shabaab commander Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys publicly challenged the authority of al-Shabaab and al-Qa'ida, declaring that jihad can be waged in many different ways and by many different groups. Aweys elaborated, "We are in al-Shabaab but its operation is very wrong, we should correct it . . . al Shabaab [sic] and al Qaeda [sic] do not represent the Muslim world, they are only part of it."[33]

Al-Shabaab has also worked closely with the Yemen-based al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Al-Shabaab leaders have collaborated with AQAP and the group has often acted as a conduit to al-Qa'ida

---

[29] "2 Minnesota Women Sentenced in Somali Terror Case," *CBS News,* 16 May 2013, Accessed online 13 August 2013 at: http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-201_162-57584972/2-minnesota-women-sentenced-in-somali-terror-case/

[30] "In new recruitment video, the Somali militant group al-Shabaab praises 'martyrs' from Minnesota," *The Star Tribune,* 12 August 2013, Accessed online 13 August 2013 at: http://www.startribune.com/local/219265871.html

[31] "Al-Shabaab Merger with al-Qaeda: Strategic Implications," *Geostrategicforcasting.com,* 02 July 2012, Accessed online 01 March 2013 at: http://www.geostrategicforecasting.com/al-shabaab-merger-with-al-qaeda-strategic-implications/. "Bin Laden advised Somali militants on 'good governance," *BBC,* 02 July 2012, Accessed online 01 March 2013 at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-18628145.

[32] Lahoud, Nelly, "The Merger of al-Shabaab and Qa'idat al-Jihad," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (16 February 2012): 1.

[33] "Residents Fear Clashes as Somali Rebel Row Worsens," *Reuters,* 01 April 2012, Accessed online 30 April 2013 at: http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/01/us-somalia-conflict-shabaab-idUSBRE83008F20120401

for al-Shabaab.[34] Al-Shabaab members have received training in Yemen and brokered weapons transfers.[35] In 2012, two weapons shipments reportedly sent by AQAP intended for al-Shabaab were captured off Somalia's northern coast.[36]

In addition to working with al-Qa'ida and its affiliates, al-Shabaab has demonstrated its ambitions by expanding a presence throughout the Horn of Africa. Al-Shabaab affiliated extremist groups have sprouted up throughout East Africa; namely the Kenyan Muslim Youth Group (MYC) in Kenya and Ansar Muslim Youth Center (AMYC) in Tanzania.[37] Moreover, after Kenyan forces invaded Somalia in October 2011, al-Shabaab launched an aggressive campaign targeting security forces and civilians in Kenya.[38]

Al-Shabaab: Strategy and Tactics

Following the collapse of the UIC and departure of Ethiopian forces in 2009, al-Shabaab initially launched a guerilla warfare campaign designed to overthrow the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and establish an Islamic state in Somalia. Through local alliances and the use of tactics such as armed ambushes and suicide bombings, al-Shabaab captured large amounts of territory in south and central Somalia.[39] By August 2010, al-Shabaab had gained significant strength and shifted its strategy to employ conventional military assaults and direct engagements with TFG and AMISOM forces. This was particularly true in Mogadishu, where al-Shabaab launched a military offensive during the month of Ramadan [August 2010] that divided the city in half.[40] However, the Ramadan offensive failed to wrest control of the city from the government, and al-Shabaab's fortunes waned shortly thereafter. Facing mounting pressure from AMISOM and TFG forces in Mogadishu, al-Shabaab conducted a "strategic

---

[34] Joscelyn, Thomas and Roggio, Bill, "Shabaab Formally Joins al-Qaeda," The Long War Journal (09 February 2012): 1-4. Watts, Clint and Lebovich, Andrew, "Hammami's Plight Amidst Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda's Game of Thrones," *Homeland Security Policy Institute* (19 March 2012): 4.

[35] Jaffe, Greg and DeYoung, Karen, " U.S. Drone Targets Two Leaders of Somali Group Allied With Al-Qaeda, Official Says," *The Washington Post*, 29 June 2011, Accessed online 24 April 2013 at: http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2011-06-29/national/35234554_1_qaeda-somalia-strike-drone-strike

[36] "Puntland Forces seize Weapons believed to be from Al-Qaida," *Bosasopress.com,* 21 July 2012, Accessed online 24 April 2013, at: http://www.bosasopress.com/puntland-forces-seize-weapons-believed-to-be-from-al-qaida. "Somalia: Puntland 'Seized Arms from Yemen,'" *Allfrica.com,* 19 October 2012, Accessed online 24 April 2012 at: http://allafrica.com/stories/201210190362.html.

[37] Letter dated 11 July 2012 from the Chair of the Security Council "Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) Concerning Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the President of the Security Council," United Nations Security Council on Somalia and Eritrea s/2012/544 (13 July 2012): 177-185.

[38] "Somali Militants Threaten Kenyan Skyscraper Attack," *France24,* 18 October 2011, Accessed online 30 April 2013 at: http://www.france24.com/en/20111018-al-shabaab-threaten-nairobi-over-kenyan-offensive-somalia-attack

[39] "15 waxyaabood oo lagu soo xusuusan doono Al-Shabaab (Maqaal)," *Allboocame.com,* 22 October 2011, Accessed online 30 April 2013 at: http://allboocame.com/?p=7833

[40] "Mogadishu Map: Al-Shabaab's Ramadan Offensive," *American Enterprise Institute: Critical Threats Project, 23 September 2010, http://www.criticalthreats.org/somalia/mogadishu-map-al-shabaabs-ramadan-offensive*

withdrawal" from the Somali capital in August 2011.[41]

Following its departure from Mogadishu, al-Shabaab faced even greater challenges as Kenya began an incursion into southern Somalia, while anti-al-Shabaab militias, such as Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama (ASWJ), and Ethiopian forces pushed southeast from the Ethiopian border.[42] To address these challenges, al-Shabaab withdrew from most major cities in Somalia. Some members fled to safe havens like the Galgala Mountains in the semiautonomous region of Puntland, and possibly other countries such as Yemen.[43] In south and central Somalia, al-Shabaab shifted its strategy back to a campaign based on guerilla warfare tactics.[44] On all fronts, including Mogadishu, al-Shabaab increasingly employed irregular attacks ambushing military convoys, assassinating government and military officials, and conducting bombings with IEDs, grenades, and landmines.[45]

Wreckage from a suicide bombing outside Mogadishu's National Theater on 18 March 2013. *Source: AFP*

Despite the shift back to guerilla warfare, al-Shabaab has not been able to stop the advance of allied forces. On 29 September 2012, Kenyan forces took Kismayo, al-Shabaab's home base from which it generated significant amounts of revenue through the taxation of local economic activities.[46] In response to the loss, al-Shabaab more than doubled its rate of attacks over the next three months launching over twenty per month against pro-government targets. While al-Shabaab has not sustained this intensity in 2013, likely due to its continued loss of financial resources and public support, it nonetheless retains the ability to inflict significant violence.

---

[41] Anzalone, Christopher, "Al-Shabaab's Setbacks in Somalia," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (31 October 2011): 1.

[42] "Why Kenya Invaded Somalia," *Foreign Affairs,* 15 November 2011, Accessed online 29 April 2013 at: http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/136670/daniel-branch/why-kenya-invaded-somalia

[43] "Somalia's al-Shabaab Islamists Move North into Puntland," *BBC,* 11 April 2012, Accessed online 02 March 2013 at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17674996. "Somalia: Al-Shabaab Commanders Flee Towards Yemen," *Shabelle Media Network,* 23 February 2012, Accessed online 02 March 2013 at: http://allafrica.com/stories/201202240787.html. Are Al-Shabaab Fighters Fleeing to Yemen?," *Somaliareport.com,* 15 March 2012, Accessed online 28 March 2013 at: http://www.somaliareport.com/index.php/post/3079.

[44] "Xarakada Al-Shabaab oo Sheegey in ay Xeelad Dagaal uga Baxeen Goobo ku yaal Muqdisho," *Somalitalk.com,* 06 August 2011, Accessed online 02 May 2013 at: http://somalitalk.com/2011/08/06/xarakada-al-shabaab-oo-sheegey-in-ay-xeelad-dagaal-uga-baxeen-goobo-ku-yaal-muqdisho/

[45] Azalone, Christopher, "Al-Shabaab's Tactical and Media Strategies in the Wake of its Battlefield Setbacks," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (27 March 2013): 1-2.

[46] "Somalia's Al-Shabaab Islamists Abandon Last Major Stronghold Of Kismayo After Government Assault," *The Telegrapher,* 29 September 2012, Accessed online 26 April 2013 at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/somalia/9575671/Somalias-al-Shabaab-Islamists-abandon-last-major-stronghold-of-Kismayo-after-government-assault.html

Al-Shabaab Attacks per Month

Al-Shabaab Attributed Attacks from Febuary 2012 - June 2013
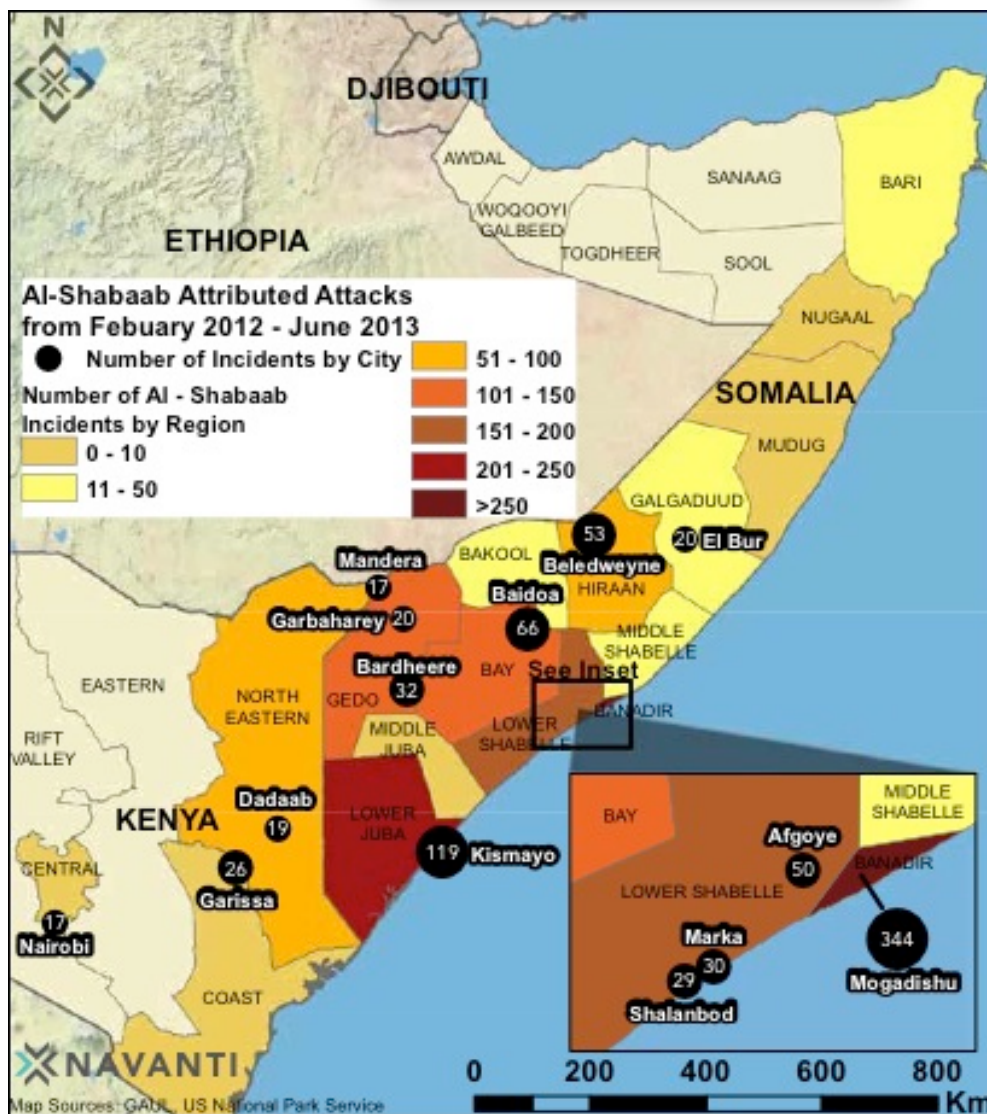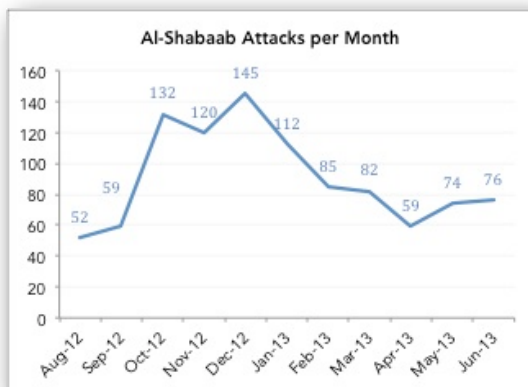
Recently, on 14 April 2013, al-Shabaab executed an attack targeting Mogadishu's main courthouse using multiple suicide bombings killing at least twenty-nine people (see table below).[47]

Internal Conflicts

In addition to suffering tactical defeats, internal conflicts have contributed to al-Shabaab's setbacks. Within al-Shabaab's upper echelon, there have been longstanding disputes and conflicts regarding goals, strategies, and tactics. Many of these appear to be molded around the discourse concerning globalist versus nationalist agendas. Individuals within the ranks of al-Shabaab's leadership, such as Ahmed Godane, remain committed to pursuing an al-Qa'ida allied global jihadist agenda while others, such as senior commanders Muktar Robow (Abu Mansoor) and Hassan Dahir Aweys, support a more nationalist and local approach, marked by a wariness of al-Qa'ida's foreign influence in Somalia.[48]

Other internal disputes have revolved around tactics. Several top leaders have voiced opposition to al-Shabaab's indiscriminant killing of innocent Somalis and its monopolistic control over other Islamist movements in Somalia.[49] In April 2013, two senior al-Shabaab leaders, Ibrahim al-Afghani and Shura council member al-Zubeyr al-Muhajir, published open letters addressed to al-Qa'ida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri requesting his intervention to resolve disputes within al-Shabaab.[50] In particular, the letters declared that al-Shabaab's misfortunes are the result of Godane's tyrannical rule and that the leader has neglected the teachings of Islam, mistreated foreign fighters, and deprived his critics of basic necessities, among other wrongs.[51]

In particular, the poor treatment of foreign fighters has resulted in public manifestations of discontent within al-Shabaab best reflected by the situation of former American al-Shabaab commander Omar Hammami (Abu Mansoor al-Amriki). Hammami has accused Godane of mistreating foreign fighters and executing those who pose a threat to his authority. Through a public discourse on Twitter, Hammami asserted that al-Shabaab's recent losses are largely a byproduct of Godane's

Omar Hammami.
Source: Somalilandsun.com

---

[47] "Somalia conflict: 'Foreigners' behind Mogadishu attacks," *BBC,* 15 April 2013, Accessed online 02 March 2013 at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22153911

[48] Roble, Muhyadin Ahmed, "Al-Shabaab Split Threatens to Open New Conflict Between Somalia's Islamists," *Terrorism Monitor* Volume 10 Issue 9 (04 May 2012): 1.

[49] Ibid.

[50] "Second Shabaab Official Publicly Criticizes Leader Over Fighter Grievances," *Site Monitoring Service: Jihadist Threat,* 24 April 2013, Accessed online 25 April 2013 at: http://newsomali.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/SITE-Intel-Group-4-24-13-IWISC-Zubeir-Muhajir-to-Godane-Problems-of-Shabaab.pdf

[51] "The Letters: How Al-Qaeda Failed in Mali and Somalia," *Wardheernews.com,* 18 April 2013, Accessed online 24 April 2013, at: http://www.wardheernews.com/the-letters-how-al-qaeda-failed-in-mali-and-somalia/

mismanagement.[52] Al-Shabaab publicly denounced Hammami in turn, and on 25 April 2013, reportedly failed in an assassination attempt on the former commander.[53]

On 30 April 2013, Robow, al-Afghani, and Aweys issued a public *fatwa* (religious decree) condemning Godane for attempting to assassinate Hammami and breaking Islamic law.[54] Hammami's current status and whereabouts are unknown, though Aweys asserted in a 17 May 2013 audio recording that the American-born jihadist was still alive.[55]

In June 2013, al Shabaab fighters loyal to opposing leaders fought in Barawe, an al-Shabaab stronghold in the Lower Shabelle region, over the supposed creation of a breakaway faction led by Robow, al-Afghani, and Aweys.[56,57] On 23 June 2013, Aweys fled Barawe for the safety of the Mudug region in central Somalia, where he reportedly retains strong clan ties.[58] However, Aweys was captured by the Himan and Heeb regional administration and later delivered to the Somali Federal Government (SFG) in Mogadishu.[59] Following Aweys departure, Godane reportedly executed al-Afghani and several other high-ranking al-Shabaab officials in Barawe, and attempted to kill Robow, who was residing in the Bakool region.[60]

Currently, it appears Godane has consolidated control of al-Shabaab by eliminating rivals to his leadership. While internal divisions have weakened the group's reputation and caused defections amongst its forces, al-Shabaab has continued to execute coordinated attacks throughout south and central Somalia including high-profile targets in Mogadishu. The true fallout of this recent leadership tussle remains to be seen.

---

[52] Hammami, Omar, "From the Poor Servant Abu Mansour al-Amriki," 07 January 2013.

[53] "Omar Hammami, American Jihadi In Somalia, Tweets On Kill Attempt By Al Shabaab Assassin," *The Huffington Post,* 26 April 2013, Accessed online 26 April 2013 at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/26/omar-hammami-american-somalia_n_3161506.html

[54] "About the Attempted Assassination of Abu Mansoor al-Amriki and His Companions Khatab al-Masri and Usamah al-Britani," *Islamic World Issues Study Center,* 30 April 2013, Accessed online 30 April 2013 at: http://www.aljahad.com/vb/showthread.php?t=31152

[55] Sheekh Xasan Daahir Aweys oo culumada Soomaaliyeed u Marqaati kacay (Dhageyso)," Halgan.net, 16 May 2013, Accessed online 21 May 2013 at: http://halgan.net/2013/05/sheekh-xasan-daahir-aweys-oo-culumada-soomaaliyeed-u-marqaati-kacay-dhageyso/

[56] "Somalia: Al Shabaab Dispute Turns Violent, Factions Emerge," Allafrica.com, 21 June 2013, accessed online 19 July 2013 at: http://allafrica.com/stories/201306220100.html

[57] "Xiisad Kacsan oo ka Taagan Degmada Baraawe Ka Dib Dagaal Saakay Halkaasi ka Dhacay," Bulshoweyn.com, 20 June 2013, accessed online 19 July 2013 at: http://bulshoweeyn.com/news.php?readmore=481

[58] "Sheekh Xasan Daahir Aweys oo Dooni uga Baxsaday Degmada Baraawe," Mareeg.com, 24 June 2013, accessed online 19 July 2013 at: http://www.mareeg.com/fidsan.php?Sheekh-Xasan-Daahir-Aweys-oo-Dooni-uga-Baxsaday-Degmada-Baraawe&sid=29379&tirsan=2

[59] "Somalia: Al-Shabaab Says it has Killed Two of its Senior Commanders – Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys Arrested on Arrival in Mogadishu," Allafrica.com, 01 July 2013, accessed online 19 July 2013 at: http://allafrica.com/stories/201307020072.html

[60] Rajonew.com, "Dhagayso: Muqtar Roobow oo Baxsad Ku So Galay Tuulo Ka Tirsan," 26 June 2013, http://rajonews.com/2013/06/26/dhagayso-muqtaar-rooboow-oo-baxsad-ku-soo-galay-tuulo-ka-tirsan-xudur/

Key Questions for the future of al-Shabaab and Somalia

Al-Shabaab appears to be at a crossroads as internal divisions and the continued advance of government-allied forces have weakened the group. At this critical juncture, several questions emerge for understanding the future of al Shabaab and Somalia.

In Somalia

How will al-Shabaab's Amir Godane react to additional dissension and what further consequences will Godane's actions have on the group and its ability to respond to territorial losses?

- Can al-Shabaab withstand further encroachment on its territory, and maintain a safe haven from which to launch attacks?

- Will Robow and Aweys, former top leaders of al-Shabaab, break ranks with al-Shabaab entirely and join the Somalia Federal Government in repelling Godane and al-Shabaab's remaining members?

What steps can the Somalia Federal Government (SFG) undertake to hasten the demise of al-Shabaab and manage the environment afterwards?

- Are negotiations and the re-integration of less ideologically rigid members of al-Shabaab possible? In addition to the SFG defector amnesty program, what other programs can ensure the demobilization and reintegration of former al-Shabaab fighters back into Somali society (especially in the wake of security threats presented by recent defectors)?

- Can the SFG and other regional administrations avoid a descent into clan politics permitting al-Shabaab to capitalize on any lost momentum?

- What is the future role of Kenya and Ethiopia in Somalia? Can the SFG sufficiently increase its capacity enough in the middle term to adequately provide enough governance and security to allow for the departure of foreign forces (prior to the setting in of any 'mission creep')?

In The Horn of Africa Region

How long can Kenya and Ethiopia sustain its military intervention into Somalia?

- Both Kenya and Ethiopia have been able to significantly reduce al-Shabaab's strength, but these countries have not been able to completely destroy the group. At what point will Kenya and Ethiopia reduce their commitments in Somalia?

To what level is al-Shabaab prepared to expand its struggle outside the confines of Somalia?

- Given the mounting pressure within Somalia, does al-Shabaab have its sights set on regional expansion? Is the movement prepared to reconstruct itself as more of an East African al-Qa'ida affiliate, albeit it with a Somali base?

The West

What is the most effective role for the United States and the international community to play in Somalia?

- After recognizing the new Somali government in January 2013, what further actions can the U.S. and the international community undertake to aid the SFG? Will these efforts provide any further governance advances than past failed efforts to stabilize Somalia?

- What programs or agencies can be most effective in terms of collaboration and addressing Somali issues?

What is the real threat of al-Shabaab to the West?

- Despite al-Shabaab's recent setbacks, will the al-Qa'ida affiliate continue to pose a threat to the West, especially in light of the recent Woolwich attack of a British soldier in the UK which suggests ties to al-Shabaab, Somalia and Kenya?

Conclusion

Al-Shabaab once appeared to be one of the most formidable terrorist groups in the world proving capable of governing vast amounts of territory and executing well-orchestrated attacks both inside and outside of Somalia. However, events over the past two years have left the group in a weakened state. Al-Shabaab's loss of territory and public support, in combination with internal conflict, has greatly reduced the group's capacity since its peak. This has created hope for the SFG and opportunity for interventions by the international community, such as the Friends of Somalia, to engage the Somali people and help rebuild the country. However, despite it's setbacks, al-Shabaab still commands territory and fighters, and remains a serious threat capable of destabilizing Somalia and the greater Horn of Africa region, and potentially inspiring attacks globally.

Somalia's Al-Shabaab: Down But Not Out *represents the fifth brief in a Special Issue Brief Series:* *African Security Challenges*. *The series is a collaborative project from the* *Homeland Security Policy* *Institute* *(HSPI) and the* *Navanti Group*. *The first four briefs in this series,* *Pardon the Pivot, What* *about Africa?*, *Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria: No Easy Fix*, *Northern Mali: Armed Groups, State* *Failure, and Terrorism*, *and* *Origins and Dimensions of Instability in Post-Qaddafi Libya* *can be found* *on HSPI website.*

Founded in 2003, The George Washington University *Homeland Security Policy Institute* *(HSPI) is a* *nonpartisan "think and do" tank whose mission is to build bridges between theory and practice to* *advance homeland security through an interdisciplinary approach. By convening domestic and* *international policymakers and practitioners at all levels of government, the private and non-profit* *sectors, and academia, HSPI creates innovative strategies and solutions to current and future threats to* *the nation.*

Navanti Group *specializes in professional services using social media, indigenous researchers, and expert* *analysts to solve complex communications, development, and irregular warfare challenges. Navanti* *combines analytical prowess and technological savvy to pull together new and innovative solutions to* *difficult global problems.*