The Al-Shabab Myth: Notoriety not Popularity

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Using Arabic names and wearing masks to hide their faces, while engaging in some of the most horrific human atrocities in the name of Islamic Shari’a, makes Al-Shabab the most dangerous criminal group ever formed in Somalia. Al-Shabab activities contribute to a lack of security, proliferation of weapons, freelance militia and disruption to all peace building and state formation efforts. Lack of leadership limits the ability to withstand the ideology Al-Shabab attempts to enforce. This paper discusses Islam in Somalia, the colonial legacy, the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa and other factors related to the birth of Al-Shabab. The paper will further examine possible future scenarios related to the presence of Al-Shabab in Somalia.
Introduction

Stabilizing and governing Somalia, which has been effectively stateless since 1991, is one of the most complex problems facing the world today. There are many factors that have lead to the Somali tragedy. These include the colonial legacy, the coalition of stakeholders, factions within the Transitional National Government (TFG), the factionalising of armed Islamist opposition, clan families, sub-clans, and regional power centers – not to mention micro-political interests at the local level, competing legitimate and criminal business interests, the influence of the semi-autonomous sub-state of Puntland, the self-declared independent Republic of Somaliland. And of course the agenda of Ethiopia, which includes Eritrea. All these factions and interests are caught in a maelstrom of conflict, creating a leadership vacuum that allows extremist groups like Al-Shabab\(^1\) to seize positions of influence.

Al-Shabab is a movement primarily composed of ideologues which broke off from the militant wing of the pre-2008 Council of Islamic Courts (CIC), also known as Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). These mostly criminal elements have no credible long term local or global strategy. Rather, they exploit clan divisions to try to gain political power under the guise of an Islamic jihadist movement. Currently their operations are limited to Somalia and their victims are mainly fellow Somali Muslims. Some claim that Somalia, with no government for so long, has become a global jihad factory for Al Qaeda. The truth is illusive and accurate research about this shadowy organization has been very thin on the ground.

Background

The current Somali conflict can be traced back to the nineteenth century, when Great Britain, Italy, France and Ethiopia divided the Somali-inhabited territories of the Horn of Africa into five distinct political jurisdictions. Despite attempts to reunite all areas of Somalia, only two Somali territories actually managed to merge: British Somaliland, which became independent on June 26, 1960, and Italian Somaliland which achieved independence just four days later. The two states were united on July 1, 1960.

The failure to incorporate the remaining Somali-inhabited territories into the new Somali Republic had, and continues to have, enduring consequences for the peace and security of the Horn of Africa region. This failure has resulted in disaffection among ethnic Somalis in Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya, and has given rise to pro-unity movements. Somali nationalists deployed the rhetoric of self-determination to justify their irredentist policies throughout much of the second half of the twentieth century. And from the 1990s onwards, Somalia’s neighbors cited the cross-border nature of the Somali crisis to defend their own

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\(^1\) **Al-Shabaab** (aka **Al-Shabaab al-Islamiya**, **Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen**, **Mujahidin Youth Movement**, **Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement**, **Young Mujahideen Movement**, or **Young Mujahideen Movement in Somalia**)
interference in the civil war that subsequently dismantled the Somali State.

To contextualize the Al-Shabab phenomenon one must understand the sources of conflict in the Horn in Africa and pay attention to two factors: 1) the colonial legacy which planted the seeds of the regional conflict and 2) the nomadic nature of the Somalis which puts tribal and clan loyalty before anything else – including religious beliefs or nationalism.

Somalia has experienced a marked increase in conflict since 1991 when the late President Mohamed Siad Barre’s government was overthrown by opposition forces. Up until 2006, this fighting was largely between clan-based warlords clashing over territory and resources. However, external forces are now involved and with the advent of the use of modern weapons one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world has been created.

The externally imposed Transitional Federal Government(s) were never able to gain popular support, mainly due to the inbuilt divisions which split along tribal lines. Tribalism in Somalia is a default identification based on the imagined superiority of one group over others. This reactionary identification by tribe, while useful for nomads is counterproductive for nation-building or any sense of national unity. This background has given Islamist groups the opportunity to insist that the only force which can unite Somalis and therefore any future government was Islamic Sharia law. Initially this theosophical approach of unity through Islam differentiated these groups from the TFG, but as this transitional government has failed to unify Somalia, Al-Shabab gradually reverted to a form of romantic tribalism to implement its vision and with limited success even created a cross-clan alliance (CRD 2004).

Al-Shabab then began to employ Medieval crusader language to exploit primitive fears of powerful, dishonourable outsiders, claiming the TFG relied entirely on protection provided by foreign ‘infidels’. Besides these appeals to long-standing tribal fears and use of punitive, undifferentiated definitions of honour and shame, counter-attacks against Al-Shabab frequently produced civilian casualties. These factors combined to make AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia) deeply unpopular with parts of the Mogadishu population. This situation forced the TFG to justify a continued foreign military presence in the capital, which in turn fueled further resentment against the TFG.

A number of reasons exist for the Transitional Federal Governments’ failures. These include:

- A lack of powerful, unifying leadership
- A lack of agreement about what kind of government Somalia needs – secular or Islamic
- A general ambivalence about Somali identity expressed in uncertainty about whether Somalia’s allegiances lie with African or Arab countries
- The curse of deep-seated and narrow tribal identifications and the effect this scourge has on any attempted political solutions involving trans-tribal or national considerations
- A multiplicity of local and international interest groups all vying for a stake in decisions made about Somalia’s future

One of the features of Al-Shabab is that it can spread its influence in Somalia without any real opposition from neighbouring countries. Somalia finds itself in a position where its neighbours, Kenya and Ethiopia, prefer a weak and fragmented Somali ‘Islamic’ nation as this will lessen its ability to challenge the validity of the Northern Frontier District in Kenya
and the Ogaden region in Ethiopia. These areas, part of divisions under colonial rule, are seen as future targets in a quest for a Greater Somalia. This quest seeks to reunite under the five points of the Somali flag all areas divided by colonial divisions. Al-Shabab exploits the weakness of the TFG and the popular resentment directed against both the Ethiopian troops after their 2006 invasion and the later presence of the UNISOM army in Somalia to expand its influence. Seemingly unable to break out of this negative role and lacking any coherent civil development objectives, Al-Shabab is therefore unable to exert any force for unity or progress towards the achievement of civil society in Somalia (Schiemsky 2006).

Failed Region

Over the past thirty years the Horn of Africa has become a ‘failed region’. And as a so-called failed state within this region, Somalia is the outcome not the cause of many failed superpower policies – both during and after the cold war. The map drawn by colonial powers which failed to consider the ethnic composition of the region’s inhabitants, the US abandonment of Somalia in 1993 after the ‘Black Hawk down’ incident, and the failure to arrest the warlord Muhammad Farah Aideed as well as policies which never addressed issues of capacity building and badly needed infrastructure development all contributed to this breakdown (ICG 2000).

From 1993 to the present a number of agreements have been signed for national reconciliation and disarmament in Somalia but none have lasted or been effective. In 2006 the CIA attempted to stymie an Islamic movement with wide support which competed against the TNG. After this failed, Ethiopia, Somalia’s traditional enemy, was then co-opted to enter Somalia to bring peace. Unsurprisingly, a nasty guerilla war was fought until Ethiopians were forced to leave in early 2009 and the Islamists were allowed back in. Essentially, the 2006 status quo was returned, minus the 15,000 Somalis now dead.²

As a nation state, Somalia now exists largely in a de jure capacity. Though the weak but widely recognised central government authority is in power (albeit in name only), in reality control of the north of the country resides with regional authorities. Of these Puntland, Maakhir and Galmudug acknowledge the authority of the TFG while maintaining their declaration of autonomy within a federated Somalia - with Central and Southern Somalia and Kismayo now regarded as largely under the control of the insurgent group Al-Shabab.

The present situation now means the weak Horn of Africa States are particularly attractive to jihadists with their ‘open economies’ providing cover for foreign fighters and

² “Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.” (John F. Kennedy)
movement of assets. Even after the 1998 and 2002 bombings,3 Kenya was hesitant in confronting the extent to which local jihadists were active there. Similarly, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Eritrea avoid any rigorous assessment of internal jihadist activity.

In short, the Horn of Africa has become a region notorious for corrupt governments, porous borders and widespread poverty. These conditions, and the subsequent discontented populations, have created a region ripe for Islamic fundamentalism.

The Evolution of Al-Shabab

In Somalia, Islam is one of the horizontal identities (including class, race and location of origin) that cut across clan lines (Besteman, 1999). The practice of Islam in Somalia has traditionally been dominated by apolitical Sufi orders (Lewis, 2002). Islamist movements did not emerge until the late 1960s when Somalis, through education and travel, gained greater exposure to less moderate expressions of Islam in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and elsewhere.

Somalis are traditionally moderate Sufi Muslims, embracing music, dancing and meditation. They do not share the strict, Saudi-inspired Wahabi interpretation of Islam of the hard-line Al-Shabab group. There were variety of Islamic movements in Somalia as early as 1890s, becoming more prominent in the 1960s and 1970s, but not many were associated with any political violence activities. Of the modern politically-motivated Islamic organizations, Al Islah appears the most moderate. As a member of the Peace and Human Rights Network in Somalia and because of its adherence to internationally recognised principles of human rights and gender equality Al Islah has found itself in confrontation with more militant movements such as Al Itihad (Menkhaus 1999).

Al-Shabab emerged from two previous Somali Islamist groups, namely the Islamic Union (Al-Ittihad al-Islamiya: AlIAI) and the Islamic Courts Union (Ittihad al-Mahakim al-Islamiya: ICU). Al-Shabab was the violent, though initially dormant wing of the ICU, waiting for an appropriate moment to take over the leadership of the movement and implement their extreme, confused, and shallow ideology. The clear break of Alshabab as a separate entity happened during the Djibouti peace deal negotiations between the TFG and ICU, when they refused to leave Asmara and join the negotiations, declaring the peace deal, a betrayal.

There are three strands of evolution from the IU to the ICU and finally to Al-Shabab. The first is ideological, in which the groups went through a funneling process and slowly become less ideologically diverse. Though all three share the ideal of changing the secular form of government in Somalia and actively strive to implement Shari'a or Islamic law, a significant faction of IU and ICU leaders have a vision that has focused on the Somali nation itself – and in neighboring territories where Somalis are the predominant ethnic group, such as Ethiopia's Ogaden region. In contrast, key Al-Shabab leaders are committed to a global jihadist ideology. They view the group's regional activities as part of a broader struggle.

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3 It is alleged that with leadership support from Harakat Al-Shabab and Hizb al-Islamiyah -- two Somali Islamist movements -- al-Qaeda's East Africa cell has long used Somalia as a safe haven. Al-Qaeda perpetrated the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, the simultaneous attacks in 2002 on Kenya's coast against the Paradise Hotel and a failed effort to shoot down an Israeli charter airliner full of tourists, and the failed attempt in 2003 to attack the new U.S. embassy in Nairobi.
The emergence of Al-Shabab as a distinct force occurred during the course of the insurgency in 2006 to oust Ethiopian troops from Somalia. The US authorities subcontracted bounty hunting of “terrorists or radicals” in Somalia to some of the warlords. The warlords exploited the American offer, resulting in the death of a number of innocent people. In January 2006, six warlords in and around Mogadishu were urged to form a "Counter-terrorists Alliance", allegedly financed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States. It has been widely reported that the CIA provided funds for the warlords to purchase weapons and other materials necessary for war; and in February 2006 the warlords declared war on the Islamic Courts. After the first engagement, the public overwhelmingly rallied behind the courts and a bloody war ended the long tenure of the warlords. Shortly thereafter, the courts formed the Union of the Islamic Courts (UIC) to coordinate their activities (Abdullahi 2007).

However the break between Al-Shabab and other insurgent groups came in late 2007. In September 2007, the ICU attended a conference of opposition factions in the Eritrean capital, Asmara, and reemerged as the Alliance for the Reliberation of Somalia (ARS), which was dominated by Islamists and led by the now ‘new’ TFG’s president, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmad. Al-Shabab boycotted the peace conference in Asmara, and its leaders launched vitriolic attacks on the ARS for failing to adopt a global jihadist ideology. On 29 February 2008, the US Government designated Al-Shabab as a Foreign Terrorist Organization under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (as amended), and as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under Section 1(b) of Executive Order 13224 (as amended) (Kohlmann 2009).

Al-Shabab is reportedly currently led by a shadowy figure, Abu Zubeyr. His real name, according to Somali sources, is Ahmed Godane and he is originally from secessionist Somaliland. His main contact is through taped messages given to Somali radio stations. Al-Shabab has been successful, in part because of the failure of all the three Transitional Federal Governments to deliver desperately needed social services and due to the fact that the two-year Ethiopian occupation left Somalis radically angry, a reaction echoed nationally and abroad. The Somali Diaspora Network accused the second TFG led by President Abdullahi Yusuf and the Ethiopians of pursuing a campaign of collective punishment and genocide. Within the TFG(s) there has never been any civil service to speak of, with the result that cabinet ministers are often the only TFG ministry staff. Exploiting this vacuum, Al-Shabab has employed religious ideology as a tool for social transformation. By using Salafi-Wahhabism as a way of bypassing local social structures, Al-Shabab has attempted to create cross-clan alliances, and thus provides a truly revolutionary alternative. One practice has been the insertion of Al-Shabab leaders to administer conquered areas that belong to clans that do not have government representation in the area. Al-Shabab has also filled a vacuum in the country by providing the population with essential services and welfare – clearing roadblocks, repairing roads, organising markets, re-establishing order and a justice system through the use of Islamic Sharia-based law (Wilner 2006).

One reason some join Al-Shabab might be that they try to do things the TFG fails to do such as managing the chaos the UN agencies⁴ create in Somalia by confronting them,

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⁴ The UN agencies that are based in Nairobi literally run Somalia remotely. They are incompetent and very bureaucratic and in some cases very corrupted. There are some legal cases and many serious allegations against their work. Many Somali researchers document this well; See articles that appear in many of the Somali webistes such as www.biiraan.com and http://markacadeey.com/maqaalo1/maqaal_markacadeey_editorial_20100326.htm
fighting petty crimes in the areas they control. For example, Al-Shabab recently barred the World Food Programme (WFP) to deliver food when it is not needed as this undermines local farmers and accused it of acting with a political agenda. This analysis is partly correct as this author among others receive complaints from Somali farmers that the timing of the WFP food aid prevented them from selling their own products at a fair price. The WFP claims that it feeds 1.8 million Somalis, a claim that cannot be substantiated, however, it is not hard to calculate the impact of ‘food dumping’ by the WFP when local produce is available. Banning or at least disrupting the importation of Khat, an addictive stimulant that creates major social and economic problems, creates the impression that they are actually trying to stop the disintegration of the society.

At this stage, definitive military victory over Al-Shabab is an unlikely outcome for Sheikh Sharif’s government given the strength of the insurgency, the weakness and fragility of the new unity government, and the lack of professional police and security forces.

Another important area that deserves analysis is Al-Shabab’s relations with Al-Qaeda. Despite the widespread allegations and rumours, many analysts have questioned the true extent of the ties between Al-Qaeda and Islamic Union groups (Menkhaus, 2004). Menkhaus argues that there has never been a smoking gun regarding the relationship between the IU and Al-Qaeda since "no Somalis appear in al-Qaeda's top leadership, and until 2003, no Somali was involved in a terrorist plot against a Western target outside of Somalia" (Menkhaus, 2008). However there is some indication of the existence of a relationship, despite concrete evidence, between bin Laden's group and one of the deceased leaders of Al-Shabab, Aden Hashi Ayro.\(^5\)

The most prominent example of the foreign fighter flow to Somalia is the episode involving approximately twenty young Somali Americans – the largest known group of U.S. citizens to join a foreign terrorist group – who returned to Somalia to join Al-Shabab (Gettleman and Connors 2007, Gordon and Mazzetti 2007). Included among this group was Shirwa Ahmed, the first known U.S. suicide bomber, who was part of Al-Shabab’s October 2008 attacks in Somaliland and Puntland. Most of the young men were radicalized at home in the United States, particularly in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area.

The head of al-Qaeda's East Africa cell, Abu Talha al-Sudani, was killed during Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in 2007. Following Nabhan’s recent death, Fazul Muhammad Harun is the most experienced al-Qaeda leader still at large in the Horn of Africa. At a minimum, the loss of Nabhan will severely disrupt the capabilities and planning of Al-Shabab and al-Qaeda in Somalia.

On September 14, 2009, U.S. Special Forces killed Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, a senior leader of al-Qaeda's East Africa cell, near the town of Barawe on the coast of southern Somalia. Although the death of Nabhan will seriously disrupt and degrade the capabilities of al-Qaeda and its support groups, without political progress and peace building in Somalia this targeting of leadership of terrorist groups will have a short-lived strategic impact.

Al-Qaeda’s bin Laden issued a video devoted to Al-Shabab in March 2009, entitled "Fight on, Champions of Somalia" where he addresses "my patient, persevering Muslim brothers in mujahid Somalia." Here, bin Laden explicitly endorses Al-Shabab and denounces the TFG, saying that when NATO supported former president Abdullahi Yusuf, the mujahideen were not fooled. "They replaced him and brought in a new, revised version,"

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\(^5\) Aden Hashi Ayrow, a former prominent al-Shabaab leader was killed in a missile strike in the town of Dusamareb on 1 May 2008.
says bin Laden, "similar to Sayyaf, Rabbani, and Ahmed Shah Massoud, who were leaders of
the Afghan mujahideen before they turned back on their heels [as apostates]." In bin Laden's
view, Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed — who had been an ICU official before becoming ARS's
leader — also falls into this category⁶, the new revised version.

Al-Shabab’s ideology

Al-Shabab’s strategy is to transform and change the Somalia Sunni community to more
radical Wahabi/Salafist followers. The following example, one of the many ways Al-Shabab is
employing to do this, highlights Al-Shabab’s attempt to erase the traditional, more
moderate, Islamic tradition. Sheikh Uways al-Barawi spread the Qadiriya brotherhood, and
with it the basic teachings of Islam, throughout East Africa and composed numerous
religious poems which are still recited today. Dada Masiti⁷ was one of the most celebrated
female saints on the Swahili coast and an accomplished poet whose verse was sought after
by the ruling elite. Neither of these two religious figures is now allowed to be recited in Al-
Shabab controlled areas. The graves of most key figures in the dissemination of Islamic
learning in the late 19th and early 20th century have been destroyed and with them the
memory of a more moderate Islam which emphasized the importance of tradition, the
inclusion of foreigners, the rejection of violence (Abdullahi 2007).

Over the last two decades of civil war, characterised by a lack of central government,
Sufi leaders had managed to steer clear of clan and political wars, but this pragmatic and
moderate approach came to an end when Al-Shabab fighters began desecrating their
religious shrines in the south of the country late last year. An example is Al-Shabab’s policy
in the port city of Kismayo, where the group not only tore down an abandoned 60-year-old
Roman Catholic church to replace it with a mosque, but they targeted Sufi sites, among
them ancient graves of clerics and other prominent Sufis, sites Al-Shabab had deemed un-
Muslim.

The unfulfilled promise to cease hostilities following the reaching of a stated
objective has a precedent in Somali history. The Somali oral historians mention that when
Sayid Muhammad Abdallah Hassan⁸ was told that his rival Sheikh Uways al-Baraawi⁹ had
been killed by his dervishes, he declared that the end of his movement would certainly
follow. In spite of his differences with the Qadiriya, he shared the then common belief that
the blood of ‘men of God’ is not spilled without divine repercussions. It is doubtful if Al-

⁶ For a series of captured documents by al Qaeda representatives assessing the Horn of Africa for future operations, see The
Five Letters to the African Corps, AFGP-2002-600053 (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2006), available at
Letters on al-Qa’ida’s Operations in Africa, AFGP-2002-800621 (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, 2007),
available at www.ctc.usma.edu/ag/AFGP-2002-800621-Trans-Meta.pdf (accessed July 26, 2007); and various letters from
Somalia, Ethiopia, and Djibouti in the Combating Terrorism Center’s Harmony Database, available at
www.ctc.usma.edu/harmony_docs.asp.

⁷ The poetess, Dada Masiti of Brava (d. 1921), wrote exclusively on religious themes.

⁸ A Somali religious and nationalist leader. Referred to as the Mad Mullah by the British, he established the Dervish State
in Somalia that fought an anti-imperial war for a period of over 20 years against British, Italian, and Ethiopian forces.

⁹ The Qadiriya leader Sheikh Uways bin Muhammad al-Baraawi... From Barawe, travelled to Baghdad, the hometown
of Abdul Qadir al-Jilani, to the Hejaz, then to Zanzibar. He formed a sub-branch of Qadiriya sect, named after him, the
Uwaysiyya... Shaykh Uways finally met a tragic death at the hands of a rival Sufi brotherhood, he was tragically murdered by
Salihiyya followers of Sayyid Muhammad Abdallah Hassan in northern Somalia in 1909.
Shabab is aware of the repetition of history they are enacting in their violation of the graves and revered memories of these important Sheikhs.

The future

Although it is desirable to engage Al-Shabab in political dialogue, in particular the moderate elements who do not want to be regarded as terrorists, this seems improbable at this time. An alternative would be to adopt a policy of incremental containment, a policy aimed at reversing extremism and the movement’s following by tackling Al-Shabab’s legitimacy at the community level. This will take time. The international community, through the UN and the African Union, is also bringing pressure to bear upon the government of Eritrea widely regarded to be a principal source of material support for the insurgents. If the new government is to succeed in neutralising Al-Shabab it must create a broad-based forum of support that will allow for the incorporation of other Islamist movements and a civil society initially underpinned by the implementation of Sharia law. The creation of such a forum and more secular space would have to be done in a way that will not alienate certain segments of Somali society, and ultimately – as the centrepiece of its strategy – would have to separate Al-Shabab from its support base amongst Somalis. It would have to do this by rolling back the waves of propaganda Al-Shabab has thus far successfully used in their aggressive media techniques and indoctrination. Any education campaign or counter-propaganda would also have to be tackled at the grassroots level.

Another way of effectively challenging the jihadist movement is by exposing its contradictions and deviant ideology. This could be done by giving religious leaders and elders the political space as well as the security to conduct this exercise. This could be done through the promulgation of Fatwas (Islamic religious rulings) from recognised religious authorities in Somalia, like the Islamic Clerics Council. These Fatwas could emphasise the history of Islam in the creation of, and its social obligation towards, the ultimate goal of civil society; a society characterized by tolerance, non-violence, equality before precedent-based common law, and respect for all rational contributions to public debate.

One of the groups to challenge the rights of Al-Shabab is Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama’a, a well organised Sufi resistance group, ... driving Al-Shabab insurgents out of several towns

Al-Shabab regards President Ahmed as a traitor to the Islamic cause, describing him and his government as "Murtadiin" (apostates). ‘Hisbul-Islam’, inward-looking and concerned with local rather than international issues, is also fighting the TFG. Based on my own experience with the recent development in the region, Sheikh Dahir Aweys, its leader, considers the Djibouti peace deal a betrayal. This factional group is reportedly supported by Eritrea and insists it will stop fighting if all "foreign forces" leave Somalia, including the AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia) troops. However, their track record is not consistent with their public declarations.

One of the groups to challenge the rights of Al-Shabab is Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama’a, a well organised Sufi resistance group, which is militarily active only in the central Somali region of Galgaduud. They succeeded in driving Al-Shabab insurgents out of several towns of
the region. In their place, the Sufi movement has established its own incipient local administration, liaising with UN officials and patrolling the locality. Grassroots support and local clan-backing has allowed this new movement to transform rapidly from a civil to a military force.

Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama’á clearly represents a challenge to Al-Shabab, and possibly also the TFG at a later stage. It appears that the accomplishments of Ahlu Sunnah Wal Jama’á imply two realities. Firstly, the severe Wahhabi governing methods of Al-Shabab, echoing those on view in Pakistan’s Swat Valley and which include stoning and amputations, elicit little local support. Secondly, a group with ideologically sound principles which can make improvements to the life of everyday Somalis will gain grass roots support fairly quickly.10

A responsive and effective state is not only an essential prerequisite for development, but as one Somali leader told me; it is also a basic human right. A government for Somalis should be seen as a human right. Somalia is the only nation in the world that can now lay claim to being the worst failed state amongst failed states.

The following are three possible scenarios for outcomes in the region put forward by many researchers in this field.

- **Continuation of Status Quo.** In summary, this entails unchanged political space for dialogue along with continuation of the humanitarian crisis (including the internal displacement) and therefore, donor/diaspora fatigue in humanitarian aid. Violent conflict to continue with no workable political solution.
- **Conflict Deepens.** AMISOM force remains with no additional peacekeeping support. Fighting may escalate, with external actors becoming heavily involved in ‘Somali crisis’. This in turn may increase insurgent activity. Local and regional administrations may emerge which will threaten the very viability of the TFG.
- **The Best Case Scenario.** Solution through dialogue which enables the accommodation of the opposition groups. Controversy between peace building/state building is addressed with robust UN Peacekeeping force (agreed by all parties) brought in to facilitate implementation of TFG’s tasks (including, draft constitution, and security sector reform.). Establishment of a trust fund with the intention of creating political space for public dialogue. This will lead eventually to peaceful elections in 2010 and produce new leadership with credibility and capacity to lead.

The key questions remain: will Al-Shabab’s attempt to rule the territories it conquers be sufficient to sustain its military significance, political relevance, and ability to increase its legitimacy through increased grassroots support? Or will such a radical, militant Islamic movement fail because it cannot provide a workable model of governance?

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Conclusion

Although the insurgency in Somalia appears to be widespread, its strength should not be overestimated. Hizb al-Islamiyah and Harakat Al-Shabab are beset by problems of limited public support, limited fighting power, political infighting, and the constant need to negotiate access to new funds. However, given the poor performance of the TFG in developing integrated, political security and development capabilities, even a weak and divided insurgency could continue to plague Somalis for some time to come.

Al-Shabab does face real challenges from within Somalia. Ahlu Sunna wa'l-Jama'a, based on a more traditional Sufi interpretation of Islam, has challenged Al-Shabab and has had some success in the south because of its ability to effect positive community development.

Finally, although Al-Shabab is today the best organised, financed and armed military group and controls the largest stretch of territory in southern Somalia, this position has come about only because the TFG is weak and corrupt. Al-Shabab aims to establish a caliphate and some suggest that it might transform itself into a political party. This paper suggests that unless Al-Shabab’s pragmatism drives it to take the Hamas approach and transform itself into a political party, to change its current leadership and revert to the earlier ideology of the Union of the Islamic Courts, it risks implosion due to its inability to govern effectively and to bring about improved conditions for the general population.
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