

# Policy Briefing

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## Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War

### I. Overview

Despite the recent military surge against Somalia's armed Islamist extremist and self-declared al-Qaeda affiliate, Al-Shabaab, its conclusive "defeat" remains elusive. The most likely scenario – already in evidence – is that its armed units will retreat to smaller, remote and rural enclaves, exploiting entrenched and ever-changing clan-based competition; at the same time, other groups of radicalised and well-trained individuals will continue to carry out assassinations and terrorist attacks in urban areas, including increasingly in neighbouring countries, especially Kenya. The long connection between Al-Shabaab's current leadership and al-Qaeda is likely to strengthen. A critical breakthrough in the fight against the group cannot, therefore, be achieved by force of arms, even less so when it is foreign militaries, not the Somali National Army (SNA), that are in the lead. A more politically-focused approach is required.

Even as its territory is squeezed in the medium term, Al-Shabaab will continue to control both money and minds. It has the advantage of at least three decades of Salafi-Wahhabi proselytisation (*daawa*) in Somalia; social conservatism is already strongly entrenched – including in Somaliland and among Somali minorities in neighbouring states – giving it deep reservoirs of fiscal and ideological support, even without the intimidation it routinely employs.

An additional factor is the group's proven ability to adapt, militarily and politically – flexibility that is assisted by its leadership's freedom from direct accountability to any single constituency. From its first serious military setbacks in 2007 and again in 2011, it has continually reframed the terms of engagement. It appears to be doing so again.

Countering Al-Shabaab's deep presence in south-central Somalia requires the kind of government – financially secure, with a common vision and coercive means – that is unlikely to materialise in the near term. More military surges will do little to reduce the socio-political dysfunction that has allowed Al-Shabaab to thrive; in certain areas it may even serve to deepen its hold. The Somali Federal Government (SFG), supported by external allies, should consider the following political options:

- implementing, as outlined in the "National Stabilisation Strategy" (NSS), parallel national and local reconciliation processes at all levels of Somali society;

- ❑ imitating Al-Shabaab's frequently successful techniques of facilitating local clan dialogue and reconciliation (as per the National Stabilisation Strategy, NSS), as well as religious education;
- ❑ developing a new approach to establishing local and regional administrations that privileges neither SFG appointees nor clients of neighbouring states; and
- ❑ making the local (Somali) political grievances that enable Al-Shabaab to remain and rebuild in Somalia the paramount focus, not regional or wider international priorities.

## II. The Limits of the Military Surge

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The latest combined African Union (AU) Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) and SNA offensive operation ("Eagle") began on 5 March 2014, driving Al-Shabaab out of at least ten major south-central towns in twenty days; eight of these were taken by the 4,000-plus Ethiopian troops newly re-hatted into AMISOM (including Bulo Burte, where Djiboutian contingents also fought).<sup>1</sup> The now slowing offensive will have achieved its immediate objectives of degrading Al-Shabaab's capacity, but only to a degree.<sup>2</sup> As in the past, the group did not put up much immediate resistance but waited to exploit AMISOM's stretched lines of command and control. It also worked to minimise any immediate "post-liberation" benefits by blocking supply routes and intimidating locals, while the SNA's ill-discipline soured the arrival of central government, and deadly clan disputes continued in several locations.<sup>3</sup> The campaign did not reach the Al-Shabaab safe havens and strongholds in Lower Shabelle, including the port city of Barawa, and Lower and Middle Juba, in particular the towns of Jilib, Sakow and Bardheere.

The renewed military push, after a hiatus of nearly fourteen months, should be set against a process of Al-Shabaab retreat and retrenchment, dating from 2011 and culminating in the dramatic internal putsch that took place in the town of Barawa, Lower Shabelle, in late June 2014.<sup>4</sup> Some have called this the "reinvention" of Al-Shabaab, though it is questionable how strategic the change is.<sup>5</sup> There have been some funda-

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<sup>1</sup> For background to the offensive, see Paul D. Williams, "Stabilising Somalia: The African Union Mission and the Next Stage in the War Against Al-Shabaab", *The RUSI Journal*, vol. 159, no. 2 (2014), pp. 52-60.

<sup>2</sup> Some analysts characterised AMISOM's recent campaigns as "mowing the lawn": suppressing, not solving the core problem. An Ethiopian colonel serving with AMISOM in the Baidoa, Bay and Bakool regions said the main security problem was "the deeply rooted conflict within the clan system, and not Al-Shabaab". "Ill-equipment, clan rivalries weaken Somalia's army – report", Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN), 28 May 2014.

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent first-hand account of newly-liberated areas in Lower Shabelle, see Tristan McConnell, "Inside the fight for Somalia's future", *Global Post*, 29 May 2014; the fighting in Lower Shabelle has been particularly bitter. "Clans clash in Somalia's Lower Shabelle", IRIN, 11 June 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Shabaab retreated from Mogadishu in August 2011; Afgoye (Lower Shabelle) was "liberated" on 25 May 2012; Balad (Middle Shabelle) on 26 June 2012, and Kismayo on 29 September 2012. The then foreign minister, Fausia Yusuf, said in an October 2013 briefing to the UN Security Council that AMISOM's defensive posture from late 2012 to early 2014 "provided Al-Shabaab with the breathing room to regroup and take the offensive", quoted in "Stabilising Somalia", op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> Matt Bryden, "The Reinvention of Al-Shabaab: A strategy of choice or necessity", Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 2014; also see Ken Menkhaus, "Al-Shabaab's Capabilities

mental shifts, and its capacity is likely to weaken, not least due to the reported departure of foreigners and diaspora-based Somalis.<sup>6</sup> However, Al-Shabaab still exhibits core strengths that have been apparent throughout its existence and that it uses ruthlessly to exploit every opportunity to undermine the progress of the externally-backed, still very feeble government in south-central Somalia.<sup>7</sup>

Its task is made easier, since there is so little consensus within the SFG – including supposedly loyal local authorities – over what “post-liberation” governance arrangements should look like.<sup>8</sup> That the offensive began amid bitter disagreements between the SFG and would-be regional authorities casts doubt over who is (literally) calling the shots.<sup>9</sup> The latest iterations of the “National Stabilisation Strategy” (NSS) for south-central Somalia, coordinated by the prime minister’s office, and more detailed interior ministry plans are still not finalised.<sup>10</sup>

While the approaches outlined in the NSS are consultative, participatory, locally sensitive and logically sequenced, implementation so far has been considerably less than ideal.<sup>11</sup> Allowances should be made for the lack of capacity within the SFG, but the top-down (re-)appointments of governors in newly liberated areas, often with no defined term limits (especially in Lower and Middle Shabelle, Hiraan, Bay and Bakool), fostered old and new grievances among the local populations.<sup>12</sup> Both Kenya and Ethiopia, though operating under AMISOM, have also promoted their long-standing allies

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Post-Westgate”, and Stig Jarle Hansen, “An In-Depth Look at Al-Shabab’s Internal Divisions”, both in *CTC Sentinel Special Issue*, vol. 7, no. 2, February 2014, pp. 4-12.

<sup>6</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, elder in Barawa, 8 January 2013; interview, Al-Shabaab defector, March 2014.

<sup>7</sup> This briefing looks at Al-Shabaab in the context of the political conflict in south-central Somalia. The primary sources are interviews with Somalis undertaken in Mogadishu, telephone interviews across the country and direct observations of the Crisis Group analyst in another capacity. Some interviewees were willing to be named, but many were not due to security reasons.

<sup>8</sup> The disputes between the SFG and the Juba Interim Administration, as well as the disputed formation of South West and Shabelle states are the most prominent examples.

<sup>9</sup> The coordination and objectives of AMISOM’s national contingents is increasingly questioned, especially after Kenya and later Ethiopia “re-hatted” unilateral deployments into the mission. A typical example of how they are viewed by an influential section of intellectuals (broadly nationalist with Islamist sympathies) is Abukar Arman, “Somalia: African solutions for African problems”, *Al Jazeera Opinion*, 9 May 2014.

<sup>10</sup> The first National Security and Stabilisation Plan (NSSP) was signed by Transitional Federal Government (TFG) President Sheikh Sharif on 10 August 2012, just weeks before he lost the presidential election in the transition to the Somali Federal Government. The new government of Hassan Sheikh presented its own version, in line with its “Six Pillar Policy”, at the London Somalia Conference in May 2013; the prime minister’s office has drafted “A National Stabilisation Strategy in South-Central Somalia”, a draft “Overview” (May 2014) of which is on file with Crisis Group.

<sup>11</sup> There is evidence, however, that the SFG is attempting greater coordination and implementation in line with the agreed draft strategy; the recent appointments of “care-taker” (non-permanent) administrations, for example in Bulo Burte, is a promising sign. Crisis Group email correspondence, donor institution, Nairobi, 16 June 2014.

<sup>12</sup> The president appointed the governor of Galgaduud, even though the province is split between at least two self-declared administrations. “Madaxweynaha somaliya oo gudoomiye u magacaabay gobolka Galgaduud” [“Somali president appoints new governor for the Galgaduud region”], *Radio WidhWidh* ([radiowidh.com](http://radiowidh.com)), 11 August 2013; Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur “Sidii”, the current governor of Lower Shabelle, has been in this position since 2007, when he was appointed by the then Transitional Federal Government (TFG) president, Abdillahi Yusuf; Crisis Group interview, Bulamarer elder, Nairobi, 18 June 2014.

in areas they have liberated.<sup>13</sup> Though there may be good tactical reasons for such appointments, they work against the declared intent of bottom-up processes of establishing local authority. In these and other unresolved local political battles, Al-Shabaab still has its uses for some Somali actors.<sup>14</sup>

### **III. What Makes Al-Shabaab Different?**

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Al-Shabaab has experienced an extraordinary rise by any measure.<sup>15</sup> It evinces a number of key differences – in addition to its extreme violence – from Somali rivals (with the exception of Somaliland). First, its core leadership, vitally from a cross-section of Somali clan-based society, remained remarkably constant over nearly a decade, until a July 2013 putsch claimed a few high-profile victims (see below); secondly, it has had a reasonably consistent declared objective, referenced to Islamic scriptural authority; and thirdly, in its continuing local presence for several years, especially in rural areas, its leaders have become adept at the cut and thrust of grassroots political governance.

#### **A. An “All-Somali” Movement**

Al-Shabaab remains at its core a Somali organisation. Previous Somali Islamist movements, al-Ittihaad al-Islami (AIAI) in particular, contributed to its formation, though certainly not all by design.<sup>16</sup> External influences – including al-Qaeda networks, in the

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<sup>13</sup> The most obvious case is Kismayo and the now Juba Interim Administration; “Xasan Shiikh oo walaac ka muujiyey ciidamada Kenya ee Kismaayo ku sugan iyo Kenya oo ka jawaabtay (Dhegayso)” [“Kenya responds to Hassan Sheikh’s concerns on its military inside Kismayo”], Raadreeb (raadreeb.com), 27 May 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Crisis Group interviews, south-central Somalia, December 2013-January 2014. In this same pre-offensive period, Crisis Group also conducted a straw poll in south-central Somalia with twenty individuals from a cross-section of society (officials, ex-Al-Shabaab fighters, religious leaders, local SFG administrators, students and clan elders), who were asked ten questions on their perceptions of Al-Shabaab, especially its strengths and weaknesses. The exercise does not claim to be especially scientific or wholly representative, but the results may be seen as indicative of a sampling of grassroots views. A more systematic, long-term survey and analysis of Somali views of Al-Shabaab and others is in “Alternatives for Conflict Transformation in Somalia: A snapshot and analysis of key political actors views and strategies”, Life and Peace Institute Report, May 2014.

<sup>15</sup> This briefing does not offer a complete account, and there are a number of points of convergence and divergence with other narratives, including Crisis Group’s own previous work on Islamists in Somalia. One example of a revised view is the profile and influence of non-Somali (al-Qaeda affiliated) “foreigners” in Al-Shabaab leadership positions; see Africa Briefing N°74, *Somalia’s Divided Islamists*, 18 May 2010, fn. 45. For previous work on armed Islamists in Somalia, including Al-Shabaab, see also Crisis Group Africa Report N°100, *Somalia’s Islamists*, 12 December 2005; and Africa Briefing N°85, *Kenyan Somali Islamists Radicalisation*, 25 January 2012. The most complete stand-alone recent academic account in English is Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group* (London, 2013). Roland Marchal pioneered sociological analysis of Al-Shabaab with a historical perspective, most recently in “A tentative assessment of the Somali *Harakat Al-Shabaab*”, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, vol. 3, no. 3 (2009); and “The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat Al-Shabaab Al Mujaheddin”, unpublished manuscript, 2011, at [www.sciencespo.fr/cei/sites/sciencespo.fr.cei/files/art\\_RM2.pdf](http://www.sciencespo.fr/cei/sites/sciencespo.fr.cei/files/art_RM2.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> AIAI was most active between 1991 and 1996, with strongholds in Balad Hawa and Luuq in Gedo; Doble, Ras Kamboni, Afmadow, Badade in Lower Juba, and, temporarily, in Bossasso (Bari) in the north east (present-day Puntland); it was also in Burao and Borama in Somaliland in 1991. Its in-

region and further afield– were significant in ideological formulation, financial resources and technical assistance but never overwhelmed its core Somali foundations.<sup>17</sup>

The exact circumstances of Al-Shabaab's origins are still debated.<sup>18</sup> A number of radicals who achieved prominence in the group had already functioned as a small Salafi jihadi cell in Somaliland, with particular links to Masjid Jaama, the main Hargeysa mosque.<sup>19</sup> Others had created a similar cluster in the southern town of Ras Kamboni.<sup>20</sup> Many had been with earlier Salafi jihadi groups, particularly AIAI in its Gedo, Bay, Bakool, Galgaduud and Puntland strongholds, as well as others outside Somalia.<sup>21</sup> Some of these gathered in Mogadishu in early 2003, when the residents, and especially the resurgent business community, were willing to back the rapid growth of clan- and Sharia- (Islamic law) based Islamic Courts of varying theological persuasions, as an alternative to the warlords and freelance militias (*mooryan*) that had blighted the city for much of the 1990s.<sup>22</sup>

The group was first established at a workshop known as “Nasruddin garage”, initially under the protection of the Ifka Halane Sharia court (the Ayr/Habar Gedir/Hawiye clan court) led by the ex-AIAI leader, Hassan Dahir Aweys.<sup>23</sup> By 2004 it had expanded and was led by Abdullahi Maalim Mukhtar (Abgal/Hawiye), a business-

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fluence and activity extended to Somali-speaking areas of south-eastern Ethiopia and north-eastern Kenya. AIAI-linked terrorist attacks in Ethiopia prompted the Ethiopian incursions into Luuq in 1996 and 1997. Militarily defeated, most key AIAI members scattered throughout the Somali-speaking Horn of Africa, some regained political and business influence. The non-violent Salafi group al-Ictisaam (Al-I'tisaam in Arabic), established in Las Canod in 1996, was an offshoot. Crisis Group telephone interview, former al-Ictisaam member, Mogadishu, 27 May 2014. AIAI's history is detailed in Crisis Group Report, *Somalia's Islamists*, op. cit., pp. 3-11.

<sup>17</sup> Crisis Group interview, Professor Yahya Amir, Mogadishu University lecturer, Mogadishu, December 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Somalia's Islamists*, op. cit., pp. 11-12, noted the emergence of a “new, ruthless independent Somali jihadi network” since 2003; for an overview of the different versions, see Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, op. cit., pp. 19-47.

<sup>19</sup> The Hargeysa group was responsible for three murders of Europeans (Annalena Tonneli, an Italian nurse in Borama on 5 October 2003, and British teachers Richard and Enid Eyeinton, in Sheikh on 21 October 2003), as well as the less internationally well-known murder and robbery (Birr1.5 million, \$70,000) of a wealthy Ethiopian businessman. In April 2004, a German aid agency vehicle was attacked between Berbera and Hargeysa; among the suspects arrested were Jaama Ali Ismail “Kutiye” and Da'ud Salah Iidle, both linked to AIAI activities in the 1990s. For a detailed description of the Somaliland killings, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°95, *Counter-Terrorism in Somalia: Losing Hearts and Minds?*, 11 July 2005, pp. 4-6; Crisis Group interviews, General Yusuf “Indha Adde”, former Union of Islamic Courts commander and now SNA general, Mogadishu, December 2013.

<sup>20</sup> See Omar Iman Abubakar, *A Tajribah Mahakim Al-Islami Fi Soomaal* [“The Islamic Courts in Somalia”] (Cairo, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> Many, but by no means all Al-Shabaab founding members had external experience, including Ismail Mohamed “Araale” (former emir); Ahmed Abdi “Godane” (current emir); Ibrahim “Afghani” (commander killed in Barawa in July 2013); Adan Hashi “Ayro” (commander killed by an airstrike in Dhusamareb, May 2008); and Mukhtar Robow “Abu Mansur” (commander). Crisis Group Report, *Somalia's Islamists*, op. cit., p.11.

<sup>22</sup> Business backers were especially important, including money transfer (*Hawala*) agencies, as well as telecommunication and import-export companies. Crisis Group Report, *Somalia's Islamists*, op. cit., pp. 19–21.

<sup>23</sup> The original Nasruddin garage group was headed by Omar Dheere (Saleban/Habar Gedir/Hawiye), killed in eastern Ethiopia, April 2007, and also believed to have been ex-AIAI and part of the Hargeysa group, even though his clan is from central Somalia. Crisis Group interview, former senior Al-Shabaab official, Mogadishu, December 2013.

man not part of the original group and become known as Al-Shabaab.<sup>24</sup> Only some members were former and would-be jihadis committed to wholesale implementation of Sharia; certainly, many were not committed to global jihad.<sup>25</sup>

The desecration of a colonial-era Italian cemetery in Mogadishu in January 2005 brought Al-Shabaab notoriety, but it was an act motivated as much by commercial gain as ideology. Much of the cleared site was sold.<sup>26</sup> On the remainder, the group built the Salahuddin Ayubi Centre, where new recruits were trained and accommodated.<sup>27</sup> In early 2005, the group selected Ahmed Abdi “Godane” (Reer Adan Waraabe/Arab/Isaaq), associated with the Hargeysa group, as its first emir and Ahmed Mohamed Islam “Madobe” (Mohamed Zubeyr/Ogaden), from the Ras Kamboni militia, as deputy emir.<sup>28</sup> Close witnesses argue that Godane and Madobe implemented a decisive shift toward a Salafi-jihadi agenda, though the appointment of an Ogadeni deputy was also pragmatic clan politics.<sup>29</sup> A Shura (council) was also appointed.

Al-Shabaab made use of the opportunity presented by the rise of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in south-central Somalia. On 5 June 2006, the UIC, led by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad and Hassan Dahir Aweys, took control of Mogadishu, establishing a 91-member Shura with nineteen permanent members (including four principal leaders), and a fifteen-member executive council.<sup>30</sup> Al-Shabaab was awarded a significant share of the positions; in particular, given his organisational ability, Godane (alias Sheikh Mukhtar Abu Zubeyr) was named secretary general (*xogeyaha guud ee fulinta*) of the executive council; he relinquished his position as Al-Shabaab’s

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<sup>24</sup> The original “Al-Shabaab” – not the later Harakat Al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin formally declared in 2008 – was chosen to avoid a specific religious orientation, as well as specific clan or regional association, that may have deterred membership. Crisis Group interview, Hassan Dahir Aweys, Mogadishu, 14-15 March 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, former Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) Shura member, Mogadishu, February 2014. For more on the rise of clan-based Islamic courts, see Crisis Group Report, *Somalia’s Islamists*, op. cit., pp 19-22.

<sup>26</sup> Khalif Adale (Ayr/Habar Gedir) is generally seen to be the mastermind behind the idea to desecrate the cemetery and sell the remains to the Italian government for €1.5 million. The Italians denied any payment. Crisis Group analyst interview in another capacity, Italian diplomat, 2006. Previous accounts have connected the act to Adan Hashi “Ayro”. See Crisis Group Report, *Counter-Terrorism in Somalia*, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Those whose commitment to Salafi-jihadism was doubted were sidelined and quietly removed; among members who were later excluded was the first leader of “Al-Shabaab” as a discreet named group (see fn. 24), Abdullahi Maalim Mukhtar. Crisis Group interview, early Al-Shabaab member, Nairobi, January 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, former Transitional Federal Government of Somalia (TFG) president and UIC leader, Kampala, November 2013. Madobe is now president of the Juba Interim Administration.

<sup>29</sup> Under the al-Rashidun caliphate, there was no deputy emir. Madobe was supported by the Ras Kamboni group, led by Sheikh Hassan Abdullahi Hirsi “Turki” (Mohamed Zubeyr/Ogaden), which also had key connections with al-Qaeda operatives. Crisis Group interviews, General Yusuf “Indha Adde”, Mogadishu, December 2013; Al-Shabaab founding member, Nairobi, January 2014.

<sup>30</sup> The composition of the UIC Shura and executive council was drawn from several distinct entities, in particular the “Sisi” court, led by Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, who was selected as the chairman (*gudoomiye*) of the UIC; Mu’askar Daynille, a court and militia led by Abdirahman Mohamoud Farah “Janaqow”, selected as the UIC first deputy chairman; and the Shirkole Officiate court, led by Abduldqadir Ali Omar, selected as the second deputy chairman. Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, former TFG president and leader of the UIC, Kampala, November 2013.

emir and was replaced by Ismail Araale.<sup>31</sup> Though most Al-Shabaab members were committed Salafists and supported jihad against the TFG and its external supporters, many would later disagree with the decisive shift to terror tactics.

### B. *A Credible (Theological) Administration*

By its self-definition as a Sunni Salafi jihadi group, Al-Shabaab tries to emulate in organisation and action the four “rightly guided” caliphs, the *al-Rashidun* (Abubakar, Omar, Uthman and Ali), that led Islam in the seventh century after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>32</sup> For Al-Shabaab, as for other Salafi jihadi organisations, many Muslim empires and states that followed the *al-Rashidun*, have deviated from the right Islamic path. Their response and duty as true believers is to return Muslims to the righteous path under one state (caliphate). Like most modern Salafis, Al-Shabaab is also heavily influenced by the Wahhabist interpretations, and their emphasis on strict scriptural authority (the Quran and Sunna) as the instructions – theological roadmap – for the organisation and structure by which to build such a righteous state.<sup>33</sup>

At its height of territorial control, Al-Shabaab established a relatively devolved Islamic government, along the lines laid out by Islamic scripture, with functional *maktab* (ministries) and *wilayaad* (regional administration): a basic but functioning alternative to the series of weak federal Mogadishu-based governments.<sup>34</sup> Its prioritisation of Sharia implementation is difficult for those governments to compete against, not least because of the disciplined armed following it can call on to enforce judgements.<sup>35</sup> When establishing its presence, Al-Shabaab also routinely establishes a local Shura of clan elders that it purports to consult; however the group, or specifically the emir, maintains the prerogative to overrule the Shura if necessary.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Other important Al-Shabaab appointments included Mukhtar Robow, defence deputy; “Abu Uteybah”, head of security; Adan Hashi “Ayro”, overall military commander; and Sheikh Omar, the health head. See Omar Iman Abubakar, *A Tajribah Mahakim Al-Islami Fi Soomaal*, op. cit. Godane became emir again after Araale’s arrest in Djibouti in May 2007; Crisis Group interview, former UIC *shura* member, Mogadishu, December 2013. Also present in the group’s core leadership at this time were *Maalim* (“teacher”) Ali Me’ad (Sa’ad Muse/Habar Awal/Isaaq), who later was known as Ibrahim “Afghani”, Ibrahim Haji Jaama Me’ad and, while “governor of Juba regions” c. 2009, “Abubakar Zeylii”; Mukhtar Robow (Leysan/Rahanweyn); Adan Hashi “Ayro” (Ayr/Habar Gedir/Hawiye), killed by an airstrike in Dhusamareb, May 2008; Abdullahi Yare (Duduble/Habar Gedir); “Ina Ainashe” (Issaq); “Abu Muslim” (Rahanweyn); “Abu Uteybah” (Murusade/Hawiye); “Dulyadeen” (Ogaden/Absame/Darood); and Hassan “Afgoye” (Galadi/Digil). Hassan “Afgoye” is currently seen as a close confidant and possible successor of Godane. The exception is Ahmed Madobe, who split from Al-Shabaab in 2009. Crisis Group interviews, ex-Al-Shabaab senior official; ex-Al-Shabaab member, both Mogadishu, December 2013.

<sup>32</sup> See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005, pp. 9-14.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Shabaab shows some divergence (some would argue deviance) from the ideal, and highlighting inconsistencies has been the favoured tactic for critics of Godane’s leadership. The leadership’s response is to argue that its critics are themselves deviant. Crisis Group interview, religious scholar, Mogadishu, December 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Each *wilaaya* has a *waali* (governor) and represents the emir at the regional level.

<sup>35</sup> Crisis Group interview, Somali elder, Mogadishu, December 2013. Twelve of twenty Crisis Group straw-poll respondents agreed Al-Shabaab’s governance and administration wins it influence, though seventeen of twenty denied that its justice system followed “due process”.

<sup>36</sup> The justification for the emir’s executive authority is found in Quranic verse 159, chapter 3 (*Aal-e-Imran*).

While its opponents are divided on many issues, including the role of Sharia in the justice system, Al-Shabaab's relative internal discipline and simple, consistent message backed by demonstrably loyal forces remain relevant to a core constituency.<sup>37</sup> Both the consultative, "clan-based" local Shura and the implementation of an overarching legal code in tune with local realities – in Al-Shabaab's case its narrow interpretation of Sharia – are approaches more or less envisioned in the SFG's NSS but so far not implemented with any consistency.<sup>38</sup>

### C. *Machiavellism at the Margins*<sup>39</sup>

After nearly a decade of gaining and exercising power, Al-Shabaab has acquired on-the-job governance experience unmatched by any rival in south-central Somalia.<sup>40</sup> In this respect, and despite the common characterisation of the group as "foreign to Somali tradition", it is an acute manifestation of recent political and social developments in that region.<sup>41</sup> Its brief history is marked by many apparent contradictions that divide analysts.<sup>42</sup> This is not unusual for any "political" organisation, Islamist or otherwise. The core contradiction that regularly confounds external expectations is its markedly disciplined organisational approach, to the point of ideological rigidity, in parallel with political pragmatism.

Taking into account its regular setbacks, Al-Shabaab appears able to learn from its errors. Its brutality, including deeply unpopular terrorist attacks and summary

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<sup>37</sup> In its focus on governance and justice, Al-Shabaab is demonstrating the importance of its religious convictions; arguably "[b]eing a religion of law, Islam is inherently concerned with governance and so political in tendency", Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit., p. 2. "Rights and justice for all" also seems to be a key factor in attracting recruits to Al-Shabaab; see "No easy way forward for Al-Shabab defectors", IRIN, 12 June 2014.

<sup>38</sup> The commitment of the then TFG president, Sheikh Sharif, to implement Sharia in 2009 brought important condemnations of Al-Shabaab by leading Salafi clerics. Crisis Group Report, *Somalia's Divided Islamists*, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

<sup>39</sup> Hassan Dahir Aweys has termed Emir Godane a "Machiavelli": "We don't want Machiavelli to lead us ... Prophet Muhammad was not Machiavelli". See "Wareysi Xasan Daahir Aweys oo ka tirsan Al-Shabaab" ["Interview with Hassan Dahir Aweys, Al-Shabaab member"], Somalichannel.tv, 16 May 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Despite its ideological rigidity, substantial local level consultation with elders is an Al-Shabaab trademark. Its attention to clans has increased in relation to its territorial losses. See, for example, "Beesha absame oo hub iyo dhalinyaro ku wareejisay al-shabaab" ["Absame clan members hand over weapons and youth to Al-Shabaab"], Baidoa News Agency, 5 January 2012; "Beesha Gaaljecel iyo Alshabaab oo heshiis kala saxiixday, oo sidii Kismaayo loo qabsan lahaa u heshiyyay" ["Gaaljecel and Al-Shabaab sign an agreement on how to capture Kismayo"], Puntland Observer News, 31 March 2013.

<sup>41</sup> Given the amount of external input and expertise in all aspects of Somali life, including political and technical advice to government and security forces, having foreign influences does not make Al-Shabaab especially exotic. Its brutality, much of it directed at unarmed civilians, is also comparable to that of some other Somali groups fighting in the last twenty years, as well as during the later years of Siad Barre's regime (improvised explosive devices and suicide bombers aside). The most recent examination of early civil war violence is Lidwien Kapteijns, *Clan Cleansing in Somalia: The Ruinous Legacy of 1991* (Philadelphia, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> The most common divides noted are the supposed opposition between "nationalists and internationalists" or "pragmatists versus hardliners", but the infighting appears to depend on personal rivalries, animated by disputed interpretations of righteous leadership under Islam. Leadership legitimacy according to Islamic principles has been the basis for Hassan Dahir Aweys's criticism of Godane; the latest example is "Shiikh Xasan Daahir oo maamul gobolleedyada ku eedeeyey kuwo u shaqeeya Itoobiya (dhageyso)" ["Sheikh Hassan Dahir accuses the regional governments of working for Ethiopia (Listen)"], Radio Kulmiye, 20 May 2014.



justice, is paired with examples of everyday political acumen, especially at the grassroots. And from the outset, its leaders have shown an ability to amplify their relatively minority and marginal position to maximum national effect.

#### IV. **Retreat and Retrenchment: 2011-2014**

In modern Somali history, Al-Shabaab counts as a veteran organisation. The years between its founding (2004); rise within the UIC (2006); role in the “nationalist” *muqawama* (uprising) against the Ethiopian intervention against the UIC (2007-2009); territorial ascendancy after Ethiopia’s withdrawal; and finally partial retreat before a strengthened AMISOM (2009–2011), were not only eventful but also formative.<sup>43</sup> There were several other critical developments along the way, including an often overlooked damaging ideological assault by formerly supportive Salafi clerics that began well before its military losses.<sup>44</sup> There was also the forceful “absorption” of its rival Salafi-jihadi coalition, Hizbul Islam, in December 2010, an event that tested Al-Shabaab’s cohesion.<sup>45</sup>

Though Al-Shabaab weathered military and ideological setbacks, by early 2011 there was growing criticism of Emir Godane’s leadership. Yet, the internal criticism was contradictory; some fighters, including foreigners, reportedly disagreed with the withdrawal from Mogadishu; local Somali fighters – especially among the Digil and Mirifle (sometimes termed “Rahanweyn”) contingents that suffered heavy casualties – questioned the value of successive failed “Ramadan offensives” in 2010 and 2011.<sup>46</sup> The loss of Mogadishu in August 2011 and poor handling of the concurrent famine in the critical agricultural belt, then mostly under Al-Shabaab control, also required answers from the leadership.<sup>47</sup> There were growing demands that Godane convene the Shura.<sup>48</sup>

In an attempt to regain public confidence in December 2011, Godane made an unusually frank appeal to rank and file to examine their failings. A meeting convened in Baidoa agreed to establish a Sharia tribunal (*radul madalib*) to address grievances against the leaders. Some insiders saw this as a mechanism to shift the blame from top leaders to middle level officials like the regional governors; ultimately no senior official was charged.<sup>49</sup> However, if the tribunal was a public relations exercise, the leadership did make institutional and regional changes. Following further losses (Bad-

<sup>43</sup> Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, op. cit., is the most complete account; but see also Marchal, “A tentative assessment”, op. cit., and Crisis Group Report, *Somalia’s Divided Islamists*, op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> Hassan M. Abukar, “Somalia’s Salafi groups and fatwa wars: conflict between al-Ictisaam and Al-Shabab is dictated by political islam”, *The War within Islam* ([www.newageislam.com](http://www.newageislam.com)), 5 December 2012.

<sup>45</sup> Crisis Group Report, *Somalia’s Divided Islamists*, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Hassan Dahir Aweys and Mukhtar Robow saw the conventional fight in Mogadishu as unsustainable and opted to return to guerrilla warfare. Not all fighters agreed. Crisis Group telephone interview, senior Hizbul Islam member, Mogadishu, March 2014.

<sup>47</sup> A solid overview of the 2011 famine and Al-Shabaab’s response is Ashley Jackson and Abdi Aynte, “Talking to the other side: Humanitarian negotiations with Al-Shabaab in Somalia”, *Humanitarian Policy Group Working Paper*, Overseas Development Institute, December 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Godane’s closed leadership circle – rather than policy per se – has been another consistent criticism. “Godane oo beddelay ku-xigeennadiisii” [“Godane replaces his deputies”], *Voice of America* (VOA) Somali News, 26 August 2011; see also “Shiikh Xasan Daahir”, op. cit.

<sup>49</sup> Crisis Group interview, former senior Al-Shabaab official, Mogadishu, December 2013.

haadhe in February 2012, Afmadow and Afgoye in May), officials gathered in Barawa (a port south of Mogadishu) on 5-7 July and devised a radical rationalisation and re-trenchment to strengthen Al-Shabaab's declining position. Five administrative and military zones were restructured, including combining three regions into one zone,<sup>50</sup> and an overall military high command designed for rapid response (*gurmada deg-dega*) was established under Omar "Qadib", also known as "Abu Uteybah" (Isse/Dir).<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps Godane's boldest move was the announcement that Al-Shabaab had joined al-Qaeda in February 2012.<sup>52</sup> The relationship was already long standing; the public announcement may have been a tactical response to a year of losses, but it also drove a wedge between Godane and some senior members. Criticism of him continued to grow. On 31 March 2012, Hassan Dahir Aweys, Somalia's most senior jihadist (a leader of the AIAI, UIC, Hizbul Islam and now Al-Shabaab), delivered a sermon in an Eelasha Biyaha mosque (between Afgoye and Mogadishu), in which he criticised a Godane speech that declared Al-Shabaab the only "legal" representative of the Muslim community in Somalia.<sup>53</sup> This led to his house arrest. On 16 May 2013, in a telephone interview with a local media station, Aweys repeated his criticism of Godane, including his refusal to convene the Shura since the retreat from Mogadishu in August 2011.<sup>54</sup>

Godane avoided convening the Shura and staged a meeting in Sakow (Middle Juba) with most Al-Shabaab ranking officers and sheikhs in mid-June 2013. Al-Qaeda emissaries already in the Golis Mountains in Puntland reportedly delivered a message from the movement's new emir, Ayman al-Zawahiri. The meeting resulted in a collec-

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<sup>50</sup> "Dulyadeyn" (Mohamed Zuber) and Sheikh "Bukhari" (Marehan) were appointed the military leaders of a newly created zone (Lower Juba, Middle Juba and Lower Shabelle, with bases in Sakow and Yaq-Barawa). Both had close kinship connections there useful for military operations and recruitment (though Ibrahim "Afghani" and Hassan Yaqub, with no deep clan links, retained their official administrative positions); "Maalim" Ibrahim (Rahanweyn/Luwaa) and Khalif "Adale" (Habar Gedir/Ayr) were appointed military commanders of Gedo (base in Rabdhure) and Bay and Bakool (base in Dinsoor), respectively. Abdifatah "Baari" (Habar Gedir/Sarur) was appointed the top military official in Mogadishu and Middle Shabelle zone (base in Mogadishu); "Quslaye" (Mohamed Amal/Duduble) was named the new leader of another zone in Hiraan, Galgaduud and Mudug regions (bases in El-Bur and Harardhere); Mohamed Said "Atom" (other sources claim Sheikh Abdulqadir Muumin) was named the governor of Bari, Nugaal, Sool, Sanaag regions including Golis Mountains. Crisis Group interview, former senior Al-Shabaab official, Mogadishu, December 2013.

<sup>51</sup> The experienced commander, Bashir Mohamed Mohamoud "Qorgab" (Murosade/Hawiye), became overall military leader; Sheikh (*Maalim*) "Burhan" (Isaq/Habar Yunis) was appointed head of *daawa*; Khalid Seifullah, chief of Godane's security; and Dahir "Ga'amey" became head of the Shari'a courts. Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> "Glad tidings: announcement of Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahidin officially joining al-Qaidah", Global Islamic Media Front, 9 February 2012.

<sup>53</sup> The announcement of loyalty to al-Qaeda was an issue. Aweys declined to work with al-Qaeda in 1993 and kept that position. His questioning of Al-Shabaab's exclusive "legal" Muslim authority in Somalia was to avoid the accusation of *fitna* (divisiveness), a charge that can result in death under Sharia. Crisis Group interview, Aweys, Mogadishu, March 2013.

<sup>54</sup> In March 2013, a twitter account seemingly linked to the foreign fighter Omar Hammami "Abu-Mansur al-Amriki" posted "An Open Letter to Sheikh and Emir Sheikh Ayman al-Zawahiri" allegedly signed by Hassan Dahir Aweys, Mukhtar Robow, Ibrahim "Afghani". The letter – whose authenticity has not been proved – accused Godane of refusing to convene the Shura, the institution in which it was appropriate to raise grievances with the emir. There is no evidence of a response from Zawahiri. "Wareysi Xasan Daahir Aweys oo ka tirsan Al-Shabaab" ["Interview with Hassan Dahir Aweys, Al-Shabaab member"], Somalichannel.tv, 16 May 2013.

tive *fatwa* (judicial opinion) by Al-Shabaab sheikhs that Godane's opponents must lay down their arms and request forgiveness.<sup>55</sup>

On 22 June, Godane's faction, armed with the *fatwa*, moved against internal critics, including his mentor Ibrahim "Al-Afghani" and Abdihamid Hashi Olhaye, alias "Maalim Burhan", who were killed after they refused to surrender to Godane's men in the port city of Barawa. Aweys fled by boat from Barawa to the port of Harardheere (north of Mogadishu) and on 26 June was reported in Adado, Himan and Heeb region, in the custody of his Habar Gedir clansmen.<sup>56</sup> On 12 September 2013, another long-term critic, Omar Hammami, alias "Abu-Mansur al-Amriki" (a U.S.-born foreign fighter), and Osama al-Britani "Towfiq" (a UK citizen of Pakistani origin) were killed in a shootout with pro-Godane militants near Dinsor in Bay region.<sup>57</sup>

There is no definitive account of the June 2013 events centred on Barawa. But that Godane and his loyalists were able to move so comprehensively against all rivals suggests his power was well entrenched, and the divisions were based on personalities, not institutionalised.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, it is likely that Godane's grip over internal security, especially through the infamous *Amniyat* (literally "security" but in the context also "intelligence") network, was critical to the success of the putsch.<sup>59</sup>

In retrospect, it seemed to be the culmination of a well-thought out internal re-trenchment exercise, saving money and capacity as well as consolidating power. Ministries were cut, leaving only those dealing with critical issues. At least three remain operational: social issues and regional affairs (*arimaha bulshada iyo siyaasada gobolada*), headed by Hussein "Daynille"; information (*iclamka/warfafinta*), headed by Abdirahman Mudeey; and justice (*qadha*), headed by Sheikh Dahir Ga'mey.<sup>60</sup> Internal committees were strengthened to oversee important functions such as *zakat* (alms) collection (*lujnah zakawaat*) and response to drought and famine (*lujnah iqaathah*). Regional governors (*emirul wilayaad*) and other high officials were also reshuffled.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Crisis Group interview, ex-Al-Shabaab and Hizbul Islam member, Mogadishu, November 2013. Loyalty to the leadership has been a constant Godane refrain.

<sup>56</sup> A senior Hizbul Islam official said Aweys left Barawa not to escape Godane but to take part in a planned reconciliation conference between the SFG and Hizbul Islam in Qatar sponsored by Norway. Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, August 2013. Hassan Dahir was surrendered to the SFG after a tense standoff in Mogadishu International Airport and remains in house arrest.

<sup>57</sup> "Al-Amriki and al-Britani: Militants 'killed' in Somalia", BBC News, 12 September 2013.

<sup>58</sup> In the aftermath, those generally considered to be "pragmatists" (e.g. Fuad "Shongole", Ali Dheere, and Muktar Robow) were unusually quiet.

<sup>59</sup> Much emphasis, by both Somalis and foreign analysts, is put on Al-Shabaab's internal "intelligence" network, the *Amniyat*, "a parallel Al-Shabaab" headed at some point by another veteran and possible "deputy emir", Mahad "Karate" (Ayr/Habar Gedir). Crisis Group email correspondence, U.S.-based analyst, 18 June 2006. Close witnesses to the Barawa "putsch" claim that Mahad "Karate" led the team that was sent to arrest but then killed "Afghani" and "Burhan" after they refused to surrender. Crisis Group interview, ex-Al-Shabaab member, Mogadishu, December 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group telephone interviews, Hizbul Islam member and Al-Shabaab defector, Mogadishu, July 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Old and new leaders included (clan links noted where known): Abdirahman Hudeyfi, Middle and Lower Juba; Mahad Omar Abdikarim, Bay and Bakool; Sheikh Yusuf Sheikh Issa "Kabakutukade" (Wa'isley/Abgal/Hawiye), Middle Shabelle; Hassan Yaqub Ali (Haren/Rahanweyn), Galgaduud; Mohamed Mire (Majerteen/Harti/Darod), Hiraan; Ali Mohamed Hussein "Ali Jabal" (Rer Matan/Abgal/Hawiye), Banadir/Mogadishu; and Mohamed "Abu Abdalla" (Hawadle), Lower Shabelle. Other leading members included Abdiaziz "Abu Musab" (Marehan), military spokesman; Ali Mohamoud Rage (Murosade/Hawiye), overall spokesman; Hassan Afgoye (Geledi), possible depu-

By the latter half of 2013, – even after the internal blood-letting – the organisation was able to intensify attacks and recruit new members.<sup>62</sup> The period saw attacks inside Somalia targeting civilians, government officials and troops, and, critically, also in the region, particularly Kenya, targeting civilians and security officials, most notably the 21 September attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi.<sup>63</sup> In light of this, the timing of the Barawa putsch and the subsequent Westgate attack only months later was probably not directly related, as some have suggested. The two events, however, underlined Godane’s long-term strategy, which balances the priority of consolidating his control over the core Somali movement – some argue via the *Amniyat* – with closer ideological ties to al-Qaeda, but preserving his operational autonomy and curtailing the influence of foreign fighters and the push for Al-Shabaab to expand outside of Somalia.<sup>64</sup>

## V. Roots of Resilience

Al-Shabaab – as an armed insurgent group – has to be faced militarily, but as a movement, it is a much deeper social phenomenon. Even as it takes conventional losses, especially of territory, it apparently continues to infiltrate all walks and stations of Somali life, including some SFG agencies.<sup>65</sup> A small but significant example is that at the end of 2013, it in effect controlled Mogadishu’s Central Prison. The presence of Al-Shabaab suspects (just under half the prison’s population) had changed the institution’s character; the group’s usual local structures of an emir, *hasba* (moral police) *Amniyat* (internal intelligence agency) and Shura, were all operating, and members

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ty; Abukar Ali Adan (Gaalja’al), overall Al-Shabaab military/militia head; Maalim Harun (Rahanweyn), *istishaad* – martyrdom; Abdi Muse (Bimal/Dir), military logistics; “Abu Muslim” (Elay/Rahanweyn), *hasbah* – moral police; Samatar Oyo’w, another close Godane ally, *daawa*; Fuad Mohamed “Shongole” (Awrtable/Darod), also *daawa*; Sheikh Mohamed “Abu Sangaab” (Gadabursi/Dir), finance; Abdirahman Ali Mudey (Gaalja’al), information; Husein “Daynille” (Murosade), social programs and the regions; Sheikh Dahir Maalim Ahmed (Duduble/Habar Gedir/Hawiye), Sharia courts; Mohamed “Dinsor” (Rahanweyn) Dinsor militia command; and “Dayib” (Duduble/Habar Gedir/Hawiye), *Amniyat*, security/intelligence, Lower Shabelle. Crisis Group interviews, observations, Nairobi, July 2013.

<sup>62</sup> The former UIC commander and SNA military official Yusuf “Indha Adde” said that from February to November 2013 Al-Shabaab trained at least seven batches of new recruits, the last graduating in November 2013 in Bula Burte, Central Somalia. Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, November 2013. Recruitment continues according to an UNSOM official: “As 1,000 defect another 1,000 are recruited”, quoted in “No easy way forward for Al-Shabab defectors”, IRIN, op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> High-profile attacks in this period included: 14 April 2013, the Mogadishu court complex, killing 29 people (the first instance of suicide bombers combined with assault troops); 19 June 2013, the UNDP compound attack, killing fifteen; 21 September 2013, the Westgate attack, killing at least 67. Al-Shabaab also repulsed special operations raids on the ground, both by the French in Bula Marer on 11 January 2013 and the U.S. in Barawa on 5 October 2013, and demonstrated its capacity in Mogadishu before and after the recent AMISOM/SNA offensive by striking the presidential palace (Villa Somalia) and parliament on 21 February 2014 and 24 May 2014 respectively.

<sup>64</sup> Al-Shabaab’s apparent growth in Kenya will be the topic of a forthcoming briefing.

<sup>65</sup> Thirteen of twenty respondents said Al-Shabaab had infiltrated the SFG and its agencies. Crisis Group straw poll, Mogadishu, December 2013-January 2014. Crisis Group interviews, civil society member, Mogadishu, December 2013; veteran politician (Siad Barre government), Mogadishu, March 2014. Al-Shabaab’s ubiquity in daily life has led to it being termed “Arsenal”, a means of referring to it or its actions without its name for fear of eavesdroppers.

were being paid.<sup>66</sup> Aside from direct infiltration,<sup>67</sup> Al-Shabaab is likely to continue to thrive in the wider Somalia context due to three distinct factors, all relatively immune to military action.

#### A. Clans

From its inception, Al-Shabaab has approached the Somali clan system carefully; its original core group of jihadis first came together in Mogadishu partly due to the absence of local clan connections but rapidly became a useful adjunct to a clan-based Islamic court. Despite firm Salafi-jihadi ideology, the group has never operated in isolation of clan dynamics.<sup>68</sup> Without giving undue priority or privilege to clan concerns, it has largely followed Islamic jurisprudence to the effect that clan or tribal custom should not be opposed unless it contravenes Sharia.<sup>69</sup> In its own terminology, Al-Shabaab divides clans into *ansar* (supporters of the mujahidin) and *gaala lajir* (collaborators with unbelievers); the designations are not immutable, however. The Ogaden and Ayr-Habar Gedir clans were originally *ansar* but became *gaala lajir*, as the Abgal and Majerteen clans remain.<sup>70</sup>

Al-Shabaab has also been adept at taking advantage of the historic behaviour of certain clans. For example, it used Ogadeni historical desire for control of Kismayo port (primarily through the majority-Ogadeni Ras Kamboni militias) to help it push out the Juba Valley Alliance in September 2006, only to drop its Ogaden faction (and Ahmed Madobe) when it became too demanding in 2009.<sup>71</sup> Habar Gedir, especially Ayr sub-clans, fought beside Al-Shabaab to maintain influence in south-central Somalia until 2008, when it lost two influential Ayr-Habar Gedir insiders: Adan Hashi “Ayro”, killed in a U.S. airstrike, and Hassan Dahir Aweys, who lost influence in the

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<sup>66</sup> The Al-Shabaab presence appeared to curtail alcohol and hashish use that was commonplace previously inside the prison, as well as murder and rape that occurred with apparent impunity. Crisis Group interview, senior prison official, Mogadishu, November 2013.

<sup>67</sup> An Al-Shabaab defector and former officer said, “I cannot work with the government, because I am aware of many people whom the government thinks work for them [but are] Shabaab infiltrators within the Somali security forces serving [Shabaab] interests”. Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, December 2013. The challenges of reintegrating ex-Al-Shabaab combatants are reported in “No easy way forward for Al-Shabab defectors”, IRIN, op. cit.

<sup>68</sup> Fourteen of twenty respondents to Crisis Group’s straw poll (Mogadishu, December 2013–January 2014) said Al-Shabaab uses clan politics to its benefit.

<sup>69</sup> Al-Shabaab’s media often encourages peace and brotherliness among clans. It refers not to Somalia and the Somalis but rather to *wilayaad Islam* (Muslim controlled regions) and “the Muslims”.

<sup>70</sup> When referring to clans, *gaala lajir* is used rather than *murtad* (apostates), which is applicable only to individuals and their actions; Sharia allows for a *murtad* to be killed. An example of the use of *gaala lajir* is a speech by Hassan Dahir Aweys at Eelasha Biyaha, after Al-Shabaab’s retreat from Mogadishu, that singled out Abgal, Majerteen and Ogaden for criticism. “Beelaha Abgaal, Majeerteen iyo Ogaadeen oo lagu eedeeyay wax qabad la’aan” [“Abgal, Majarteen and Ogaden clans accused of reluctance”], Allgedo Online ([www.allgedo.com](http://www.allgedo.com)), 7 November 2011.

<sup>71</sup> “Ururada Raaskamboni iyo Caanoole oo laga saaray Kismaayo” [“Ras Kamboni and Anole dislodged from Kismayo”], Wadanka ([www.wadanka.com](http://www.wadanka.com)), 11 September 2009; “Fresh Fighting kills 10 in Kismayo”, Somali Net ([www.somalinet.com](http://www.somalinet.com)), 30 September 2009.

Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS), the coalition that brought UIC remnants together in Asmara in 2007.<sup>72</sup>

The group also plays on the political inferiority complexes of clans, offering support to those squeezed between larger rivals; the Murosade and Duduble-Habar Gedir, both of which provided numerous fighters, are examples in Mogadishu and central regions.<sup>73</sup> It likewise plays on perceived imbalances of power or seniority to obtain support, with the Marehan clans of Gedo region (now notionally part of the Juba Interim Administration) a case in point.<sup>74</sup>

Clans have allied with Al-Shabaab to challenge political privilege, for example Bimal against primarily Habar Gedir in Lower Shabelle;<sup>75</sup> and a collection of marginalised clans, Gaalja'al, Jajale, Sheikhal and Jareer, against the politically, though not numerically dominant, Hawadle, over the city of Beletweyne and Hiraan region.<sup>76</sup> In Puntland, Harti/Darood clans not part of the Mahmoud Saleban/Majerteen triumvirate, especially some Warsengeli sub-clans, have been co-opted to establish a refuge in the Golis Mountains, what Al-Shabaab calls its *Sharqistan wilaaya* (eastern governate).<sup>77</sup>

As well as using clan rivalries for political advantage, Al-Shabaab taps into the roles (and tensions) of primarily males within clan society, including by the traditional Somali tactic of fighters marrying local girls to seal alliances.<sup>78</sup> Playing on the divide between those in cities and towns, the group gives salaries to elders who stay in rural areas with their clans. It also empowers younger men, especially from clans dominated by others, to better protect their communities and immediate families.<sup>79</sup> However Al-Shabaab is also prepared to face down clan sentiment; there are numerous examples of targeted killings of important but non-cooperative elders, sheikhs, intellectuals and businessmen.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, it will reconcile with clans with which

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<sup>72</sup> "Maxay Habar Gedir Al-shabab oola heshiisay? Dhagayso imaamka beesha ka jawaabaya" ["Why did Habar Gedir agree with Al-Shabaab? Listen to the clan leader's response"], Nabad News, 21 January 2014.

<sup>73</sup> "Allaahu Akbar: Beelaha Murusade iyo Maxamuud Hiraab oo Lagu Walaaleeyay Diinta Islaamka (Dhageyso+Sawiro)" ["God is great: Murusade and Mohamoud Hiraab [another name for Duduble] are made brothers through Islam (listen+pictures)"], Sabaax (sabaax.com), 21 August 2013; Crisis Group telephone interview, Ayr clan elder, Dhusamareb, April 2014.

<sup>74</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, clan elder, Beled Hawa, April 2014.

<sup>75</sup> "Al Shabaab oo kulmisay beelaha H/gidir iyo Biimaal iyo dowlada oo ku fashilantey heshiisiinta labada beelood" ["Al-Shabaab brings together Habar Gedir and Bimal clans, as the SFG fails to reconcile the two"], Kashaale News, 7 August 2013.

<sup>76</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, Gaalja'al clan elder, Beletweyne, April 2014.

<sup>77</sup> "Dagaalka buuraha Galgala: macdan, mucaarid, Al-Shabaab iyo Puntland, Q.1 aad" ["Galgala Mountains conflict: minerals, rebellion, Al-Shabaab and Puntland, part 1"], Horseed Media, 9 December 2012; Markus Virgil Hoehne, "Resource conflict and militant Islamism in the Golis Mountains in northern Somalia (2006-2013)", *Review of African Political Economy*, vol. 41, no. 141 (2014); Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°97, *Somalia: Puntland's Punted Polls*, 19 December 2013, p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> Crisis Group interview, Abgal clan elder, Mogadishu, March 2014.

<sup>79</sup> Crisis Group interview, Al-Shabaab defector and former officer, Mogadishu, December 2013.

<sup>80</sup> Al-Shabaab is widely believed to have killed the senior clan Hiraan region elder, Sheikh Maxamed Xaaji Xuseen (Maracade). "Hogaamiyihii odayaasha gobolka Hiiran oo maanta lagu dilay magaalada Beledweyne" ["The leader of the clan elders in the Hiraan region killed in Beledweyne today"], Warbaahiye (warbaahiye.com), 27 November 2012. Tradition forbids killing clan elders, women, children, religious scholars, the sick, disabled and those who seek peace.

it has clashed in the past, as was apparent in anticipation of the recent AMISOM/SFG offensive.<sup>81</sup>

## B. Fiscal Strength

Al-Shabaab has given the impression of being financially competent and less corrupt than the central and local authorities it opposes.<sup>82</sup> But above all, and unlike its armed Somali adversaries including the SFG, it pays its soldiers and operatives well and regularly and provides for its veterans and the families of its “martyrs”.<sup>83</sup> For much of the last five years, its operations in south-central Somalia resembled a “fiscal-military state”.<sup>84</sup>

The precise mechanisms of its fiscal management are deliberately opaque. Inevitably some transactions flow through Somalia’s ubiquitous *hawala* system.<sup>85</sup> Greater international scrutiny has discouraged direct transactions; instead, trustworthy people are given the money to invest in personal businesses and return the capital later.<sup>86</sup> However, the rise of mobile money transfer companies inside Somalia, subject to much less scrutiny, is likely to facilitate Al-Shabaab cash flows within the country.<sup>87</sup> There are also anecdotal reports that the group copes with the uncertain financial environment and fluctuating cash flow by investing in gold.<sup>88</sup>

Against most predictions and despite UN sanctions, Al-Shabaab has weathered the loss of exclusive control over important revenue streams such as Mogadishu (especially Bakara market) in August 2011, and Kismayo, (especially the port) in September 2012, and still imposes covert levies on trade.<sup>89</sup> Territorial losses are also somewhat offset against reduced administration costs. The group continues to tax commercial activities wherever it can.<sup>90</sup> Other revenue is opportunistic and irregu-

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<sup>81</sup> “Dhageyso; Beelaha Dir iyo Gaaljecel oo ka hadlay kaalinta ay kaga jiraan ka hortagidda duulaanka ithoobiya” [“Listen: Dir and Gaaljecel clans speak on their role in preventing the Ethiopian offensive”], Calamada (calamada.com), 11 March 2014; “XMSH iyo beesha Absame oo kulan ku qaatay gudaha wilaayada jubooyinka” [“Harakat Al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin and the Absame clan meet inside Juba’s region”], Calamada, 8 January 2014; “Daawo sawirada kulankii dhex maray xarakada mujaahidiinta Al-Shabaab iyo beesha H/Gedir.(Dhagayso)” [“Watch pictures from the meeting between Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin and Habar Gedir clan. (Listen)”], Radio al-Furqaan, 23 January 2014.

<sup>82</sup> Crisis Group straw poll, Mogadishu, December 2013-January 2014.

<sup>83</sup> For a summary of SNA weaknesses, see Paul D. Williams, “One Somalia, One Army? Building an Effective Somali National Security Force”, Africa up Close (www.africaupclose.wilsoncenter.org), 7 April 2014.

<sup>84</sup> The fiscal-military state builds a solid fiscal base (including taxation) as a way of funding war. The term is especially associated with J. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power, War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (London, 1989), but is applied widely, also to non-European states.

<sup>85</sup> Al-Shabaab is reputed to have lost a good deal of money when the *hawala* company Qaran Express went bankrupt. Qaran Express and other *hawala* companies expanded after the accounts of Al-Barakaat were frozen by U.S. sanctions in 2001. Crisis Group interview, Bakara market wholesaler, Mogadishu, March 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Crisis Group interviews, three Somali businessmen, Mogadishu and Nairobi, October 2013.

<sup>87</sup> For example, Hormud’s “EVC plus”, and Telsom’s “Zaad”.

<sup>88</sup> Crisis Group interview, ex-Al-Shabaab official, Mogadishu, November 2013.

<sup>89</sup> After it lost Kismayo, Al-Shabaab banned production and export of charcoal where it retained control, so as to pressure the new Ahmed Madobe-led administration. Crisis Group telephone interview, civil society member, Kismayo, October 2013.

<sup>90</sup> Local sources noted Al-Shabaab was taxing trade in the border area between Bay and Gedo, even though it was controlled by forces allied to the SFG. Crisis Group telephone interview, local Somali journalist, Baydabo/Baidoa, October 2013.

lar, some of it allowed by Sharia (such as *qhanimah*, valuables seized during battle), much of it illegal, including under Sharia. Though it denies involvement, Al-Shabaab takes an interest in the brisk kidnapping business, buying victims, charging higher ransoms.<sup>91</sup> There have long been reports of it “taxing” profits from piracy in Harardheere, Galgaduud.<sup>92</sup> Most recently, there are allegations that it profits from the illegal ivory trade.<sup>93</sup>

### 1. *Zakat*

The group also continues to derive regular revenue from the difficult to monitor religious duty to give alms (*zakat*) and charity (*sadaqa*). *Zakat* collection – inside and outside Somalia – will likely remain an important source. The third pillar of Islam, it is divided into two forms, *zakahul fitr* and *zakahul maal*.<sup>94</sup> The latter is most important to Al-Shabaab, since it is payable on all types of Sharia-compliant, profit-making business, as well as bank savings. This includes agricultural produce, livestock, precious metals and other minerals. *Zakat* falls due in the first month of the Islamic calendar (*Muharam*). Al-Shabaab’s usual practice is to distribute pamphlets – especially targeted at business people – detailing the amounts payable (*nisab*) under Sharia.<sup>95</sup> Collection by a local committee (*lujnah zakawaat*) is decentralised in each region.<sup>96</sup>

There is some evidence that Al-Shabaab’s authority to demand *zakat* has been challenged by some businessmen, who contend the group has used and distributed it only to sustain its jihad, not as specified in the Quran and Hadith. These individuals reportedly agreed to pay an amount at the lunar year’s end, but to meet their annual *zakat* obligation separately.<sup>97</sup>

### 2. *Sadaqah*

*Sadaqah* is paid out of compassion and is entirely voluntary. Al-Shabaab receives it as good-will donations and jihad contributions from both Somali and foreign sympathisers. More controversially, it calls for *sadaqah fii sabilillah* (charity for the sake of Allah) and contributions for *jihad fii sabilillah* (a holy war).<sup>98</sup> In the past, those reluctant to pay jihad contributions have been labelled “weak Muslims” and intimidated

<sup>91</sup> Between 2008 and 2012, Al-Shabaab was reportedly involved in the kidnapping of at least eleven expatriates. Crisis Group interviews, Somali journalist; 29 October 2013, March 2014.

<sup>92</sup> See Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia*, op. cit., pp. 109-112.

<sup>93</sup> For example “Africa’s White Gold of Jihad: Al Shabaab and Conflict Ivory”, Elephant Action League, 2012.

<sup>94</sup> *Zakahul fitr* is due after Ramadan by every Muslim who can afford to pay and give to the poor (often as food). In the past, Al-Shabaab has not directly benefited but has facilitated distribution of alms in the areas under its control. *Zakahul maal* is levied on property or goods that have been in a person’s possession for a lunar year; Al-Shabaab collects and directly utilises it.

<sup>95</sup> An example is on file with Crisis Group.

<sup>96</sup> Sheikh Suldan Mohamed Muhumed is the head of the *lujnah zakawaat* and led Al-Shabaab’s drought operations in 2011. *Lujnah zakawaat* functions are decentralised and present in all regions; representatives of clan elders assist collectors.

<sup>97</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Somalia telecommunication company manager, Mogadishu, March 2014; Bakara market wholesaler, Mogadishu, March 2014.

<sup>98</sup> Al-Shabaab often demands a fixed sum when collecting jihad contributions as *sadaqah*, contrary to Sharia, which clearly indicates charity is voluntary and cannot be determined by any authority. Crisis Group interview, Somalia telecommunication company manager and remittance company worker, Mogadishu, March 2014.



or killed.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, donations can be expected to continue, since Somalis have praised Al-Shabaab for “charitable” work like drilling boreholes, digging irrigation canals and building mosques and madrasas.<sup>100</sup> The headlines over its mismanagement of the 2011 drought, notwithstanding, Al-Shabaab also did distribute some relief to those affected.<sup>101</sup>

### C. *The Importance of Daawa*

The depth and breadth of Al-Shabaab’s ideological mission, characterised by the term *daawa*, is difficult to gauge.<sup>102</sup> It has clearly benefited from the long-standing growth of Wahhabi-influenced Salafi preaching in Somalia, a religious outlook that arguably makes the step to armed Salafi-jihadism – though still significant – ideologically “easier”.<sup>103</sup> However, it is also the case that some Somalis appreciated Al-Shabaab’s reform of traditional Quranic schools (*dugsi*), upgrading them to formal madrasas, especially in rural areas, where their innovations to the curriculum and teaching were much broader than the preaching of jihad.<sup>104</sup>

Nevertheless, from the outset, the group has made recruitment and training a priority; the numbers of young men and women who appear ready to act for Al-Shabaab, even now in the face of a greater security presence, is impressive.<sup>105</sup> One of the most significant contributions of *daawa* activities through its media and human networks in Somalia and with Somali populations in the Horn (Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia) and the wider diaspora has been the translation and propagation of al-Qaeda ideology in Somali, especially the call for jihad.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> During 2010, many businessmen left Al-Shabaab-controlled parts of Mogadishu to avoid demands for charity and lost property and goods. Some who remained but refused to pay were killed. Crisis Group interviews and telephone interviews, Bakara market businessmen, Mogadishu, March and April 2014.

<sup>100</sup> Its media sites like Calamada and Somalimemo regularly show videos of Al-Shabaab digging irrigation canals along the Shabelle River in Bula Marer and Kurtun Warey areas and constructing water pans for the residents, as well as distributing *zakat* (in the form of livestock).

<sup>101</sup> Despite its overall poor performance during the 2011 drought, Al-Shabaab claims to have distributed food and over 50,000 animals to affected areas under its control, including donations associated with al-Qaeda. The al-Kataib foundation displayed videos of children and women celebrating al-Qaeda aid. Crisis Group interview, Hizbul Islam member, Nairobi, December 2013; telephone interview, Habar Gedir clan elder, Bula Marer (Lower Shabelle), January 2014.

<sup>102</sup> Twelve of twenty in the Crisis Group straw-poll called its *daawa* activities a core strength.

<sup>103</sup> Crisis Group interview, religious scholar, Mogadishu, November 2013. A previous Crisis Group report described the relationship between Salafism and Salafi-jihadism as follows: “This expansion of the Salafiyya around the periphery of the Islamic world and in the Muslim diaspora is increasingly difficult to dissociate from the electrifying and galvanising impact of the Salafiyya Jihadiyya on the imaginations and reflexes of the younger and increasingly mobile, if not wholly deterritorialised, elements of the Muslim population”, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>104</sup> Crisis Group analyst’s personal observation; Crisis Group email correspondence, Roland Marchal, academic and analyst, 18 June 2014.

<sup>105</sup> A critical function of the *Amniyat* appears to be *daawa* in the wider Somali society; before any specialised military training takes place, potential Al-Shabaab members undergo at least six months “orientation” while still living in their home areas. Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Crisis Group straw poll, Mogadishu, December 2013-January 2014; “Akhriso nuqul soomaali ah: tusmooyin guud oo ku aadan camalka jihaadiga. w/q Sheekh Ayman Al-Dawaahiry” [“Read a copy in Somali: General instructions concerning jihad ... by Ayman al-Zawahiri”], amiirmuur (amiirmuur.com), 14 September 2013.

## 1. Al-Shabaab's discourse

Al-Shabaab knows its audience, both internationally and locally – especially the rural rank and file fighters many of whom have never left their immediate villages. The impact of public messaging in the large rural areas controlled by the group for several years is difficult to measure, but it is well-known that it undertook regular public meetings and forums in which its policies, achievements and prospects were discussed. As well as public information, these also urged the faithful to enlist to defend Somalia and Islam from the *kuffar* (unbelievers).<sup>107</sup> The resilience demonstrated in rural areas following the AMISOM campaigns is indicative of the impact of its Somalia-based *daawa*, recruitment and training.

Associating the conflict in Somalia – especially the involvement of external forces – with historical attacks on Islam, clearly resonates with parts of Somali society.<sup>108</sup> Simple but effective binary oppositions are put forward: AMISOM (especially Ethiopia and Kenya) are “African crusaders” spreading Christianity and falsehood; the SNA are *murtadiin* (apostates).<sup>109</sup> A common line is that the *murtadiin* value the lives only of foreigners, not fellow Somalis.<sup>110</sup> SNA soldiers and SFG officials are ridiculed and portrayed as “weak” in their faith, their lives disgraced and facing the prospect of hell-fire in the hereafter (*akhera*). Mujahidin who fight with Al-Shabaab are glorified.<sup>111</sup> The efficacy of a message fusing patriotism with the duties of Islam should not be underestimated.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Public meetings are mostly on holidays like Eid, or when a sentence of amputation is carried out. One of many examples is the video, “Dabaal degyada Ciidul Adxaa ee Baraawe 1434” [“Eid al-Adha celebrations in Barawa 1434 AH(2013)”], Radio al-Furqan, 17 November 2013, at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Erik6x\\_lCPg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Erik6x_lCPg).

<sup>108</sup> Godane speeches are examples: “Amiirka xarakada mujaahidiinta Al-Shabaab oo jeediyay kalimad uu kaga hadlay Soomaaliya, Kenya, Afrikade Dhexe iyo Suuriya (Dhageyso)” [“Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahidin emir take on Somalia, Kenya, Central African Republic and Syria (listen)”], Radio al-Furqan, 14 May 2014; “Dhageyso: kalimad cusub oo uu jeediyay amiirka XMSH Sheekh Abuu Zubeyr” [“Listen: A new ‘word’ released by Al-Shabaab’s emir”], Calamada, 9 March 2014; “Amiirka Alshabaab Axmad Godane oo ka hadlay weerarka westgate mall” [“Al-Shabaab emir speaks on the Westgate attack”], audio, YouTube, 25 September 2013.

<sup>109</sup> Al-Shabaab puts great emphasis on distinguishing friends and enemies (*alwala wal bara*); the issue, important to all Salafi groups, is discussed in Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah Aharani and Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab Najdi (eds.), *Majmu’at Tawhid [Compilations on Monotheism]* (Beirut, 2007), pp. 155-165.

<sup>110</sup> For example, an Al-Shabaab commentary claimed (with some exaggeration) that the killing of a foreigner made Somali headlines for four days, but the death of a “shoe shiner” at the hands of an SNA soldier was not even reported, except by Al-Shabaab-controlled Radio Al-Andalus. “Al-Shabaab: A Somali shoe shiner boy killed by a Somali soldier”, broadcast November 2013.

<sup>111</sup> “The Burundian bloodbath: Battle of Daynille”, Al-Kataib video, 24 October 2012, for example, repeats exaggerations like “one mujahid can kill twenty AMISOM”.

<sup>112</sup> Though he criticised both, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys made the connection in his most recent speech between contemporary youth, including those fighting with Al-Shabaab, and the pioneering nationalists of the Somali Youth League. Al-Shabaab used his words in its own statements. See “Dhageyso: Sheekh Xasan Daahir Aweys oo shacabka Soomaaliyeed ugu baaqay in ay gumeystaha ka dhiidhiyaan” [Listen: Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys calls for the Somali public to protest against colonialism], Somalimemo ([somalimemo.net](http://somalimemo.net)), 20 May 2014.

## 2. Media

Al-Shabaab has developed a hugely effective media operation for local Somali-speaking and, increasingly, Swahili-, English- and Arabic-speaking audiences.<sup>113</sup> Its media arm, Al-Kataib, produces video content for international (English- and Arabic-speaking audiences).<sup>114</sup> The media campaign against the group has increased in recent years, but many Somalis still give more credibility to Al-Shabaab's statements, especially on details of attacks.<sup>115</sup>

At its peak Al-Shabaab controlled eight FM radio stations broadcasting in Somali; now it is reduced to two.<sup>116</sup> Even after it lost control of Kismayo and Mogadishu, its affiliated stations continued to broadcast.<sup>117</sup> There are also a number Al-Shabaab-owned or affiliated websites, with several domain names, though they are subject to constant hacking from covert sources.<sup>118</sup> YouTube and Twitter are also utilised. Accounts are quickly closed – most often for the depiction and promotion of violence – but new ones quickly pop up.<sup>119</sup> Paltalk.com has long been a favoured social media site for Al-Shabaab.

## VI. Conclusion

There is a sense of inevitability to the resilience shown by Al-Shabaab. It represents a culmination of the long-term turn toward social conservatism in the country that is difficult to reverse quickly. As an insurgent group, it retains core constituencies in

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<sup>113</sup> "Al-Shabab's media prowess complements aggressive tactics", Feature, BBC Monitoring, 28 May 2014. Godane's latest speech was translated into English and Swahili, "Muslims of Bangui and Mombasa: a tale of tragedy", Al-Kataib video, 14 May 2014; the website [www.somalimemo.net](http://www.somalimemo.net) has content in Somali, Swahili, English and Arabic.

<sup>114</sup> Al-Kataib was responsible for the film "The Burundian bloodbath", op. cit., in which eyewitnesses were interviewed, and bodies of AMISOM Burundian soldiers and damage inflicted by AMISOM shells was shown. Another Al-Kataib production, "Woolwich attack, it is an eye for an eye", focused on the murder of British soldier Lee Rigby in London on 22 May 2013 by two British citizens, one of whom Kenyan police had arrested in 2010 for allegedly attempting to train with Al-Shabaab. Al-Kataib video, 15 October 2013.

<sup>115</sup> Al-Shabaab often gives the numbers and names of its own mujahidin killed, as well as enemy (AMISOM/SNA) casualties, but with significant omissions and/or exaggerations.

<sup>116</sup> When Al-Shabaab expanded its territorial control, it took over several existing privately-owned radio stations, including HornAfric, Capital voice, Somaliweyn and Alfurqan. Only two Al-Shabaab stations – Radio Andalus and Radio Al-Furqan – are still on air, but they broadcast in many parts of Somalia. Radio Andalus refers to the period when Muslims controlled Andalusia in Spain (755-1492).

<sup>117</sup> Radio Andalus's signal in Mogadishu is patchy, due to SFG and AMISOM jamming. Until recently, its Mogadishu transmitter was mounted on a vehicle moving from one district to another, and Al-Shabaab's most consistent transmissions were from El-Buur, which has now been lost. Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, November 2013. According to a December 2012 poll in Mogadishu by the African Union/Information Support team (IST), 56 per cent of respondents listened daily or several times a week to Radio Andalus. "Media Mapping Briefing Note", no. 007, 25 April 2013, p. 37.

<sup>118</sup> The most significant are calamada.com, amiirnuur.com, somalimemo.com, radioalfurqaan.com, qaadisiya.net, jihadology.net and somalimidnimo.com; amiirnuur.com has Somali, Swahili and Arabic content; somalimemo.com has English, Arabic and Swahili. The sites shift between domains such as ".org", ".net" and ".info".

<sup>119</sup> During the 21 September 2013 attack on Westgate Mall, the official Al-Shabaab Twitter account was closed. A new account, HSM\_INFO, was registered on 16 December 2013 but suspended the next day.

many parts of south-central Somalia that are not currently addressed by locally-acceptable governance alternatives. Finally, as an organisation, it has demonstrated an aptitude for strategic planning that should not be underestimated. It remains rooted in its Somali context, willing to learn and benefit from external influence – notably al-Qaeda, including its local operatives and regional affiliates – but retaining a strong inclination toward local autonomy.

Confronting such an experienced and adaptable organisation requires the same mix of pragmatism and political grip that Al-Shabaab has honed through trial and error, though vitally without the kind of internal and external accountability to which the various formulations of weak Mogadishu-based governments have had to submit (notionally at least) to access support.

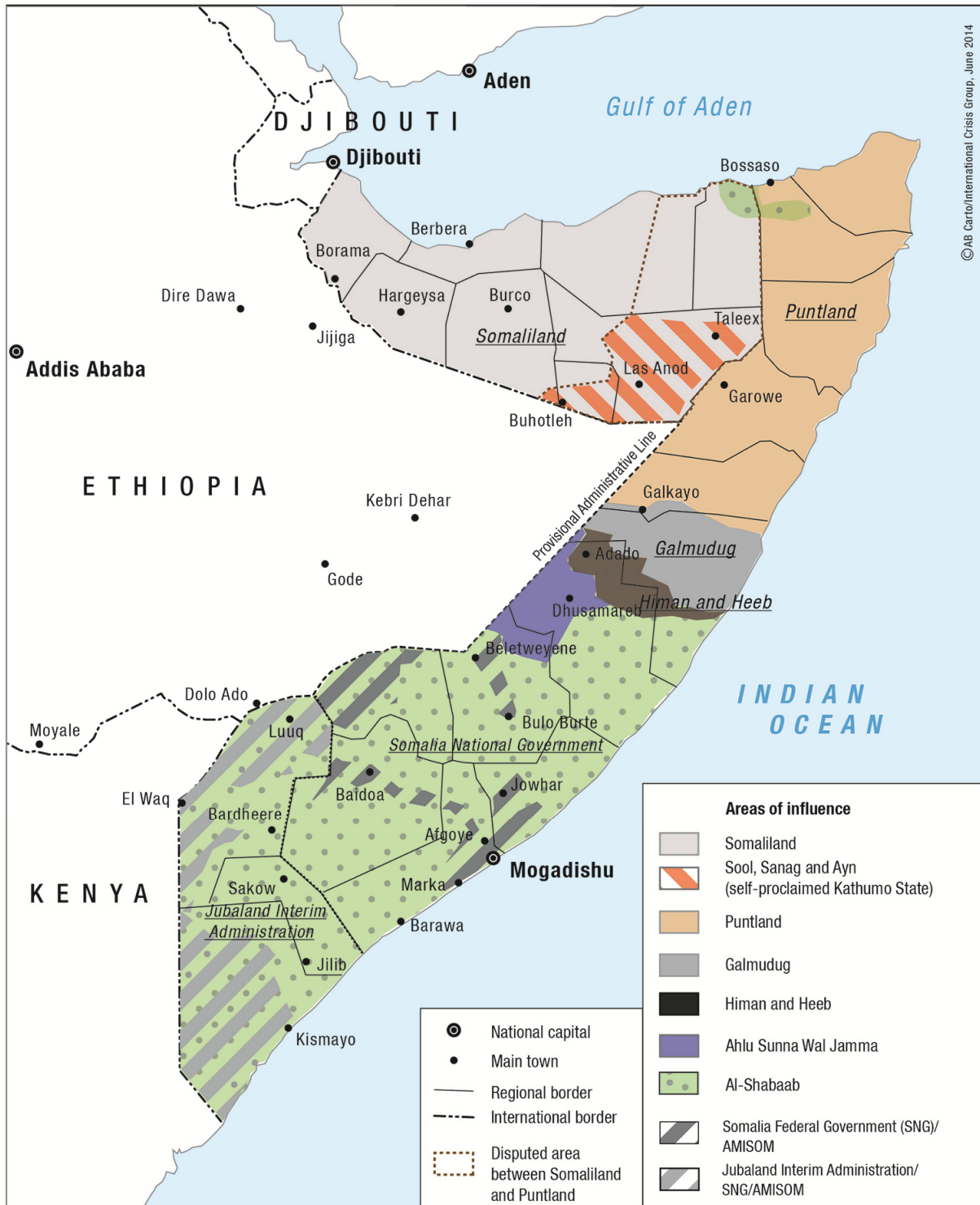
But for many Somalis, Al-Shabaab is only one, and not necessarily the most pressing, of the many problems they face; and for some communities and individuals, it offers practical solutions and benefits, including mediating local clan disputes, improving religious education, providing basic services and institutionalising consultative bodies for local governance arrangements. It is clear from an examination of Al-Shabaab that eschews judgement on its fundamental rectitude but rather focuses on how it has become so entrenched that organisational priorities, combined with grassroots political work, are critical accompaniments to its campaign of violence and intimidation, taxes and summary justice.

Meanwhile the Somali Federal Government in south-central Somalia and its regional and wider international supporters have, until now, put most efforts into top-down political deals giving cover for externally-driven military objectives, rather than working toward locally-won legitimacy. While there is welcome recent evidence of a more strategic approach, there are still plenty of grievances that Al-Shabaab can exploit, including those regenerated by the recent offensive.

In spite of the urgency for progress, and before new offensives begin, local political work and reconciliation processes should be given time to mature and take root. Soft political and moral assistance, such as mediation support and religious education, should be prioritised, alongside military and technical support. This requires a willingness to engage with the Somali reality, exercise strategic patience and risk missing targets on the high-level diplomatic track in favour of entrenching more sustainable social consensus. The appetite to take such an approach to Somalia's troubles is steadily growing, but it is an approach that Al-Shabaab has demonstrated from its very inception.

**Nairobi/Brussels, 26 June 2014**

Appendix A: Map of Areas of Control in Somalia



\* The extent and boundaries of influence areas are approximate.

## Appendix B: Report and Briefings on Africa since 2011

### Central Africa

- Burundi: From Electoral Boycott to Political Impasse*, Africa Report N°169, 7 February 2011 (also available in French).
- Chad's North West: The Next High-risk Area?*, Africa Briefing N°78, 17 February 2011 (only available in French).
- Congo: The Electoral Dilemma*, Africa Report N°175, 5 May 2011 (also available in French).
- Congo : The Electoral Process Seen from the East*, Africa Briefing N°80, 5 September 2011 (also available in French).
- Africa without Qaddafi: The Case of Chad*, Africa Report N°180, 21 October 2011 (also available in French).
- Implementing Peace and Security Architecture (I): Central Africa*, Africa Report N°181, 7 November 2011 (also available in French).
- The Lord's Resistance Army: End Game?*, Africa Report N°182, 17 November 2011.
- Burundi: A Deepening Corruption Crisis*, Africa Report N°185, 21 March 2012 (also available in French).
- Black Gold in the Congo: Threat to Stability or Development Opportunity?*, Africa Report N°188, 11 July 2012 (also available in French).
- Eastern Congo: Why Stabilisation Failed*, Africa Briefing N°91, 4 October 2012 (also available in French).
- Burundi: Bye-bye Arusha?* Africa Report N°192, 25 October 2012 (only available in French).
- The Gulf of Guinea : The New Danger Zone*, Africa Report N°195, 12 December 2012 (also available in French).
- Eastern Congo: The ADF-Nalu's Lost Rebellion*, Africa Briefing N°93, 19 December 2012 (also available in French).
- Central African Republic: Priorities of the Transition*, Africa Report N°203, 11 June 2013 (also available in French).
- Understanding Conflict in Eastern Congo (I): The Ruzizi Plain*, Africa Report N°206, 23 July 2013 (also available in French).
- Central African Republic: Better Late than Never*, Africa Briefing N°96, 2 December 2013 (also available in French).
- Fields of Bitterness (I): Land Reform in Burundi*, Africa Report N°213, 12 February 2014 (only available in French).
- Fields of Bitterness (II): Restitution and Reconciliation in Burundi*, Africa Report N°214, 17 February 2014 (only available in French).
- The Security Challenges of Pastoralism in Central Africa*, Africa Report N°215, 1 April 2014 (also available in French).
- Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency*, Africa Report N°216, 3 April 2014.

*The Central African Crisis: From Predation to Stabilisation*, Africa Report N°219, 17 June 2014 (also available in French).

### Horn of Africa

- Somalia: The Transitional Government on Life Support*, Africa Report N°170, 21 February 2011.
- Politics and Transition in the New South Sudan*, Africa Briefing N°172, 4 April 2011.
- Divisions in Sudan's Ruling Party and the Threat to the Country's Stability*, Africa Report N°174, 4 May 2011.
- South Sudan: Compounding Instability in Unity State*, Africa Report N°179, 17 October 2011 (also available in Chinese).
- Kenya: Impact of the ICC Proceedings*, Africa Briefing N°84, 9 January 2012.
- Kenyan Somali Islamist Radicalisation*, Africa Briefing N°85, 25 January 2012.
- The Kenyan Military Intervention in Somalia*, Africa Report N°184, 15 February 2012.
- Somalia: An Opportunity that Should Not Be Missed*, Africa Briefing N°87, 22 February 2012.
- China's New Courtship in South Sudan*, Africa Report N°186, 4 April 2012 (also available in Chinese).
- Uganda: No Resolution to Growing Tensions*, Africa Report N°187, 5 April 2012.
- Ethiopia After Meles*, Africa Briefing N°89, 22 August 2012.
- Assessing Turkey's Role in Somalia*, Africa Briefing N°92, 8 October 2012.
- Sudan: Major Reform or More War*, Africa Report N°194, 29 November 2012 (also available in Arabic).
- Kenya's 2013 Elections*, Africa Report N°197, 17 January 2013.
- Sudan's Spreading Conflict (I): War in South Kordofan*, Africa Report N°198, 14 February 2013.
- Eritrea: Scenarios for Future Transition*, Africa Report N°200, 28 March 2013.
- Kenya After the Elections*, Africa Briefing N°94, 15 May 2013.
- Sudan's Spreading Conflict (II): War in Blue Nile*, Africa Report N°204, 18 June 2013.
- Ethiopia: Prospects for Peace in Ogaden*, Africa Report N°207, 6 August 2013.
- Sudan: Preserving Peace in the East*, Africa Report N°209, 26 November 2013.
- Somalia: Puntland's Punted Polls*, Africa Briefing N°97, 19 December 2013.
- Sudan's Spreading Conflict (III): The Limits of Darfur's Peace Process*, Africa Report N°211, 27 January 2014.
- South Sudan: A Civil War by Any Other Name*, Africa Report N°217, 10 April 2014.

### **Southern Africa**

*Zimbabwe: The Road to Reform or Another Dead End*, Africa Report N°173, 27 April 2011.

*Resistance and Denial: Zimbabwe's Stalled Reform Agenda*, Africa Briefing N°82, 16 November 2011.

*Zimbabwe's Sanctions Standoff*, Africa Briefing N°86, 6 February 2012 (also available in Chinese).

*Implementing Peace and Security Architecture (II): Southern Africa*, Africa Report N°191, 15 October 2012.

*Zimbabwe: Election Scenarios*, Africa Report N°202, 6 May 2013.

*Zimbabwe's Elections: Mugabe's Last Stand*, Africa Briefing N°95, 29 July 2013.

*A Cosmetic End to Madagascar's Crisis?*, Africa Report N°218 (also available in French), 19 May 2014.

### **West Africa**

*Nigeria's Elections: Reversing the Degeneration?*, Africa Briefing N°79, 24 February 2011.

*Côte d'Ivoire: Is War the Only Option?*, Africa Report N°171, 3 March 2011 (also available in French).

*A Critical Period for Ensuring Stability in Côte d'Ivoire*, Africa Report N°176, 1 August 2011 (also available in French).

*Liberia: How Sustainable Is the Recovery?*, Africa Report N°177, 19 August 2011.

*Guinea: Putting the Transition Back on Track*, Africa Report N°178, 23 September 2011.

*Côte d'Ivoire: Continuing the Recovery*, Africa Briefing N°83, 16 December 2011 (also available in French).

*Beyond Compromises: Reform Prospects in Guinea-Bissau*, Africa Report N°183, 23 January 2012 (only available in French and Portuguese).

*Liberia: Time for Much-Delayed Reconciliation and Reform*, Africa Briefing N°88, 12 June 2012.

*Mali: Avoiding Escalation*, Africa Report N°189, 18 July 2012 (also available in French).

*Beyond Turf Wars: Managing the Post-Coup Transition in Guinea-Bissau*, Africa Report N°190, 17 August 2012 (also available in French).

*Mali: The Need for Determined and Coordinated International Action*, Africa Briefing N°90, 24 September 2012 (also available in French).

*Côte d'Ivoire: Defusing Tensions*, Africa Report N°193, 26 November 2012 (also available in French).

*Curbing Violence in Nigeria (I): The Jos Crisis*, Africa Report N°196, 17 December 2012.

*Guinea: A Way Out of the Election Quagmire*, Africa Report N°199, 18 February 2013 (only available in French).

*Mali: Security, Dialogue and Meaningful Reform*, Africa Report N°201, 11 April 2013 (also available in French).

*Burkina Faso: With or Without Compaoré, Times of Uncertainty*, Africa Report N°205, 22 July 2013 (also available in French).

*Niger: Another Weak Link in the Sahel?*, Africa Report N°208, 19 September 2013 (also available in French).

*Mali: Reform or Relapse*, Africa Report N°210, 10 January 2014 (also available in French).

*Côte d'Ivoire's Great West: Key to Reconciliation*, Africa Report N°212, 28 January 2014 (also available in French).

*Guinea Bissau: Elections, But Then What?*, Africa Briefing N°98, 8 April 2014 (only available in French).

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