

Al-Shabaab

The Internationalization of Militant Islamism in Somalia and the Implications for Radicalisation Processes in Europe

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Table of contents

Introduction	3
Data collection and methodology	4
Ideological Alignment with al Qaeda: towards the Global Jihad	8
The ideology of al-Shabaab	8
The history of Islamism and Jihadism in Somalia	9
Social control mechanisms applied by al-Shabaab	14
Tactical culture	19
The al-Qaeda affiliation	22
Foreign Fighters in Somalia	26
Foreign fighters 1992-2006	26
Non-European foreign fighters in Al-Shabaab	31
Foreign fighters from Europe	39
Radicalisation and recruitment	49
The role of propaganda	49
The enabling environment	51
Recruitment pipelines and networks	58
Conclusion	61
Notes	63

Introduction

Since 1991 Somalia has rightly been regarded as a failed state. Until recently, this crisis has attracted little international interest as it has been overshadowed by security concerns over Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Sudan, and international assistance has largely been symbolic. However, the deteriorating security situation in Somalia, and the fact that militant Islamists now control the southern part of the country, has raised awareness and concern. Some observers to the conflict have even indicated that Somalia may be the next significant front after Iraq and Afghanistan. This rather pessimistic observation is due to the fact that al-Shabaab not only controls a very large territory, but has also moved towards identifying itself as a part in the global Jihad. Propaganda statements from the movements clearly outline the perspectives and visions of al-Shabaab, and there have been frequent salutary references to al-Qaeda and other Jihadi groups.

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the changing nature of the Jihad in Somalia, specifically the increasing internationalization of this conflict. It has been argued that al-Shabaab has moved towards al-Qaeda in both an ideological as well as in an operational sense and this question will be analyzed in detail here. If a local Somali insurgent group has actually merged at some level with the global Jihad, then this development has wide ranging security implications. Already there are indications that areas under the control of al-Shabaab have undergone a process of Talibanisation where the militant's interpretation of Sharia law is being enforced with no regard for traditional culture or religious sentiments.

However, the primary focus of the investigation concerns the radicalisation and recruitment of foreign fighters. As the study outlines, this is not a new development but can be traced back to the early 1990s, yet the nature of the influx of foreign fighters has changed tremendously. The report provides a global overview of foreign recruitment to al-Shabaab with specific emphasis on Europe; and Denmark in particular. The critical security situation in Somalia also entails direct implications for Europe as there is evidence of al-Shabaab issued threats against European interests as well as active recruitment or volunteering of European Muslims to the frontlines in the Horn of Africa. A smaller group within the European Somali diaspora has actively supported al-Shabaab, either ideologically, financially, or militarily, and this development merits further investigation.

Studies of radicalisation patterns in Europe have identified a correlation between local conflicts and Muslim communities within Europe.² The recent conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Palestinian Territories have also had a profound impact on Muslims in Denmark, and there is evidence that these conflicts have inspired others to pursue an active role in what they perceive to be a holy war. Muslim diasporas play an important role in the development of the global Jihad and a thorough knowledge of the perception of these conflicts, by Danish Muslims in particular, is relevant and necessary in order to formulate specific counter radicalisation measures.

The field of radicalisation studies in Europe has experienced a tremendous growth over the past five years, yet the increased attention has been quite uneven. While this report is not concerned with a critical overview of the existing research literature, a few observations do merit a cautionary note. An example of this unevenness is the preoccupation of researchers to focus on previous and often outdated cases as the basis for empirical studies. However, the radicalisation and recruitment environment in Europe keeps changing and specific groups of individuals that only a few years ago attracted scant attention are now high on the agenda as in the case of the Somali diaspora. Moreover, very few studies have strived to access primary sources and to obtain new data through

fieldwork. While recognizing that this endeavour is indeed difficult, it is also indispensable and this perspective will be explained in detail shortly.

In recent years there has been a steady stream of worrying information about the increase of foreign fighters travelling from all over the world to train and fight with the militant Islamist movement al-Shabaab in Somalia. While there is still confusion about the actual numbers of foreign fighters currently active in Somalia, the empirical evidence available clearly indicates a global trend of migration to this particular battlefield. Yet, our knowledge about the connections between Somalia and diaspora milieus in Western countries as well as Jihadi milieus is quite limited.

Data collection and methodology

Previous research projects undertaken by the authors have relied heavily on social anthropological perspectives and methodologies, including fieldwork. These results provided added value in the sense that they contributed to the understanding of relationships between terrorists and civil society. A cultural frame of reference emphasizes close attention to ideological foundations and the ways and means by which they are transformed into social and political practice.

The common ideology of militant Islamist movements, known as Jihadism, can analytically be framed as a sub-culture translated into social practices, however, this particular form of culture will by definition be an alien construct with regards to the basic tenets of traditional Somali culture. Like Jihadism, phenomena such as Iraqization and Talibanisation do not have their origins in Somali history or culture but have been imported. The ideological foundation of al-Shabaab is a foreign and new element to the conflict in Somalia, certainly on the current scale and intensity, and the question is how the Somali diaspora perceives these developments.

The social anthropological perspective employed in this report necessitates a triangulation of data and perspectives on the internationalization of al-Shabaab. Obviously, the extensive literature on al-Shabaab has been studied, including journalistic accounts, analytical briefs, and more traditional research based publications. In this regard it should be noted that the proliferation of articles on al-Shabaab are for the most part based on sparse data and lack of access to primary sources. This is critical in the sense that a number of published articles have been misleading in portraying al-Shabaab as a highly structured and cohesive organization, which it is not. While this report does not present an overview or review of the existing literature, a word of caution appears to be appropriate when dealing with al-Shabaab.

Secondly, our international network of terrorism researchers and specialists has been consulted for their views on specific issues related to al-Shabaab. A few dozen individuals were contacted during the project and the authors are grateful for their assistance and the sharing of insights. Lastly, field research was conducted in Denmark, Kenya, and Somalia during late 2009; however, the special circumstances of these interviews require some elaboration. As will be illustrated below, these fieldworks required extraordinary planning and patience and the researchers were in several instances confronted with specific ethical issues which had to be resolved, most often on the spot.

Fieldwork Methodology

Even before the beginning of the project in the spring of 2009 it was decided by the authors that a fieldwork component would be essential to test and verify the assumptions previously mentioned in the framework of the study. Much has been published on the situation in Somalia, especially

concerning the recent upsurge in piracy. Publications dedicated to the nature of the al-Shabaab movement have certainly also flourished over the past year, perhaps as a result of the attention directed towards the phenomenon of piracy. However, the vast majority of these publications have been journalistic accounts, some of which have truly been excellent with important observations not attainable elsewhere. Similarly, there have also been a considerable number of analytic briefs all of which attempted to provide an overview of al-Shabaab. Most of these fail to deliver what they set out to accomplish, and the authors suspect that the necessary background and familiarity with Jihadi studies has not been available. Indeed, there have been relatively few thorough academic and scientifically rigorous studies on al-Shabaab since the emergence of the movement as a significant player in 2007. This report does not claim to be the final word on al-Shabaab, on the contrary. Months of research have clearly outlined the complexity of the al-Shabaab phenomenon, and it would be preposterous to insist that the authors have managed to produce a full and complete account of this particular militant Islamist group.

The need to supplement or verify existing information on al-Shabaab came about because the initial reading phase revealed that some written sources were indeed contradictory or dubious in terms of the veracity of the facts and analysis presented. This uncertainty of the quality and reliability necessitated other means, in short field research. The desired fieldwork required the identification of relevant sources with a keen eye on project restrictions on time and resources available. The limitations of this project dictated that planned field work would have to be conducted fast and efficient and drawing on past project experience. Obviously people within Southern and Central Somalia have been directly exposed to the rule or ideology of al-Shabaab and therefore these individuals can be categorized as primary sources. Needless to say, personal interviews with al-Shabaab members would have been preferable but the movement's view on foreigners made this an impossible option. The fieldwork component would then have to be divided into two separate entities, one for each researcher. Firstly, Lars Hallundbaek was tasked with conducting fieldwork within the Somali diaspora within Denmark to learn about their perspectives on al-Shabaab. This will be outlined in detail subsequently. Secondly, Michael Taarnby would be responsible for planning and executing fieldwork in the Horn of Africa to the extent this was possible, the security situation considered.

Danish Somali diaspora fieldwork

Sympathies towards al-Shabaab and other militant factions among European Somali diasporas have been stressed persistently in academic literature and media reports since the rise of ICU and al-Shabaab. Assumptions of the magnitude and motivational causes behind this support are divergent, however, precious little primary source data has been presented to support various claims. For this reason fieldwork in various Somali communities in Denmark was undertaken in order to supplement and test already published assumptions.

The objective of the Danish fieldwork was neither to extract names nor personal data on individuals who might have gone to Somalia to take up arms nor to count exact numbers of possible Jihadis. Rather, it was to probe the general atmosphere in a European Somali diaspora community in mapping the sentiments towards events in Somalia and on al-Shabaab in particular. By advancing our knowledge of how and to what extent diaspora members relate themselves to the conflict in Somalia, the authors have aimed to understand the perspectives at play, and most importantly, to expose the nuances and diversity in political and ideological positions.

Field studies were performed where diaspora concentrations are high, primarily in the two main cities in Denmark, Copenhagen and Aarhus. Attempts to gain access to local Somali communities in Aalborg and Odense, and even Malmø, Sweden, proved futile. Methodologically, participant observation, the honoured method of anthropological research, was discarded from the outset as a primary source of data. To observe activities reflecting militant ideologies or ambitions was never an option. Being so, data collection rested solely upon interviews. In total, XX semi-structured interviews were conducted, equally representing Aarhus and Copenhagen. Due to the topic and initial wariness to speak frankly, the research team sometimes found it useful to turn the interviews into informal conversations. The method of flexible inquiry also meant that interview guides had to be reformulated a number of times during the process in order to stimulate conversation. In the end the research team had to rely on intuition when choosing which questions should be asked at which stage in the interview, thus setting intuition over cogency and insight over firm verification.

The main obstacle was to gain access to willing informants as the research team's collection of information so easily could be confused with intelligence gathering. Though not as far-reaching or with grave consequences as in Somalia, the sensitive issue of al-Shabaab and other militant factions is still shrouded with significant personal implications for Somalis in Denmark. Internal pressure can be intense and tangible and two examples serve to illustrate the research environment. An informant's family grave site in Somalia was desecrated by unknown perpetrators shortly after he questioned the motives and legitimacy of al-Shabaab actions. Another informant's distant relatives living abroad were repeatedly threatened by Somalis living in Denmark to control their relative who had openly spoken against al-Shabaab. These and other examples of social control mechanisms contributed to an atmosphere in which few were keen to share their knowledge.

Prior field studies carried out in Muslim communities in Europe have successfully applied the method of initially establishing contact and acceptance from imams, who would themselves participate, and then lend legitimacy and grant access to a wider pool of informants. However, this top-down approach had to be altered since no imams or other religious authorities were available for inquiry. The Somali community in Denmark is comprised by a wide range of local associations and clubs with everyday activities for their members. Lacking willing official religious figures, the research team approached resourceful persons vested with a certain respect and credibility in the local milieu and associations. This somewhat limited category of informants revealed a surprising diversity of ideological positions. Most importantly, they offered the advantages of a wider view, and a thorough knowledge of the ideological currents in the community. Far from a homogeneous group holding homogeneous attitudes, a priority was to do samplings from different categories of informants to meet the criteria of reliability, verifiability, and validity. This intention proved to be as noble as it was difficult. Due to the narrow segments interviewed, this fieldwork should therefore be seen as a preliminary probe rather than an authoritative study, and more than anything; it proves how little is known.

Due to sudden and extraordinary events beyond the author's control, access was further impeded during the interviewing process. On December 3, 2009, a 24-year old Somali citizen who had lived in Denmark since the age of 5, carried out a suicide bombing in Mogadishu, killing 24 people, including four government ministers. Four weeks later, on the first evening of 2010, a 28-year old Somali citizen with Danish residence permit and alleged ties to al-Shabaab and al-Qaida related activities in East Africa, attacked Kurt Westergaard, the man behind the most notorious Muhammed cartoon drawing, in his home in Aarhus. Both cases are described in more detail elsewhere in the report.

These attacks send shock waves throughout the Somali community in Denmark and threatened to shut off access to more informants as confusion and disbelief increased. However, while most field locations, especially mosques, sealed off hermetically for outsiders as a consequence of the attacks, a few informants were still willing to participate in interviews despite the toxic atmosphere. The Genie was out of the bottle, so to speak, and in light of the attacks it no longer made any sense to deny the problem of violent radicalisation among diaspora members which most of the informants had done hitherto. A few informants clearly positioned *against* al-Shabaab seized the opportunity to speak up. For those holding militant sympathies, any potential desire to air one's opinions, even for research purposes, simply evaporated.

Overall, the Danish fieldwork was subjected to the same set of research ethics as deployed in its East African counterpart. As a basic premise unconditional anonymity was assured, which most informants surprisingly declined. All informants were offered the full un-edited audio file from the interviews they participated in. Last, but certainly not least, the authors have exerted themselves not to contribute to any disproportional or dramatized representation of the issue. The Somali diaspora in Europe is widely considered one of the most vulnerable immigrant groups and any stigmatizing misrepresentation would obviously not improve their situation. To shield and retain informants, authors on principle opted to decline media enquiries throughout the research process.

Somalia fieldwork

The decision to identify a secure and relevant fieldwork location that would enable the project to obtain first hand accounts of al-Shabaab in Somalia necessitated a detailed security analysis of what would be possible and responsible to undertake. While Somaliland and Puntland are both relatively safe locations, here stressing the relative element, these areas have little direct experience with the Islamist insurgents. Information obtained here would risk being tainted by hearsay and otherwise second hand information. Southern and central Somalia was absolutely off-limits at the time of fieldwork preparation. Any movement by a field researcher would have been extremely foolhardy with a very high possibility of serious injury, death, or kidnapping and these areas were eliminated from the list of possible locations very early in the project.

The only remaining location was the part of Mogadishu controlled by AMISOM, the African Union Mission in Somalia, and this area constituted the airport, the seaport, and a narrow strip of Southern Mogadishu. Any movement into the city itself would be extremely risky as al-Shabaab informers would relay the presence of a foreigner to senior leaders through an intricate network of informers within hours of arrival. The decision to conduct fieldwork in Mogadishu was taken in August 2009 but it would be another two months before the final preparations were in place for a short term stay with the AMISOM force. Unless this security arrangement was firmly in place, the field research would have been called off, even if it had meant serious changes in the scope of the research project.

Fortunately, an invitation was extended by AMISOM force commander Major General Nathan Mugisha to visit Mogadishu in October 2009, and the research team is very grateful for this opportunity and support in spite of the overwhelming tasks burdening the peacekeeping mission. The AMISOM contingent of about 5.300 is comprised of soldiers from Uganda and Burundi, and embedding would have to be with the Ugandan contingent simply due to language barriers. The actual field research was undertaken in October 2009, and a range of desired interview candidates had been identified prior to embedding. However, prior planning and the actual circumstances on the frontlines require utmost flexibility. Assisting a visiting researcher does not have high priority in

a war zone, nor should it, yet every single member of the UPDF encountered literally went out of his or her way to assist, often under difficult circumstances.

The desired interview candidates comprised a mix of AMISOM soldiers, TFG government officials, including security personnel, and Somali civilians willing to share their experiences while living under the rule of al-Shabaab. The actual execution of these interviews requires some elaboration which is thoroughly based on field research ethics in high-risk settings. Field researchers are obliged to ensure that their informants are not exposed to any harm as a direct result of any form of interaction or association with the researcher. When in doubt, it is imperative that even the most desirable interview be dropped on the spot instead of risking harm to an informant; anything else would be extremely unethical.

The three categories of desired informants proved to have very different perspectives on being interviewed. No problems of any kind surfaced in working with the UPDF of the AMISOM force, on the contrary, this proved to be straightforward and even jovial. The few TFG officials interviewed were stuck between a rock and a hard place, and while most were willing to be named in this report, the authors have preferred to err on the side of caution. Retribution by al-Shabaab is swift and hard in Mogadishu and because the security situation is prone to serious changes this research team made the decision not to mention any names. While some academics may have an issue with the absence of names and further details, the authors would rather risk some academic finger pointing than somebody's life.

Finally, the third category of informants had been selected based on a prior research project in Lebanon, where civilian eyewitnesses proved to be our best and most reliable source of information. In the Mogadishu setting however, this was not the case. The level of fear of retribution among Somali civilians for even being seen speaking to a foreign researcher precluded most contacts. Photography was absolutely out of the question; the locals were scared that the pictures would eventually find their way into the hands of al-Shabaab and would instantly mark them as spies for which the punishment is execution by firing squad. For this reason all names of Somali civilians have been anonymized and even where much more background information is available, this has been left out to prevent any form of direct identification. The real identities of the informants are known to the field researcher only and will not be divulged in this or any subsequent publication. However, in situations where direct interaction was impossible, mere observation would reveal a wealth of information based on non-verbal communication and behavioural patterns. For these obvious security reasons, the third category of interviews had to be abandoned.

Ideological Alignment with al Qaeda: Towards the Global Jihad

The Ideology of al-Shabaab

When this project was first drafted in the early months of 2009, there was some speculation within the terrorism studies community concerning the alignment of al-Shabaab with other globally oriented Jihadi groups. The only thorough review of al-Shabaab's own writings at the time was conducted by Reuven Paz in his illuminating report from December 2008.³ According to Paz, the entire content of al-Shabaab's online Jihadi magazine *Millat Ibrahim*, posted through GIMF in September 2008, is in line with the doctrine of al-Tawhid wal-Jihad. The argumentation in the writing falls into the Takfiri doctrine, especially when the movement's enemies in Somalia are discussed. In this publication there are clear and unambiguous references to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, indeed al-Shabaab's so-called research center was titled *The Zarqawi Center for Studies and Research in the Horn of Africa*. Part of the magazine is dedicated to a clear demarcation between the ICU and al-Shabaab, a development which Paz has termed the *Jihadi Arabization* of the movement.

Having been intrigued to the extent that further inquiry into this development appeared merited in early 2009, this topic was included in the overall project. However, even the most careful planning is sometimes overtaken by real events on the ground, which was exactly what happened in this case. During 2009, al-Shabaab was very active in its communications to the outside world and various senior members have been quite specific in framing their ideology along the terminology and concepts of other well-known Jihadi groups, most notably al-Qaeda. What appeared as a likely hypothesis at the outset of the project was thoroughly confirmed by al-Shabaab itself over time.

One might reason that this topic should not be addressed at all, since there is ample evidence of a closer ideological alignment with the global Jihad than seen in any previous Somali Jihadi group. When the ideological angle has been included after all in an abbreviated form, this inclusion is considered relevant for several reasons. First of all, there is still confusion about whether or not al-Shabaab is a local Somali phenomenon or if it is part and parcel of al-Qaeda. Moreover, this recent ideological move may signal future developments on the Jihadi scene, not only in Somalia, but with serious implications for the Horn of Africa and with events impacting on security matters in Western Europe, Canada, the U.S and elsewhere.

The ideological changes and the increasing internationalization of al-Shabaab's agenda can be analyzed along several trajectories. The authors have chosen three specific areas where these changes are most visible and where they can be tracked and verified empirically. The first concerns the actual ideological foundation and identifies the specific notions applied in the Salafi Jihadi tradition. The second concerns the increasing Talibanisation, meaning the practical application of social control mechanisms founded on a specific interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence. Lastly; the impact of a radical ideology translates directly into specific battlefield behaviour which was previously unknown in Somalia. This last trajectory has been termed Iraqization; a term which signifies that al-Shabaab has deliberately incorporated an ideological and operational profile that aligns the movement much closer to the most violent and extreme Jihadi groups operating in Iraq.

However, in order to properly assess al-Shabaab's move towards the global Jihad, a rudimentary understanding of Islamism and Jihadism in Somalia will be in its place. Al-Shabaab did not come about suddenly or unexpectedly even though most observers seemed taken by surprise. To

comprehend how and where al-Shabaab deviates from previous expressions of militant Islamist sentiments in Somalia, a brief introduction to the historical development will serve to set the stage for further elaboration and analysis.

The History of Islamism and Jihadism in Somalia

In a historical perspective, the roots of a Sharia based society have not been strong in Somalia. Instead the driving force has been nomadic customary law; Islamists ideas and movements is largely a post-independence phenomenon.⁴ As pointed out by Ken Menckhaus, one of the significant long-term trends to emerge from two decades of conflict in Somalia is the rise of political Islam. This particular ideology owes much of its success to the abject failure of any other form of political system to strike root and function in a country ravaged by civil war, but perhaps more importantly, to deliver some resemblance of justice at the local level.⁵

An excellent primer on contemporary forms of Islamism in Somalia by Anouar Boukhars provides an overview of the peculiar characteristics of ideological movements and developments in Somalia. According to Boukhars, Somalia's Islamists can be roughly divided into three distinct types of activism; political, missionary, and Jihadi.⁶ The introduction of Islamist movements into Somali society occurred in the 1960s and was predominantly inspired by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. However, the Islamists were forced to disband in the early 1970s and most went underground or fled into exile. This exodus was partly to blame for the subsequent heterogeneous nature of Somali Islamism where very diverse groups would later emerge. The initial inroad made in Somalia by Egyptian groups was superseded in the 1980s by Saudi charities that brought significant resources for humanitarian aid as well as the Wahabi brand of Islam. Initially, this imported ideology was largely puritanical, but due to the political changes in the country it would eventually turn political and ultimately influence local Jihadi groups.

The most significant Somali movement to emerge from foreign influence and the spread of Islamist ideas was the al-Ittihad al-Islamiya. When al-Ittihad al-Islamiya formed in 1984, it merged two smaller groups of radical Islamist orientation; the al-Salafiya Muslim Brotherhood and an even smaller and more radical group, al-Takfir al-Wahda. Thus, the presence of a very radical ideology and a small but dedicated cadre has been in existence in Somalia for over 30 years. When the indigenous Islamist movement al-Ittihad al-Islamiya emerged in its militant form in early 1991, it was primarily lead by Somali intellectuals who had transformed their movement from da'wa to Jihad. Its first stronghold was Kismayo after government forces decided to evacuate the port city. Interestingly, this pattern would be repeated again in 2008 by its successor, al-Shabaab.

Several entities took note of this new and competent force, and from 1992 military assistance arrived from Sudan and Iran but also from al-Qaeda. This assistance was provided at a crucial moment when Somalia had slipped into a state without an effective government. When the Somali state collapsed in January 1991, al-Ittihad was without question the most efficient of the Islamist organizations in the country. Its vision of a an emirate based on a greater Somalia that would encompass parts of neighbouring states made it unique in its outlook, especially combined with the capability to field a militia and to engage in terrorist operations.⁷

While the leadership and the fighters were of Somali origin, their background and personal experiences provides some insight into their ambitious goals, regional outlook, and militant activity. Among the top leadership most had graduated from Islamic universities in Pakistan, Kuwait, and

Saudi Arabia and had been exposed to interpretations of Islam different to the traditional forms practised within Somalia.⁸ Moreover, Somali returnees from the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union came with organizational skills, military experience, and personal links. The latter group was instrumental in shaping al-Ittihad into a potent fighting force. It is very difficult to estimate how many Somalis went to Afghanistan in the 1980s. Some sources claim there were several hundreds and while this may be a true figure, it cannot be verified independently.⁹

Some have argued that the military defeats in 1996-97 meant the dissolution of al-Ittihad, but the truth is probably a little more complicated. Instead of disappearing entirely, the remnants dispersed and the movement fragmented. Some became disillusioned with the armed struggle and called for a non-violent political process of inclusion while hardliners like Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys and Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki went in the opposite direction. Differences between religious leaders and field commanders emerged, and the hardliners pursued beneficial relations with likeminded Jihadi groups, such as al-Qaeda.¹⁰ From al-Ittihad emerged two distinct camps after 1997, and the less Jihadi oriented members began to use the label al-Islah to differentiate themselves from the hard line Jihadis. Al-Ittihad and al-Islah were part and parcel of the same movement, although there were some doctrinal disputes internally. Organizational control over al-Ittihad was always slightly confusing as the movement could not overcome clan allegiances. No single individual would ever emerge to dominate and set the ideological course for the movement's future.

One of the most influential figures in the 1990s was Sheikh Hassan al-Turki who relocated to Ras Komboni after having been defeated in Gedo in 1996. An isolated base and a training facility were set up at Ras Komboni where the hardline element of the al-Ittihad movement seemed to flourish. Al-Turki was considered a radical even by his fellow al-Ittihad companions and was said to have been a member of the al-Takfir wal-Hijra branch. This ideological stance would draw al-Turki and his followers much closer to al-Qaeda.¹¹

In the mid to late 1990s al-Ittihad members had infiltrated the Sharia courts which provided the only form of law and order in Somalia at the time. The clandestine nature of al-Ittihad allowed it to spread its influence in the Sharia courts and also in the business community. Initially welcomed, because they were the only ones who actually cared for the population, their strict Islamic interpretation alienated them from the population. Even at this time, amputations, stonings, and the killings of apostates occurred.

The Islamic Courts Union

After the military defeat in 1996 at the hands of the Ethiopian troops, the remnants of al-Ittihad, meaning those who opted out of exile, went quietly to Mogadishu where they effectively gained control over what had formerly been independent and loosely organised Islamic courts. The Islamic courts were correctly seen by former al-Ittihad members as an expedient tool to reassert themselves under a new name and legitimacy. The autonomous courts gradually became part of the ICU, quietly and effectively. Their power was consolidated in the early 2000s due to professional management, by keeping a low profile and complete disarray in the rival political camps. Although the ICU brought peace and justice, they ruled by fear, which they deliberately nurtured to prevent uprisings and dissent.

In 2006, a coalition of local Sharia courts and Islamists in Mogadishu defeated another coalition of militias. While the ICU was comprised of both moderate and extremist elements of the most significant groupings, the coalition also counted the al-Shabaab militia. Led by the renowned Aden Hashi Farah Ayro, it was the best armed, the best trained and perhaps the most committed militia of about 400 fighters at the time.¹² Ayro remained most active in Mogadishu and was able to capitalize on his lineage in that he attracted many new recruits from the Habre Gedir clan.

The Sharia courts installed under the organizational umbrella of the ICU delivered a minimum of stability when the national government was perceived as inadequate for the task, and the international community did not care to be involved in any meaningful way. In short, the ICU performed and delivered when no other entity did. A major failure, which is often overlooked regarding the ICU, was the absence of a socio-political blueprint for Somali society once they were in power. The resulting differences and disagreements on the interpretations of Sharia caused serious friction, and in the end local ICU leaders did their own thing. The resulting fragmentation was critical and probably hastened the demise of the ICU. In December 2006, an offensive led by Ethiopian forces quickly routed and overran the ICU. The leadership disbanded and most of them fled Somalia. The al-Shabaab fighters who were not killed took to the countryside to regroup, and though out of sight, they were not eliminated. In the fighting it was mostly young, idealistic, and untrained volunteers who did most of the dying, while the experienced insurgent units simply faded away instead of facing defeat. In reality, the defeat of the ICU's forces in 2006-7 was more a rearranging of forces.¹³

Al-Shabaab

The previous brief concrete examples of Jihadi movements active in Somalia should not be confused with an exhaustive and thorough analysis of historical developments which are better treated elsewhere by more competent scholars. These examples serve the purpose of underlining the existence of a small but dedicated Jihadi milieu in Somalia and especially so because several of the prominent leaders of previous Islamist movement are still active today under al-Shabaab.

During the reign of the ICU, al-Shabaab functioned as an integral component to the courts movement, certainly as the enforcing element. With the defeat of the ICU in January 2007, doctrinal and activist differences surfaced which would eventually result in mutual accusations between former allies from the ICU. One of the clearly visible ideological developments was the hardening of al-Shabaab's political and religious visions. The perceived need to distance themselves from former allies was especially toxic concerning the presence of foreign fighters. Where the ICU would meet international volunteers at Mogadishu airport around 2006 and tell them to return to their country, al-Shabaab would eagerly embrace any foreign recruit, and this remains a major point of contention. Eventually, the moderate forces of the ICU would be increasingly pressured by al-Shabaab in the increasing hostile power struggle.

The Islamist insurgency gained ground throughout 2008 and ended up with almost complete control of southern and central Somalia. But this period also witnessed serious rifts in the Islamist camp, especially between the former ICU leadership which had relocated to Eritrea and the field commanders who remained behind. The hardline elements of the ICU primarily, Ayro, al-Turki, and Robow went to southern Somalia where they divided the territory into three operational sectors. The division into areas of operations was not arbitrary, but reflected clan realities on the ground and

where they could count on local support. Ayro would be in charge of central Somalia and Mogadishu; al-Turki would control the Juba valley and Robow the Bay and Bakool areas.¹⁴

During 2008, and increasingly so in 2009, al-Shabaab became much more vocal in outlining an international agenda and called for a regional offensive against imperialist and Christian forces threatening Somalia. The arch enemy, Ethiopia, was blamed for all sorts of evils. This perception also included the U.S. which was seen as controlling Ethiopia. Threats were issued against Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, and Burundi for their meddling in Somali affairs, but also Denmark attracted attention. On several occasions the infamous cartoons were mentioned and used explicitly as a revenge for future retaliation for insulting the Prophet.

When analysts speak of al-Shabaab as a single, unified entity, this interpretation is quite misleading. Several militant Islamist groups active in Somalia today have joined forces in a larger movement known as the Hizb al-Islamiyya, however, the most significant of these groups is al-Shabaab.¹⁵ In late 2009, al-Shabaab was composed of 12 different groups who used the al-Shabaab label. Some were hardcore Jihadis and very ideologically committed, while others were much less religious and much more opportunistic. The leadership is decentralised but supported by religious figures at the local level who interpret Sharia concepts and practice.¹⁶ This would explain the lack of a single doctrinal blueprint for the movement, and there is a remarkable historical parallel to Al-Ittihad which was very secretive in its dealings, especially its leadership decision making. Its organizational structure was highly compartmentalized, and this may have worked against al-Ittihad in the sense that some branches may not have known what other branches were doing. Decentralized initiatives may well have been the order of the day, instead of a clear chain of command.¹⁷ This organizational fragmentation has produced a horizontal structure which is resilient, yet impedes the consolidation of the movement's potential gains.

This situation has resulted in a high state of fluidity and opportunism and at times even leading to defections. Currently, there is serious internal disagreement on a range of topics, such as the role of women, the banning of Khat, judicial procedures, and the nature of the armed struggle. Speaking of al-Shabaab as a terrorist organization in the singular is highly misleading; instead it makes much more sense to consider al-Shabaab as a very dynamic movement that is fragmented from within.¹⁸ This slightly confusing situation is also reflected in the nature of the movement's leadership that by some have been characterised as being in a state of flux.¹⁹ While Sheikh Ahmed Abdi Godane, known as Abu Zubeir, remains the figurehead, persistent rumours concerning his actual control over al-Shabaab testify to a wide range of stakeholders as opposed to a classical organizational hierarchy.

Based on the assumption that al-Shabaab has gradually moved towards the global Salafi Jihad variant, this angle which will be looked at more closely. The best sources that can be acquired on the ideological perspectives of al-Shabaab originate from the movement itself. By using the widely available propaganda material written by senior members of the movement it is quite possible to eliminate speculation about al-Shabaab's vision and interpretations of events. It should be noted that al-Shabaab's propaganda effort has changed dramatically over the past three years. From being quite rudimentary online statements in Somali to professionally edited and lengthy movies distributed through the effective technical expertise available from the Global Islamic Media Foundation; al-Qaeda's premier media outlet. In June 2008, a communiqué was issued through GIMF in which the emir of al-Shabaab Mukhtar Abu Zubeir unequivocally stated that the movement was fighting within the framework of the global Jihad. Abu Zubeir specifically sends his

greetings to Osama bin Laden, Mullah Muhammed Omar, Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, and he traces the origin of the current conflict to the beginning of the 1990s.

The main thrust of al-Shabaab propaganda has concerned the movement's role within the global Jihad and also its opposition to other political factions in Somalia. Besides the standard usage of citations from the Quran to legitimize political statements, there has actually been relatively little effort to provide religious doctrine to al-Shabaab's audience. One of the few remarkable ones again appeared through GIMF in February 2009. This 47-page document, entitled *The Scream of an Honest and the Advice of a Sympathetic*, was written by Sheikh Abu Salman Hassan Hussein Adam who is listed as an official of al-Shabaab. The document should in all likelihood be seen as a response to the Somali government's discussions on religious legislation going on at the time. When the TFG cabinet voted in favour of implementing Sharia law in Somalia in March 2009, this did little to appease al-Shabaab, on the contrary.²⁰ Sheikh Abu Salman very eloquently discusses the Somali constitution, specifically the article on freedom of religion, and concludes that the current government is illegitimate and outside the bounds of Islamic law. However, Sheikh Abu Salman takes this notion one step further in declaring government officials apostates, including the president. Somalis should have no doubt about the infidelity of those who wrote the constitution or those who follow it. Until the government repents, every Somali Muslim will be obliged to engage in Jihad.

This document is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it clearly follows the takfiri strand in declaring opposing parties as infidels which is a very grave accusation. Secondly, because al-Shabaab apparently followed domestic political developments very closely and perceived a need to react to a direct threat from the TFG. Finally, because the Jihadis were forced into declaring themselves the true bearers of Islam. No competition would be allowed even if it meant discarding the government's attempt to implement Sharia. If al-Shabaab could not direct and control the course of Islamisation in Somalia, nobody could.

Al-Shabaab's aspiration to create an Islamic state modelled on the Taliban is certainly not in line with the wishes of the Somali population. However, as the well-informed ICG carefully notes, nobody can predict confidently what it may develop into over the next several years.²¹ Predictions aside, it remains of central concern to understand not only the ideology of al-Shabaab but also how these sentiments and perspectives are translated into actual behaviour. It is of equal importance to study and understand what they say and also what they actually do.

Social control mechanisms applied by al-Shabaab

The second trajectory concerns the crucial step from the internalisation of a radical and violent worldview to the actual implementation of this particular ideology. The transformation of ideology into practice allows for a much closer look at al-Shabaab, especially in the movement's interaction with local Somalis.

One of the first to apply the term Talibanisation was Ahmed Rashid in his remarkable book from 2000 on the Taliban.²² It has since become widespread in use in describing emerging militant Islamist groups who profess admiration for the Taliban style of governance, in particular their efforts to eliminate non-original Islamic practices. Several Jihadi groups, like Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon and al-Shabaab in Somalia, have tried to copy the forms of social control employed in Afghanistan and have made explicit reference to their source of inspiration. A thorough understanding and mapping of the aspects of Talibanisation is a key element in understanding

contemporary insurgencies, however this extensive effort is better treated in-depth elsewhere. There is a range of common features within the process of Talibanisation which could be termed trademarks of this particular social engineering.

A few examples are sufficient in this context to illustrate how Talibanisation runs parallel to an ongoing Islamist insurgency; actually one would have little meaning without the other. First of all, Talibanisation seeks to eliminate perceived unbelievers, infidels, idol worshippers, and deviant Muslims. Militant Islamists can be quite relentless and resort to desecration of places of worship, banning traditional forms of religious practice to outright murder of perceived deviants. Closely related to this phenomenon is the insistence that the population adhere to a strict dress code that also includes prescriptions on personal appearance. These are not idle threats, most often the militant Islamists will go to great lengths to root out any un-Islamic behaviour that is offensive to their own religious ideology and violent enforcement is a common feature. Talibanisation also involves a decidedly anti-cultural campaign that targets perceived vices such as dancing, drinking, socializing, listening to music, playing games or watching movies. Again, enforcement can be very harsh indeed, out of proportion to the alleged crime, yet these activities do become instrumentalised as will be exemplified later in this section. Although most if not all of these elements should be considered indispensable within Talibanisation, the degree to which each element is emphasized and implemented will vary according to context. Though it is quite a rigid formula for social control, conditions on the ground are bound to affect actual changes being implemented by the militant Islamists.

In a previous research report on Fatah al-Islam, a Jihadi group which was active in Lebanon in 2007, an anthropological approach was taken in order to highlight how a particular Jihadi ideology manifested itself among the local civilian population.²³ In the transition between theory and practice, extreme religious views and actions become the trademark of Jihadi groups, and most share quite a few commonalities with regards to their behaviour and interaction with local population. These forms of interaction are of particular interest in deepening our understanding about what actually happens when religious extremists try to exert religious, political, social but also cultural control over people in areas that have been liberated by militant Islamists. Even though in the case of al-Shabaab, the ICU before them and similar groups elsewhere have initially been greeted as liberators, the subsequent coexistence rapidly deteriorates into a climate of fear and oppression. Rather than bringing society back to stability and traditionalism, the exact opposite happens when unfamiliar Islamic concepts are forcibly imposed on a population that would seemingly have preferred to have been left alone.

The types of social and cultural control enforced by militant Islamists come in many forms and variations and it is impossible to catalogue each and every one of them in this report. Instead a few thematic issues have been highlighted to illustrate exactly how the imposition of an alien cultural construct almost inevitably results in tension or outright conflict. The al-Qaeda and Taliban inspired ideology of al-Shabaab manifests itself, for instance, in the desecration of religious symbols, the imposition of Sharia inspired forms of justice, and severe restrictions on permissible forms of entertainment and cultural traditions. Studying a militant Islamist movement like al-Shabaab cannot be restricted to strategic or tactical issues but should be complimented by a thorough understanding of the impact of an alien ideology on traditional Somali society. Although al-Shabaab insists on the originality of its ideology it is rife with inventions, most of which are considered very strange or offensive to the average Somali.

A well-known effort employed by al-Shabaab to win over the local population is called *koormeer*, or visit, where Al-Shabaab fighters pay a visit to a town or village to gain legitimacy. Clerics would address the population in public and speak about the need for changes and what al-Shabaab could do for the Somali people. Food and money is often handed out to the needy and community disputes are settled in make-shift courts to give a semblance of law and order.²⁴ The gradual takeover of territory in 2008 transformed these visits into actual occupation and rule. In August, Kismayo came under the control of al-Turki's faction and Marka was controlled by Fouad Shongole in November that same year.

An extension of the struggle for control of territory is the hard line approach taken on humanitarian workers. Dozens have been killed and several agencies have been named specifically in communiqués and told to leave Somalia. Several statements threatening both the UN and the WFP have been released, and it should be recalled that the UN office in Hargeisa was actually targeted and destroyed by a suicide bomber in 2008. Yet in reality, things are a bit more complicated as al-Shabaab will sometimes cooperate with NGOs, presumably because this is the only way of getting basic services to the local population.²⁵ Sheikh Aweys has condemned the targeting of humanitarian workers and promised to protect them to the best of his abilities.²⁶ Leaflets have been distributed in Mogadishu calling aid workers infidels and warning them that they will be hunted down. Today most agencies maintain a symbolic presence of local staff within Somalia, while most relief operations are run out of Nairobi.

Desecration of religious symbols

A common practice of al-Shabaab concerning control over religious institutions and associated religious symbols is the systematical destruction or desecration of shrines and graves. Especially Sufi shrines and graves have been the target of militants who claim that praying beside a revered Sufi scholar amount to idol worshipping which is strictly forbidden according to their religious interpretation. Al-Shabaab's ideology condemns innovation in Islam and intensely dislikes the associated rituals, and instead adheres to a much more austere and literal interpretation. Sheikh Hassan Yaquub, the al-Shabaab spokesman in Kismayo, was interviewed by the BBC in June 2009 and defended the practice of desecration,

*The destruction of graves is not something new: we target graves that are over decorated and ones used for misleading people. We are not aiming at the Sheikhs and their standing in their society, but it is forbidden to make graves into shrines.*²⁷

In another Sufi community in Brave, the graves of revered religious leaders have also been attacked and graveyard caretakers had been ordered not to tend to the cemetery. A community leader based in Manchester who followed the incident considered the desecration as actions against humanity, especially because the dead could not defend themselves. Referring to al-Shabaab militants as "these people", he stated categorically that they had nothing to teach this community about Islam. Furthermore, he stated that,

*The Islamists closed the mosques and said no-one could pray at the ones near graveyards – arguing that the prayers performed there could not be proper prayers and would amount to worshipping the graves themselves.*²⁸

Leaders from the Sufi movement Ahl al-Sunna Wal-Jama'a denounced the destruction of graves in the town of Bardhere, but the protests were countered by Sheikh Abdulqadir Yusuf Qalbi who

stated that these actions were a religious obligation, and as such, al-Shabaab had a duty to enforce this ruling. Al-Shabaab's intolerance for other religions could also be evidence by the destruction of a Christian church in Kismayo in 2008. Although the church had not been in service for decades since there is no Christian community in Kismayo, al-Shabaab insisted on this act of desecration in order to demonstrate their unwillingness to tolerate other religious communities.

The Imposition of Sharia Justice

Territory that has been taken over by al-Shabaab has witnessed peculiar forms of justice unknown to the communities that they were supposed to protect. The very public display of metering out Jihadi style justice has involved flogging, stoning, and the amputation of limbs of those found guilty. This form of social control seeks to install respect if not outright fear of the Sharia inspired justice as perceived by al-Shabaab and is yet another element in understanding the model society that al-Shabaab envisions. A few specific case stories illuminate these highly orchestrated and public events.

In Kismayo in May 2009, a young man, Mohammed Omar Ismail, had been accused and found guilty of the theft of 10 pairs of trousers, 10 shirts and a few other items, in all valued at about \$90. Though he persistently claimed his innocence he was found guilty by a Sharia court and sentenced to have his right hand amputated; the punishment for thieves according to al-Shabaab. Hundreds of curious spectators had flocked to Kismayo's park to witness the punishment. The hand was swiftly severed and shown to the crowds as a warning to deter future thieves.²⁹ In August 2009, a young boy, Mohammed Gelle Yusuf, was accused of stealing 100 US dollars and sentenced to have his right hand amputated. An al-Shabaab court in the town of Bu'ale in the Middle Juba region administered the trial, the verdict, and the execution of the sentence as well.

The fact that these cruel and unusual punishments are becoming more widespread can be seen in a case from Mogadishu in June 2009. Amputations are now also used as punishment in the Somali capital where four teenagers were sentenced to have a hand and a leg amputated each after they were found guilty of stealing.³⁰ The verdict was handed down by a judge, Sheikh Abdul Haq, from the Sharia court in the al-Shabaab controlled area of Suqa Holaha in Mogadishu.³¹ Also, in July 2009, seven people were executed by beheading in Baidoa as they were found guilty of being Christians and spies, this was what local residents were told by al-Shabaab.³²

Perhaps the best known case of the Sharia inspired punishments handed down to those found guilty in the al-Shabaab courts is the stoning of 13-year-old Asho Ibrahim Duhulow. Asho had been raised in the Dabaab refugee camp in Northern Kenya and badly wanted to see Somalia and visit relatives she had only heard stories about. Sometime in August 2008 she left Dabaab and ventured into Somalia and eventually ended up in Kismayo. Her tragic story is not much different from the innumerable other Somali women who have been raped and even killed by out of control militiamen. However, Asho decided to report her rape, identifying three men as the perpetrators. She was arrested along with the three offenders who were not tried by the court but set free; instead Asho was charged with adultery. Little reliable information has surfaced about the actual trial and how exactly she was found guilty, but the execution of her punishment made headlines worldwide. Not only was Asho sentenced to death by stoning for her crime but it was the style of her execution that attracted attention to her case.

At 4 PM on 27 October 2008, Asho was dragged screaming by armed militiamen before a large crowd in Kismayo who bound and partly buried her to prevent her escape. Onlookers tried to

intervene to save her from a horrendous death, but al-Shabaab guards opened fire and killed at least one bystander. Rocks were handed out to about 50 people who participated in the stoning that drew about 1000 spectators.³³ The stoning only stopped briefly when a nurse intervened to see if Asho still had a pulse. She did, and the stoning continued until she died from her injuries. A Sheikh from al-Shabaab commented that Asho was happy about her punishment under Islamic law and had accepted her fate, but he also regretted the killing of the innocent bystander.³⁴

Views on culture and entertainment

Not only is the permissible dress code under al-Shabaab rule very conservative, it is also enforced with a vengeance. The veiling of women who venture out from their homes has become mandatory, else the risk being punished for their inappropriate appearance. The mandatory black *abayas* have been unknown in Somalia until now and is indeed an invention imported by al-Shabaab who considers the showing of any part of the female body a grave offence to public order. Even women's underwear attracts the attention of the militant Islamists who have ruled that the use of bras is not permitted under Islamic rule. This curious interpretation is not practiced in even the most conservative Muslim states. Likewise, Somali men must grow a beard to appear as truly Islamic. These rules are rigorously enforced by al-Shabaab who fine, beat up or kill Somalis who do not abide to the rules.

In Marka in southern Somalia people were stopped on the street by members of al-Shabaab to have their gold teeth forcibly removed. Residents who had silver or gold fillings were taken to the local al-Shabaab stronghold where a hooded man, referred to as the doctor, used his hands or a pincer in case the tooth was firmly embedded in the jaw. The reasoning behind this practice, according to al-Shabaab, was that fashion and beauty are strictly prohibited in Islam and that interpretation would include gold and silver fillings.³⁵

Al-Shabaab's campaign to eliminate un-Islamic forms of culture and entertainment is virtually imported from Afghanistan both in style and content. The past two years especially have seen an increase in the prohibition of music, dancing, and movies. The ICU cracked down on cinemas as early as 2006 and closed all movie theatres within their territory. Yet, al-Shabaab has taken this prohibition on entertainment even further by completely banning the possession and showing of DVD movies. Sheikh Mowlid Ahmed, a senior al-Shabaab leader in Kismayo, stated that watching movies has been banned completely, including in private homes. Moreover, residents ran the risk of being stopped on the street to have their mobile phones checked and violators would be flogged.³⁶ In Baidoa in June 2008, a grenade was thrown at a cinema where mostly young teenagers were watching the European football quarter final match between Spain and Italy. In this attack two boys were killed and at least eight other injured.

The prohibition on live music, and especially mixed gender dancing, has been enforced since at least 2008. In a well-documented case from November of that year, 25 women and seven men were arrested after repeated warnings by al-Shabaab and subsequently flogged. This incident took place 30 kilometres north of Mogadishu in the town of Balad where local residents were participating in a traditional dance. Al-Shabaab spokesman Sheikh Abdirahim Isse Adow was unmistakably clear in his views on this incident,

*The dancing of men and women together is illegal and totally against Islam. We neither killed them nor injured them, but only whipped them according to the Islamic law. We released them after whipping them. We warned them many times, but they wouldn't listen.*³⁷

People who sell khat, the mildly narcotic plant chewed daily by most Somalis, have been instructed to move their business to the outskirts of the major cities. This is interesting in the sense that khat chewing would be high on al-Shabaab's long list of evil things, yet they have not yet dared to attempt to eliminate the practice out of fear of the repercussions from the local population.

These few examples of social control mechanisms employed by al-Shabaab are obviously no substitute for a thorough analysis of the cultural divisions between religious interpretations in contemporary Somalia. They have been included to serve as one element in the proper framing of the nature of al-Shabaab; more specifically as the visible form of Jihadism as culture in practice. While the severe restrictions placed on ordinary Somalis certainly serve to control the population it also entails an equally important dimension. By accepting this particular variant of a Jihadi ideology, individual al-Shabaab members clearly signal their adherence and devotion to their movement and its goals, and as such their behaviour serve to consolidate their Jihadi identity.

The tactical culture of al-Shabaab

The third trajectory, concerning the tactical culture of al-Shabaab may appear as an element that has relevance to military operators alone. The authors actively seek to refute this notion based on the premise that ideological orientation will be enacted and translated into specific perspectives on the use of violence. Armed action can be seen as an extension of the ideological foundation, however shallow, and provides revealing insights into the nature of al-Shabaab. It is not the fact that al-Shabaab fights which should attract our interest but how they chose to fight. Previously it has briefly been outlined why the movement has resorted to wage what is perceived as a necessary and obligatory Jihad. The study of tactical culture has the added benefit of being highly empirical and thus allows for comparative studies between different terrorist and insurgent groups. Jihadi tactical culture is highly ritualistic and involves a range of symbolic acts designed and executed to provide proof to outsiders about the sincerity of al-Shabaab. Moreover, it also serves to cement bonds between movement members as they partake in ritualistic behaviour.

The culture of martyrdom

From its formal inception in 2006 al-Shabaab trainers sought to instil the cult of martyrdom among its recruits. Yet, the sense of immortality did little to affect realities on the frontlines as can be seen in the battle of Baidoa in December 2006. ICU fighters were no match for trained and experienced Ethiopian troops and IUC leaders employed human wave attacks which devastated the Islamist force. It was Sheikh Aweys who sanctioned this collective suicide mission.³⁸ Al-Shabaab's success against Ethiopian forces should be examined at several levels. While the majority of Somalis were more than sceptical towards al-Shabaab's alien form of Islam and its austere form of Islamism, it nevertheless viewed the armed actions against Ethiopian troops as legitimate resistance against an invading army.

Suicide bombing was first conducted in Somalia by al-Shabaab and the most spectacular operation raised international attention on the movement's tactical capabilities. In October 2008 al-Shabaab executed five suicide bombings in Puntland and Somaliland. The targets were the compounds and offices of the UN, local government, and Ethiopian troops. This was a landmark event in that it proved beyond doubt that al-Shabaab had become a serious player and had the organizational capability to plan and execute five synchronized bombings far beyond their own territory. The double suicide bombing against AMISOM headquarters and the DYNCORP office in Mogadishu

on 17 September 2009 was a very professional and carefully coordinated operation. Many news sources were quick to point out that the bombings were carried out in retaliation for the assassination of Saleh Nabhan a month earlier. However, through conversations with eyewitnesses to the bombing that killed the deputy commander of AMISOM, it is quite clear that the preparation needed to pull off this operation could not have been done within a month.³⁹

An interesting development occurred on 13 November 2009 when a Somali man was detained at Mogadishu airport immediately before embarking on the Daallo Airlines flight to Hargeisa.⁴⁰ Other passengers alerted the police about their suspicions about the man whose name has not been released. When detained he tried to bribe his way out but to no avail. The contents of his bag revealed items chemicals, a syringe and an acid like substance. This incident appears remarkably similar to the attempted downing of a US airliner on Christmas day 2009.

Iraqization

In June 2008, Abu Zubeir acknowledged that al-Shabaab had changed its tactical perspective along the lines suggested in audio releases by senior al-Qaeda figures. Suggestions by Osama bin Laden, Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi and Ayman al-Zawahiri had been implemented in the movement's new strategy. He specifically stated that the fighters had resorted to guerrilla style tactics in the face of overwhelming firepower of the Ethiopians and that this had a tremendous impact on the morale of the enemy.⁴¹

There are similarities at the tactical level between the Islamist insurgents in Iraq and Somali. The early campaign in late 2007 and early 2008 to secure territory in the south involved many smaller raids on government controlled towns. Officials have been singled out for assassination, towns have been stormed where the targets were police and military, and the town would be held for a short while to clearly illustrate the impotence of the government in securing its people. Then the al-Shabaab fighters would withdraw before reinforcements could arrive to dislodge them through force.⁴²

Soon after the TFG had returned to the capital, urban terrorist attacks began to appear which were very similar in style to what had been inflicted on Iraq over the recent years. Mortar attacks, assassinations and gunfights specifically targeted TFG officials and police in a tactic which also appears to have been imported from Iraq, that of driving a wedge between the government and the population. Targeted assassinations have become a trademark of al-Shabaab and especially the Somali intelligence service, the NSA, has been hit hard with more than 30 officials having been killed between spring 2007 and 2008. This is part of a deliberate campaign to disrupt the intelligence capabilities of the NSA.⁴³ Assassination has become such an effective tool of al-Shabaab that even its former allies in the ICU complained about this practice. In April 2009, Abdirahim Isse Addow, the spokesman of the ICU, blamed al-Shabaab fighters for two recent assassinations in Mogadishu and furthermore stated that this was a part of a deliberate campaign targeting officials.⁴⁴ The recent introduction of the tactical means of suicide bombers and IEDs are indications of both an ideological change as well as external technical assistance from foreign Jihadis. Al-Shabaab has increased the use of IEDs considerably over the past year, and some of the devices are similar to those discovered in Iraq.⁴⁵

Urban warfare

At the tactical level al-Shabaab displays several trademarks some of which are identical to practices used by other Jihadi groups. AMISOM personnel described how they had often encountered groups

of armed children, some younger than ten, who had been indoctrinated by al-Shabaab. They were deliberately sent forward to engage AMISOM troops in Mogadishu because their commanders knew very well that the African peacekeepers were reluctant to fire on children. The soldiers interviewed considered this to be a most despicable and cowardly practice, and they despised al-Shabaab fighters for not having the courage to fight their own battles. Standard operating procedure dictated that warning shots would be fired to scare the children off, but sometimes it didn't work and the troops had to engage directly.⁴⁶

When al-Shabaab organizes a fight in Mogadishu words are sent to the safe house that the fighters are to convene at a certain location at a specific time. Then a car arrives with weapons for the fighters since they are most often stored elsewhere. Snipers are then deployed with the dual task of taking out enemy soldiers and to eliminate reluctant or injured al-Shabaab fighters. After the fight the guns are collected and taken to a different location. This practice is unusual in comparison to other Jihadi groups where personal weapons are kept close at hand, and this more than indicates the lack of trust between commanders and the rank and file. Foreign fighters of Pakistani or Afghan origin have been observed directing offensive operations against TFG forces in Mogadishu. These members were hooded to conceal their identity and they appeared to have had battlefield experience.⁴⁷

Civilians have been used as shields in particular when mortars had been fired at TFG or AMISOM troops. It should be noted that al-Shabaab's mortar crews appear to be particularly inept as they have often missed their targets completely and instead shelled local neighbourhoods. The inevitable civilian casualties have then conveniently been blamed on indiscriminate counter fire, and the peacekeeping role of the AU contingent is brought into question. Generally, al-Shabaab has displayed little if any restraint in minimizing civilian casualties when fighting breaks out in the capital.

Internal discipline

The president's security advisers stated that they had never seen such a cohesive, well-trained and ideologically driven militant force such as al-Shabaab.⁴⁸ The enforcement of discipline within the ranks of al-Shabaab is harsh and there is a low threshold for dissenting views. Yet, defectors are a real problem and al-Shabaab has devised several procedures to counter this. Any member who is taken prisoner is automatically considered a traitor and is assumed to be a spy working for the TFG for which the punishment is execution. Confirmed reports describe how injured fighters have been doused with petrol and set a fire to prevent them being taken prisoner; the rationale being that the fighter is guaranteed martyrdom.⁴⁹ Al-Shabaab fighters are kept in safe houses throughout Mogadishu where they live together under supervision. Unlike in the rural areas, they mostly dress in civilian clothing, instead of the standard green fatigues, however, the red and white chequered head scarf has become a trademark of the insurgents.

Low ranking gunmen in Mogadishu receive very little tactical training except on the ubiquitous AK-47. They are considered expendable and not particularly trustworthy anyway. This very rudimentary training is also reflected in the lack of a serious indoctrination programme. Several informants in Mogadishu were asked about the ideological and religious training provided by al-Shabaab to its members; however, the various responses indicated that this did not seem a priority. An interesting perspective on the relationship between the rank and file of local al-Shabaab youth and the foreign fighters was revealed in an interview in Mogadishu with a former al-Shabaab fighter. This young Somali had seen Afghans and Pakistanis in Mogadishu who were clearly

recognizable by their appearance and long beards. He had also seen Americans, a term used categorically to describe any white foreigner. Yet, he had never interacted with any of them since he was just a lowly fighter.⁵⁰

The al-Qaeda affiliation

The three trajectories described indicate a gradual move among Somali Jihadis towards a much more hardline ideological foundation based on the Salafi-Jihadi tradition. Al-Shabaab has specifically been inspired by al-Qaeda, the Taliban and the Iraqi insurgents affiliated with al-Qaeda core. That these sentiments should be taken seriously can be evidenced in their chosen style of interaction with the civilian population and in the way they conduct their insurgency. It is precisely these gradual changes that have led observers and analysts to question whether or not al-Shabaab is linked to al-Qaeda. To paraphrase Somalia expert Ken Menckhaus, *that Shabaab has links to al-Qaeda is not in question. What is more difficult to assess is the extent and significance of those links.*⁵¹

To what extent should al-Shabaab be characterized as a local Somali insurgent phenomenon or as part of al-Qaeda and the global Jihad? This debate has been ongoing for the past few years and has intensified recently as new information has become available. The answer is no trivial matter because it will to a significant extent determine the future of al-Shabaab. However, first it is necessary to have an understanding of what a possible affiliation, whatever its nature, with al-Qaeda actually means. An ideological affinity with al-Qaeda clearly indicates a hardline approach to the internal conflict in Somalia and is likely to result in a situation where negotiations with government officials are avoided based on fundamental Jihadi principles which cannot be abrogated. At another level, the alleged association with al-Qaeda would enable al-Shabaab to access resources and skilled operators and to link up with likeminded Jihadis in other countries. The exchange would go both ways as al-Qaeda would certainly welcome the establishment of an Islamic emirate in the Horn of Africa which could also serve as an operational platform with ideal proximity to East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Such a base of operation was clearly desirable to al-Qaeda as far back as the early 1990s. However, a publicised affiliation with al-Qaeda would unquestioningly bring unwanted attention and direct support to its mortal enemies within Somalia and the extensive East African network would be scrutinized by regional law enforcement agencies.

In order to answer this relevant and timely question, a set of parameters can be identified which allow the observer to make a more precise analysis of al-Shabaab and its relationship with al-Qaeda. Among these parameters three will be outlined here;

- Historical relations between Somali Jihadis and al-Qaeda
- The self-perception of al-Shabaab as an integral part in the global Jihad
- The views of Jihadi groups on al-Shabaab's ideology and stated mission

Al-Qaeda's interest in Somalia dates back to the early 1990s. Reportedly, a meeting took place in Khartoum in 1992 between leaders from al-Ittihad and bin Laden where they consolidated their common goals.⁵² When al-Qaeda was based in Khartoum it developed an East African network of affiliated movements and also established its own cells. This endeavour was initiated by al-Qaeda's second in command at the time, Abu Ubaidah al-Banshiri. Kenya was the most significant hub of this network and from here al-Ittihad was supported extensively in the early days. The period 1992-94 has been extensively documented through captured al-Qaeda internal correspondence clearly

outlining operational activities during this stage⁵³. Advisory teams were dispatched from Afghanistan and Pakistan with a mission to establish a foothold in the Horn of Africa and to coordinate closely with the Somalia al-Ittihad group; the historical predecessor to al-Shabaab.

Sheikh Aweys was a senior figure in the military wing of al-Ittihad and established a relationship with al-Qaeda's Abu Hafis al-Masri in 1993. The dispatched al-Qaeda operatives instructed the Somali Jihadis in guerrilla tactics and also participated in the fighting against U.S. troops.⁵⁴ Al-Masri would later return to Sudan and boast out the actions of al-Qaeda although in truth the participation of the global Jihadis was probably minor. As Evan Kohlmann has pointed out in his detailed report on al-Shabaab, the battle of Mogadishu became one of the founding myths of al-Qaeda and was presented as a seminal event.⁵⁵ This relation was not easy and the al-Qaeda operatives dispatched to Somalia became quite frustrated with their inability to ignite a holy war, and some of these events will be described in part two of this report. Most of them had left around 1996 when al-Qaeda relocated to Afghanistan, yet some remained behind and formed the small but capable nucleus of al-Qaeda in East Africa (AQEA), which was most active from 1992 to 1998. AQEA's activities culminated in the coordinated embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998.

These East African operatives were certainly connected to al-Qaeda core and would continue to coordinate with Somalia Jihadis although to a lesser extent. Mogadishu would remain an important hub in the AQEA scheme but the center of gravity had shifted to Nairobi. The adaptability of the Jihadis meant that around 2000, Somalia was once again attractive as a hideout and a forward planning area. Prominent individual Somali Jihadis have also travelled to Afghanistan, some as far back as the 1980s to fight the Soviet occupants and later to train at the infamous camps, particularly Khalden.

The historical relationship between Somali Jihadis and al-Qaeda can most aptly be described as fluctuating. In the early 1990's al-Qaeda clearly saw the Hon of Africa as a place for setting up training camps, to attract new recruits, to set up a base of operations and as a sanctuary. These aspirations were never rewarded to the extent al-Qaeda wanted, yet connections were maintained and Somalia would continue to play a significant role as a rear area to plan future operations, including the attacks in Mombasa in 2002.⁵⁶

ICU was accused by the U.S. State Department of harbouring known terrorist. Four individuals were named in 2007; Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, Tariq Abdullah, and Issa Osman Issa.⁵⁷ In August 2008, Nabhan stated that Abu Talha as-Sudani was killed while he was leading one of the brigades of the Mujahedin.⁵⁸ The same Nabhan was killed himself in September 2009. The actual links between al-Shabaab, al-Qaeda core and AQEA are primarily founded on a small group of individuals, such as Nabhan and Abu Talha, and even the UN has established a direct link between Sheikh Robow and AQEA, which was primarily through Nabhan.⁵⁹

Leading members of al-Shabaab have explicitly stated in interviews and various communiqués that the movement should be considered an integral part of the global Jihad. A video titled *At your service Osama* was released in October 2009 and any doubt about al-Shabaab's intentions should have evaporated by then. The video was distributed in several Mogadishu neighbourhoods and there was also a public screening shortly after the release. What is perhaps more interesting in this respect, is the rumoured disagreement within the leadership circle of al-Shabaab concerning the desire to actually link up with al-Qaeda. According to well-informed sources, that crucial decision

has not been made yet, but there is clearly a hardline element present within al-Shabaab that desperately wishes to become an integral part of al-Qaeda. This struggle which is currently taking place within al-Shabaab also involves some of the foreign fighters who predominantly side with the hardliners, yet others are of the opinion that full al-Qaeda membership would take al-Shabaab beyond the point of no return.⁶⁰ The ideological move towards al-Qaeda has been reciprocated in the sense that the premier al-Qaeda propaganda outlet, GIMF, has delivered crucial technical expertise in disseminating al-Shabaab statements and combat footage now widely available on the internet. This process has been completed in less than 2½ years, a clear indication of the al-Qaeda/GIMF support to Somali insurgents.

One of the most unequivocal statements on al-Shabaab's self-perception was the movement's reaction to being listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. in March 2008. The reply to this listing was defiant, if not proud, and said,

*As we are part of the Salafi-Jihadi Islamic trend which opposes the dominance of the crusaders and the aggression led by America, we do not find it unlikely that America would add us to the names of these other honourable men, for whom we are honoured to join, at the bottom of their list.*⁶¹

In July 2006, Osama bin Laden specifically mentioned Somalia in an audio release which was distributed through al-Qaeda's media wing, the As-Sahab Media Foundation. Again the theme of Western interference was mentioned and that any crusader soldier on Somali soil would be fought. Moreover, bin Laden urged Muslims to assist the needs of the Mujahedin in several theatres, including Somalia, and the people of Somalia were told to reject the TFG and instead give support the Islamists fully. The perception in Jihadi circles of this message was that that al-Qaeda had endorsed travelling to Somalia to link up with fellow Jihadis. Fighting the crusaders alongside the armed wing of the ICU was now considered a legitimate Jihad, although the ICU was divided on the question on foreign fighters. The pace gradually picked up from 2006 and onwards. Later that year, al-Qaeda in Iraq also endorsed the Somali Jihad and they hoped for an Islamic state in Somalia. These encouragements and the Jihad in Somalia were eagerly discussed on radical forums on the internet. When a defeat at the experienced hands of the Ethiopians seemed imminent, Ayman al-Zawahiri issued a statement in January 2007 titled *Help your Brothers in Somalia*. The message called on all Muslims everywhere to answer the call to Jihad in Somalia and instructed the Jihadis to use martyrdom operations, ambushes, and similar Jihadi tactics.

The Islamist struggle in Somalia has been mentioned by senior al-Qaeda figures over the past two years, who has called for support from the global Jihadi community for several reasons. Somalia is viewed as one of the theatres where the Islamist militants stand a good chance of taking power, partly because the international community has been very reluctant to get involved on the ground. This has certainly raised awareness about the Somali cause and is probably a major reason for the continued migration of Jihadi fighters to Somalia. A video issued by senior al-Qaeda leader Abu Yahia al-Libi in April 2007 carried a specific message to the Mujahedin in Somalia. Al-Libi claimed that the insurgents in Somalia had to choose the right path of Jihad to secure victory and specifically encouraged the use of suicide bombings.⁶² The support from al-Qaeda continued and in February 2009 al-Zawahiri released an audio message titled *From Kabul to Mogadishu*. Here he insisted that the Mujahedin in Somalia had the right to repel all foreign forces; this is a duty of all Muslims. Moreover, all Somalis should reject the constitution because it is not Sharia based.⁶³

Osama bin Laden made another appearance in March 2009 and this time the message clearly outlined the significance of the Horn of Africa in the global Jihad. According to bin Laden, the war in Somalia is a war between Islam and the international crusade. President Sharif must be dethroned and fought for siding with the infidels. Speaking directly of al-Shabaab he stated; *for you are one of the important armies of the Mujahid Islamic battalion, and are the first line of defence for the Islamic world in its south western part.* Again, he appealed to the Ummah to support its brothers in Somalia with money because the victory of Mujahedin in Somalia is a matter of extreme importance.⁶⁴

Of equal interest to the al-Qaeda relationship is the support extended to al-Shabaab from the Jihadis in Yemen, AQAP, which became a proper al-Qaeda branch in January 2009. In March 2009, the emir of AQAP, Abu Baseer al-Wahayshi expressed his full support to al-Shabaab in the AQAP online magazine *Echo of the epics*. Wahayshi emphasizes the proximity between the battlefield in Yemen and Somalia and urges Muslims to support al-Shabaab with money or to join them in the fight.

Assessing al-Shabaab's relationship with al-Qaeda is contingent on the questions asked. If the expectation is to verify a distinct and specific organizational structure in which the Somali Jihadis have merged with al-Qaeda core and have become an integral partner in the global struggle, then this decision has not been made yet. Clearly, both Jihadi movements have in the past expressed support to each other and continue to do so, however, al-Shabaab has not yet become a fully fledged al-Qaeda branch although it is certainly moving in that direction.

Foreign Fighters in Somalia

Foreign fighters 1992-2006

The recent interest in the internationalization of Jihadism in Somalia is quite curious in the sense that this is certainly not a new phenomenon. International Jihadists have gravitated to the Horn of Africa since the early 1990s; if not before. The literature available on the presence of foreign fighters in Somalia is quite compartmentalized in the sense that most authors have specialized in a single narrow topic. The very frequent publications, especially concerning the alleged role of al-Qaeda operatives, have occurred as a steady stream since 2008. The vast majority of this material conveniently ignores a relationship between Somali Jihadis and other Salafi Jihadi groups and there has been no dedicated effort to portray and analyze the foreign component in a temporal perspective. Going back 20 years in order to highlight the first serious presence of foreign fighters will actually strengthen the conclusions of this report considerably and several revealing issues on the relations between local and foreign fighters can be identified.

Al-Ittihad and al-Qaeda

The best documented episode of foreign fighter's involvement comes from al-Qaeda itself. Captured documents detailing correspondence between Somalia and the senior al-Qaeda leadership describe in great detail how a group of Jihadi trainers went about their mission, and just as interesting – how they failed. This documentation is widely available due to the serious effort to collect and analyze original documentation by the Combating Terrorism Center (CTC) at West Point Military Academy. The following overview is based on internal al-Qaeda documents from 1992-94.⁶⁵

The al-Qaeda team dispatched from Pakistan to Somalia entered the country in February 1993 and was instructed by veteran operative, Mohammed Atef. The venture was dubbed operation *MSK*; Arabic for holding or seizing and was intended to establish a base in Somalia from where the Americans could be driven from the region. The first group of operatives was composed of a twelve-man team who was tasked with setting up a base and to support local Islamist insurgents in Somalia and in the Ogaden. On arrival, three training camps were established in close collaboration with al-Ittihad located in Lu'uq, Bossaso, and in the Ogaden. Communications were maintained with Khartoum from where they received instructions but also with al-Qaeda members resident in Afghan camps. The skilled logistics people of the team arranged for air transport through Nairobi's Wilson Airport, maritime transport via Lamu in Kenya, and also an overland infiltration route from Djibouti via the Ogaden.

Among those dispatched to Somalia were Mohammed Saddiqi Odeh and Khalfan Khamis Mohamed who would later be instrumental in the 1998 bombing of the US embassy in Dar Es Salaam. The latter infiltrated Somalia by fishing boat from Kenya by using an infiltration route that is still in use today. Abu Talha al-Sudani also moved to Somalia in 1993 where he married a Somali woman. He was the chief financial officer for al-Qaeda operations in East Africa. His importance became clear when Saleh al-Nabhan released a 24-minute audio statement confirming al-Sudani's martyrdom in early 2007. Sudani was killed in an air strike in the immediate aftermath of the battle of Ras Komboni. Al-Shabaab capitalized on his death later on and encouraged young men from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, and Chad to join their brothers in the training camps.⁶⁶

Simultaneously, Maulana Masood Azhar, the leader of the Pakistani Jaish-e-Mohammed, travelled to Nairobi in 1993 to meet with leaders of al-Ittihad. Azhar responded to al-Ittihad's request for fighters and financial assistance and facilitated this movement, and he may also have played a much more active role in operations within Mogadishu.⁶⁷ When Pakistan came under pressure, primarily from Egypt in 1993, to expel the numerous Jihadis who had settled in Pakistan after the Afghanistan war, many of those relocated to Sudan where al-Qaeda was based. Azhar was instrumental in re-directing these fighters from Sudan into Somalia.

The CTC report on al-Qaeda's misadventures in the Horn of Africa concludes that it was largely a failure. The issues which prevented al-Qaeda from gaining a foothold in this region have been ascribed to a lack of appreciation of clan allegiances and policies, suspicion from local Somalis, and logistical difficulties.⁶⁸ Operating in a region plagued with anarchy was not easy and Kenya actually turned out to be the better option. The benefits of joining a radical Salafi Jihadi group were minimal, if not outright counterproductive, to local Somalis and new recruits were to some extent considered unreliable. Joining al-Qaeda meant leaving one's clan and this option came with very high personal costs and risks associated. Only the young were attracted to this new movement with its foreign ideology, particularly in Ras Komboni, as the costs of leaving the clan were less than for the older generation. Perhaps this explains why al-Shabaab now recruits children in their early teens and sometimes even from the orphanages.

The Africa Corps, as the team was dubbed, ultimately failed and was largely out of Somalia by 1996 when al-Qaeda had relocated to Afghanistan. In all, none of its objectives were achieved during its intense two-year stay covered by the retrieved documents. The military training was certainly appreciated by al-Ittihad but not its ideological content. At one point al-Qaeda members even discussed the possibility of assassinating clan leaders to eliminate the most quarrelsome allies. The Somalis were despised by the al-Qaeda team who considered them as greedy, corrupt, unreliable, and prone to outright banditry. Where they did find success was in providing security to local communities exasperated by a perpetual state of anarchy – this pattern has been repeated and the lessons learned.

Mohammed Atef also went to Somalia in 1992 and 1993 to encourage local militias to take action against American and UN forces stationed in Mogadishu. It was Atef who trained the Somalis when heavy fighting broke out in Mogadishu in 1993. Osama bin Laden was notably proud of the fact that al-Qaeda operatives participated in the vicious street battles in the capital, and this information would be revealed to a CNN correspondent in 1997, although the actual involvement of al-Qaeda is still disputed. Whatever their real or imagined achievements; al-Qaeda was certainly on the ground in Mogadishu when it happened. The departure of the US military from Somalia in 1994 was perceived by al-Ittihad as a victory, but certainly also as a tremendous success by al-Qaeda. Having fought the Soviet army for a decade and having learned its lessons the hard way, al-Qaeda was surprised how little it took to demoralize and defeat the US in Somalia. This lesson has not been forgotten.

Al-Ittihad emerged victorious after the engagement with the US and UN forces and then turned its attention to regional issues. Relations with Sudan and al-Qaeda were maintained, and, equally important, with Ethiopian insurgents and Eritrea. At this stage around the mid-1990s, al-Ittihad had emerged not as a global player but certainly as a regional one.

Kenya's North Eastern province saw heavy activity from both al-Qaeda and al-Ittihad as they sought to expand areas under their influence and to attract new recruits. This province is largely inhabited by ethnic Somalis, and local resentment towards Kenya dates back to independence in 1963. Discontent served as fertile recruiting grounds often organized clandestinely through a string of charitable organizations. In line with al-Ittihad's vision of a greater Somalia, recruiters would be dispatched into northern Kenya to explain their goal of one nation for all Somalis and also to attract young fighters. Having established a presence in Gedo as early as 1992, al-Ittihad had already begun implementing its version of Sharia. While the local population appreciated the material assistance provided, they loathed being told how to be good Muslims. In Gedo region two more camps were established without interference from the government and new fighters from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Eritrea received training on guerrilla warfare and terrorist operations.⁶⁹ About a dozen Arabs were reported to have trained at the camps and participated in the incursion into Ethiopia in 1995. One of al-Ittihad's most competent commanders, Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki, relocated to Ras Komboni where a training camp was established that was jointly operated between al-Ittihad and al-Qaeda. Ras Komboni would become significant in years to come as a training facility, transit hub, and planning center for future terrorist operations.

However, the Somali Jihadis miscalculated as their Ethiopian adventure in 1996 backfired. Among those Jihadis killed on the battlefield were fighters from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Algeria and from other African countries.⁷⁰ Some were taken prisoner by the Ethiopians, among them a Saudi, Abdelaziz al-Muqrin who had previously fought in Algeria and Bosnia. They proved to be no match for the Ethiopian troops; al-Ittihad was forced into rethinking its strategy. One of the first to sense that times were changing was the ever opportunistic Sheikh Aweys who stated in 1997 that he would abandon the militant path and that his group would enter the political process. Not only had al-Ittihad suffered losses to the Ethiopians, but it had also lost the crucial support of Sudan, and al-Qaeda had grown weary on their unruly fellow Jihadis but would retain a low-key presence in Mogadishu.⁷¹

It can be argued that al-Ittihad would eventually whither away to become obsolete, however, this observation requires some modification. While al-Ittihad as an organization would experience its demise, its leaders and fighters would remain and become significant players in the ICU. None other than Sheikh Aweys enlisted his former al-Ittihad militiamen to provide the core of his latest adventure.

Mukhtar Ali Robow, a.k.a. Abu Mansour, relocated to Afghanistan between 2001-03 in the fight against the Americans and later returned to the post of deputy minister of defence in the ICU. Abu Mansour gave a lengthy interview to online Jihadi magazine Sawt-al-Jihad in May 2008 upon taking over as commander after Ayro's death. This interview was significant because Abu Mansour was very explicit in his views when he claimed that al-Shabaab fighters were part of the Salafi-Jihadi branch. He specifically stated that the Jihad in Somalia was part of the global Jihadi movement and recognized that this movement was led by al-Qaeda. Finally, he complained in the interview that too few foreign fighters have joined their brothers in Somali.⁷² However, this complaint was lodged against an Ummah which had proved reluctant to fight in as much as it was directed at former allies in the ICU. As the next section illustrates there was serious disagreements between the two movements on the need and role of foreign fighters.

The Islamic Courts Union

Al-Qaeda maintained a presence in Mogadishu which was well-known in Somali security circles. Gradually, the strategic center had shifted from Kenya to Somalia and the defining moment was perhaps the Mombasa operation in 2002. The operatives escaped from Lamu on the Kenyan coast in fishing boats back to Somalia after the operation where they kept a low profile in their compound. While al-Qaeda certainly was present and active in Mogadishu, the actual number of operatives in Somalia was likely very small, too small to have an impact on the battlefield. It seems more likely that they provided much needed services in the form of training, liaison and planning. Some Somali fighters affiliated with al-Ittihad were recruited by al-Qaeda in Mogadishu to fight U.S. troops in Afghanistan but the real number remains unknown. Some have claimed that Sheikh Aweys personally dispatched more than 300 fighters to Afghanistan; however, this figure seems wildly exaggerated.⁷³

While the first Islamic court was actually established as early as 1993, this section is mostly concerned with the period 2005-07. The ICU was established in response to a situation characterized by a non-existent government and actually provided the only real alternative to complete lawlessness in Somali. The population initially supported the ICU because the courts promised stability and also delivered on its promises. However, a range of prominent individuals from al-Ittihad also became leading figures in the ICU and while their main focus was on restoring order to Somalia, the international agenda and contacts were not forgotten. Each court typically maintained a militia as there was no police or military presence.

Ayro was trained in Sheikh Awey's Ifka Halane Islamic court and then transferred to Mogadishu to assist in guarding al-Qaeda operatives. Reportedly, Ayro was inspired by this company and opted to go for training in Afghanistan in the 1990s. It is possible that Sheikh Aweys himself also travelled to Afghanistan and stayed there for several months in the immediate aftermath of 11. September.⁷⁴ In early 2005, Ayro and his militia took over a compound in Mogadishu and this was where he hosted operatives from Yemen, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia who were primarily involved in the training of young Somalis.

The summer of 2006 would prove to be significant in several respects. Ethiopian troops arrived in Somalia which should have come as no surprise since especially Sheikh Awey's al-Ittihad faction had persistently assisted the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). Al-Ittihad remnants, the ICU, ONLF, and the OLF were united in their struggle against Ethiopia and sought to liberate what they perceived to be traditional Somali land which is now part of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian invasion brought fighters from both the ONLF and the OLF to help in the fighting but no information on identities or actual numbers have been offered as this is indeed a forgotten war. As the ICU gradually expanded its control over southern and central Somalia in 2006, including strategic points in Mogadishu as well as the ports of Marka and Kismayo, foreign Jihadis began to flow into the country in larger numbers. Former Prime Minister, Ali Muhammed Gedi, stated in 2006 that there were about 3000 foreign fighters aligned with various Islamist groupings, including the ICU.⁷⁵ However, no evidence was presented to verify this claim.

Abu Mansour al-Amriki, the American Jihadi fighting with al-Shabaab, made abundantly clear what exactly happened when the foreigners arrived in Somali. The following excerpt is from a communiqué by al-Amriki which was released in January 2008 where he listed a number of grievances with the ICU,

Similar to them were the Muhajireen who were welcomed at the airport by the Islamic Courts with terrible statements like: “We don’t need the Muhajireen” and they tried to send them back; if it were not for a few of the Shabaab (like Shaykh Fu’aad and Abu Talhah as-Sudani) who saved many of these Muhajireen at the airport and tended to their affairs.⁷⁶

The mentioning of Shaykh Fu’aad, also known as Fouad Shongole, is particular interesting and his activities will be dealt with later in more detail.

Clearly, something had changed in the global Jihadi community regarding the perception of the struggle in Somalia. What until then had been perceived as a relative backwater in a global struggle and vastly overshadowed by events in Afghanistan and Iraq had gradually emerged as a new and legitimate arena of Jihad. The opportunity to fight Christian Ethiopian troops, a useless government and to deny the U.S. a foothold in the Horn of Africa converged as radicalizing elements. The attention from Osama bin Laden was also significant in raising awareness. Somalia appeared as the third most important front and promised a swifter victory than both Afghanistan and Iraq since the only real opposition at the time was Ethiopia.

Camps were set up where foreigners trained side by side with young Somalis and the most promising recruits went on to demolition training. It was also at this stage that the cult of martyrdom was introduced to Somali Jihadis. In August 2006, Sheikh Aweys formally declared that Ayro’s militia had become the Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahedin, the Mujahedin Youth Movement. Ayro, together with Hassan al-Turki, the former al-Ittihad commander with a strong al-Qaeda affiliation, emerged as the top figures in al-Shabaab, and six training camps in and around Mogadishu were under their control. Somali youth were greatly attracted to this new movement which gave them the opportunity and means to fight back at the widely disliked Ethiopians.

Ayro was perceived as a star, especially within his own sub-clan the Air, but also managed to recruit more widely. He can be said to embody the transition from the first generation of Somali Jihadis to the second which was much younger. Estimates of new al-Shabaab recruits range between 3,000 and 7,000 and would provide the new force with the manpower needed to go on the offensive.⁷⁷ More volunteers than ever arrived from the Somali diaspora and their reception was secured when Ayro took control over the airport in Mogadishu after a fall-out between the ICU and al-Shabaab over the issue of foreign fighters in Somalia. During this period, both Sheikh Robow and al-Turki spoke openly about their support of foreign fighters migrating to Somalia and a split was clearly on the horizon.

Foreign fighters arrived from Egypt, Ethiopia, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, UAE, Kenya, Tanzania, UK, US, Sweden, France and Demark.⁷⁸ A large contingent was stationed in Baidoa where Arab fighters worked side by side with their Somali counterparts from al-Shabaab. This was possible because they spoke Somali reasonably well which indicated that they had been in the country for a while. The Baidoa force was presumably led by a senior al-Qaeda operative, Abu Talha al-Sudani.

However, the battle of Baidoa resulted in a devastating defeat of the ICU, and even Mogadishu was abandoned. The remaining ICU leadership fled south to al-Turki’s stronghold at Ras Komboni which was to witness the last stand of the militant Islamists. A number of foreign fighters were killed in poorly planned operations against the Ethiopians and also by air strikes from U.S. planes, especially in the battle of Ras Komboni. Some foreign fighters remained in Somalia, yet others

slowly trickled out of the country in early 2007 where they were apprehended by Kenyan authorities.

Menckhaus has pointed out some of the drawbacks of introducing foreign fighters into the Somali conflict during the height of the ICU. First of all, the last thing Somalia needed was more teenage gunmen. Moreover many foreigners were unaccustomed to the hardships of living in the bush and were quite often a liability and many spoke the Somali language poorly.

However, some of them joined with language skills which in part explain why al-Shabaab's propaganda effort today is of a very high quality. Moreover, foreign fighters are of value to the militants in the sense that they are cut off from their families and communities and as such are much easier to intimidate and indoctrinate as their survival depends entirely on al-Shabaab.⁷⁹

Non-European foreign fighters in Al-Shabaab

When al-Shabaab emerged as a distinct movement distancing itself from the ICU it split into two, a militia called the *al-Asra Army* which is responsible for combat operations, and a security unit called the *al-Hesbah Army* which is in charge of establishing security and law and order in al-Shabaab controlled areas.⁸⁰ Some of the foreign fighters who had journeyed to Somalia stayed on and became fully aligned with al-Shabaab. The distinction between those foreign fighters who arrived prior to the fall of the ICU and those who arrived in 2007 or later is highly significant. When dealing with foreign fighters, one of the main issues is to understand why they decided to join this particular militant movement in the first place. There can be many different types of motivation for joining and they will be dealt with separately in the last section on radicalisation and recruitment. However, in this context it is important to distinguish between those who arrived to fight against the Ethiopians and those who arrived after the Ethiopian withdrawal. Currently, there are different types of foreign fighters in the ranks of al-Shabaab, like those who stayed on after the 2007 defeat, members of the Somali diaspora, Western converts, and veteran Jihadis already aligned with a militant Islamist group.

Quantity and origin of foreign fighters

The previous sections have established beyond doubt that foreign fighters have journeyed to Somalia since the early 1990s and that they continue to arrive in order to train or fight with al-Shabaab. In the spring of 2009 the influx of foreign fighters had even begun to worry the UN Security Council. A Somalia report from April noted that the increased traffic of foreign fighters linking up with radical groups was of serious concern, and that recent attacks had become more sophisticated, coordinated and lethal. The AMISOM force commander was quoted in the report, and he spoke of a *deceptive calm in Mogadishu*. He anticipated this would be the calm preceding the storm.⁸¹ It is, however, exceedingly difficult to arrive at any exact number of foreign fighters. To quote both ends of the extremes; then there are "almost none to about 6,000 foreigners" which is not exactly helpful in gaining an overview. Moreover, the numbers available through open source material differ substantially and are more often than not left unchallenged. A few examples will illustrate the diversity of these estimates and why they differ so much.

TFG officials are notorious for given highly inflated figures in order to attract foreign military assistance, like for instance the figure of 6,000 mentioned above.⁸² Somali military and police officials have on several occasions offered various estimates ranging into several thousands, yet with no evidence to support these remarkable claims. At the other end of the scale are the

statements from al-Shabaab members. Sheikh Robow admitted in the summer of 2008 that foreign fighters were present in Somalia and active in the field.⁸³ This should not come as a surprise but until then he had practically denied the presence of foreigners. A most interesting estimate occurred in September 2009 by Sheikh Yusuf Mohamed Siad who had recently defected from Hizbul-Islam to join the TFG. According to Siad, there were thousands of foreigners and many were veterans from Sudan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.⁸⁴ Being a former ally of al-Shabaab, Siad would seem to have been well-placed to present a more realistic picture of the situation. An interview with a TFG colonel on 27 October 2009 revealed that there were about 250 foreign fighters active in the Mogadishu area, according to his intelligence sources. He had first hand experience with these fighters after three years of service in the capital. In addition, he had collected detailed information on 18 Americans who had fought in Somalia, some of whom had been killed in action, while others had been injured but were still active insurgents. There were European fighters in Mogadishu and in Kismayo as well, according to the Colonel, and they were both of Somali and European origin. Asians and fighters from the Middle East seemed to be predominant and this group comprised of Pakistanis, Afghans, Indonesians, Iranians, Iraqis, and Yemenis.⁸⁵

However, there must be a distinction between quality and quantity. An important observation on the current capabilities of al-Shabaab was raised by AMISOM force commander, Major General Mugisha, who stated that the insurgents had trained extensively and were now a much more capable force.⁸⁶ Most foreigners were not actually fighting on the frontlines themselves but were involved in other tasks such as logistics, communications, and the training of suicide bombers. The TFG colonel remarked wryly that they did not seem too interested in dying themselves, instead they would prefer to train others for martyrdom. The foreigners were liked by the locals simply because they brought money, yet their austere form of Islam did not win them any sympathy. Beheadings were singled out as particularly repulsive to the population of Mogadishu. In a more bizarre twist, the Colonel described a recent incident of a foreign fighter of Chinese origin, presumably from the Uighur minority, who had set up shop in a central location, locally known as KM7, in Mogadishu. He was a perfume maker who had arrived from Kismayo recently and the sale of perfumes generated income to support al-Shabaab. This story seems so incredible that it just might be true, as anything seems possible in Mogadishu.⁸⁷

Veteran Jihadis

General Ward of the U.S. AFRICOM said in an interview with Associated Press in April 2009 that a few dozen foreign fighters had relocated from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region to Somalia. Ward considered this level of activity as disturbing and troubling. Another U.S. military official ventured, that al-Qaeda in East Africa today may be no more than two dozen individuals who are constantly on the move.⁸⁸ These figures are obviously derived from intelligence sources and cannot be verified independently. However, based on U.S. military observations and changes on the ground in Somalia it seems very likely that a number of veteran Jihadis have relocated to the Horn of Africa. While the actual numbers may appear insignificant in a larger recruitment perspective, these figures should be compared to the al-Qaeda team that was dispatched in 1992, as mentioned previously, because this transfer may signal a growing commitment on behalf of al-Qaeda core. Captured al-Shabaab fighters have spoken about the presence of al-Qaeda operatives and trainers based in safe houses in Mogadishu, but the only confirmed case would be that of Saleh Nabhan. In spite of the historical difficulties between Somali Jihadis and al-Qaeda operatives it should be recalled that there has been a continuous relationship, primarily through al-Qaeda in East Africa. Saleh Nabhan, Fazul Mohammed and Abu Talha al-Sudani are believed to have had considerable

influence over parts of the ICU leadership and were influential in military matter, although with a lower profile.⁸⁹

Since this report set out to examine the global nature of al-Shabaab recruitment, the following sections are divided into geographical entities. The purpose of this division is to present a general outline of foreign fighters in a manageable way. Needless to say, the available material differs tremendously in terms of the reliability and detail on the available information. There is much more detailed information on recruitment practices in the U.S. than in Kenya, even though the latter has presumably seen considerable larger numbers of recruitment. Moreover, it must be emphasized that these regional overviews focus on trends at the expense of individual profiles. While some background information on certain al-Shabaab foreign fighters will be mentioned here, it is the global trend of radicalisation and recruitment which is of interest. As such, the geographical overview provides the empirical evidence to assert that extensive recruitment has indeed taken place and this pattern will be discussed in the final section.

Africa

The presence of individuals from Sudan, Kenya, the Comoros, and Zanzibar has been confirmed, yet the exact scale of African recruitment remains unknown. Al-Shabaab considers African Muslims as a considerable recruitment potential and an audio message from 2008 was specifically directed at Muslims in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Chad, and Nigeria.⁹⁰ However, the vast majority of African foreign fighters originated from Kenya which also serves as the primary hub for al-Shabaab's activities abroad. The African Union special representative to Somalia stated in December 2009 that there was an estimated 1,200 foreign fighters in Somalia at the time, of which half originated from Kenya.⁹¹

Both al-Ittihad, and later the ICU, have recruited successfully in the northern Kenya region including from the large Dabaab refugee camp which holds more than 200,000 displaced Somalis. At least 14 foreigners of Iraqi and Syrian origin were arrested in 2002 by Kenyan police in Dabaab. The suspects were allegedly dispatched on a terrorist operation and were subsequently deported. In the border area recruitment is still taking place where economical hardship and drought has made life very hard. The lure of money has tempted some Kenyans into al-Shabaab but not always with success. The story of a young taxi driver in Mandera is worth mentioning as it illustrates the financial importance over ideological commitment. The young man was approached in 2007 by a recruiter who gave him \$650 and then introduced him to an elder who gravely stated that the young man was obliged to go and fight in Somalia. This recruitment scheme did not work out as the young man related; *I gave the elder half the money, threw away my phone, enjoyed myself, chewed khat and paid fees for driving school.*⁹² Part of the lure until recently for Kenyans was the fact that one of the senior commanders was actually a Kenyan, Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan who led a group of almost 200 foreign fighters known as the al-Muhajiroun. Another Kenyan, known only as Qaqa the Kenyan, was mentioned for his bravery in action by Abu Mansour while fighting with his group. He was killed in the spring of 2009 in the battle of Bardale.

What appears to be a typical recruitment pattern of Kenyans into al-Shabaab is evidenced by the case of 17-year-old Aliow Ali Hassan who disappeared without a trace. He left his young wife and three children and the only sign of life came after three months of silence when he called his brother to let him know that he was now in Somalia. Hassan stated that he had joined al-Shabaab to fight the Jihad and that he would not be coming back, so it was better if his family forgot about him. According to his brother, Hassan had been radicalized over a period of months in mosques in

Nairobi and felt strongly against the Ethiopian occupation when it began. Hassan grew up in Eastleigh, the Somali district of Nairobi, which is home to more than 200,000 Somalis; also known as “Little Mogadishu”.⁹³ In August 2009, ten young Kenyans were arrested in Eastleigh. They had been recruited through charitable organizations which apparently did not exist. A police enquiry about the nature of the organizations revealed that they had no relief activities as claimed.⁹⁴

It is beyond doubt that Eastleigh constitutes an important hub for al-Shabaab activities. According to Somali expert Rashid Abdi, al-Shabaab runs a well-organized recruitment operation in the district. Radical sermons are delivered and al-Shabaab propaganda DVDs are shown to a captive young audience in religious study circles. Youngsters are sometimes forced to attend these sessions, and harassment or direct threats are issued if they don't comply. Activities also include fundraising through an intricate hawala system. Especially the Sixth Street Mosque has attracted attention primarily due to the views of Sheikh Umal who has been touring Europe to spread his ideological views.⁹⁵

An Eastleigh Sheikh who refused to be named for fear of retaliation stated that dozens of Kenyans of Somali origin had been recruited and that most were presumed dead. According to this Sheikh, they came from moderate families who could not afford proper education and had to send their sons to local madrassas where they were gradually indoctrinated and turned towards militant Islamism. The Sheikh related a story of a mother who went to Kismayo to search for her missing 12-year-old son. She discovered that he was being trained as a suicide bomber but was unable to take him with her out of fear that she would be killed in the process.⁹⁶

The Middle East

Very little information is available through about foreign fighters from the Arab world, especially in comparison with known cases from Europe or the U.S. It has been verified that individuals have left Saudi Arabia and Yemen to join al-Shabaab but the nature and the extent of this phenomenon remains unknown.

A revealing example of a Saudi foreign fighter has actually been offered by the media wing of al-Shabaab itself. A July 2009 communiqué relates the path to Jihad and the martyrdom of Abu Idress al-Muhajir. A Sudanese he grew up in Riyadh where he was a high school student. According to the statement, he was introduced to Jihadism through the internet, particularly the writings of al-Maqdisi. At the age of 16 he was arrested for shouting at a police patrol and expressing support for al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula; the QAP. He was released after a couple of months in prison but proceeded to join an unknown Jihadi group in Saudi Arabia. When he was arrested for the second time he started to think about Hijra and eventually fled to Somalia and joined al-Shabaab. He died as a martyr but the communiqué does not say how.⁹⁷

Probably the best documented original narrative on the radicalisation, recruitment and enlistment in al-Shabaab of any foreign fighter surfaced on a Jihadi website in October 2009. The lengthy narrative, titled *Migrating from the Saudi Peninsula to Somalia*, described the adventures of a Saudi who ended up fighting on the streets of Mogadishu.⁹⁸ According to the author who remained anonymous, he had been sympathetic to the Jihadi cause since 9/11 and had tried to join an armed movement but without luck. The triggering event was a TV programme on the behaviour of US soldiers in Iraq which showed sexual harassment of underage Iraqi girls and an alleged rape of an Iraqi woman. According to his own version of events, this was the turning point. The journey to Somalia is described in great detail and will be mentioned later in the section on recruitment

practices and pipelines. Eventually the author found himself fighting on the frontlines in Mogadishu, exactly as he had hoped for, under the leadership of a Swedish Emir. On the first day of fighting he killed an apostate with a headshot and the Swede praised him saying; *good news brother, you have just taken his place in heaven*. The Emir himself was killed shortly after.

While only a few individuals from Yemen have positively been identified as being involved in the insurgency in Somalia, the Yemeni connection remains a great concern, if not the greatest. The proximity and historical relations between the two countries have at the very least manifested in a well-documented arms trafficking across the Gulf of Aden. The majority of arms shipments to al-Shabaab originates in Yemen and is shipped across the strait in smaller vessels. Two al-Qaeda suspects escaped in a prison break in Yemen in February 2006 and ended up in Somalia. Mansur al-Bayhani was killed in fighting in Somalia in June 2007 and the escapee, Ibrahim al-Muqri, was later arrested in Kenya. The latter would subsequently be handed over to the Yemeni authorities and released in an amnesty programme in 2009.

The radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaki, a US citizen of Yemeni origin, wrote on his well read website in December 2008 that the success of al-Shabaab depended on Muslim assistance. Where the ballot had failed the bullet would succeed, and that al-Shabaab's implementation of Sharia was an example for all to follow. It was the responsibility of the Ummah to support this struggle with men and money.⁹⁹ The Emir of al-Qaeda in Yemen (AQAP), Nasir al-Wahayshi, has made frequent references to al-Shabaab in support of their struggle in the Sada al-Malahim online publication. Recent al-Shabaab leaders who had been killed, such as Nabhan, Ayro and as-Sudani, were praised as martyrs. There is very little evidence, if any, of a direct operational link or potential merger between the two Jihadi groups, however, the mutual positive references certainly makes this relationship worthy of further inquiry.

United States

American citizens have travelled to Somalia since at least 2005 to join the Islamist insurgents, first the ICU and later al-Shabaab. This group of individuals is quite diverse but can for analytical purposes easily be divided into two subgroups; converts and Somali-Americans. The exact figure remains unknown but about 25 cases have been confirmed and fairly well-documented. That Somali immigrants and refugees in the U.S. might end up in their country of origin to fight on behalf of one armed group or another may not come as a surprise. The Somali diaspora worldwide appears to be deeply passionate and very well informed about current events in Somalia, however the converts appear to be a distinctly separate group. Recruitment in the U.S. has been quite compartmentalised. While the authorities have investigated possible cases in Cleveland, San Diego, Boston, Columbus, Portland, and Seattle, it is clearly the Minneapolis area that is of greatest concern.¹⁰⁰ About 20 young Somalis from Minneapolis have left for Somalia. The first group departed in the fall of 2007 and some stayed in touch via Facebook with their friends who were still stateside. Apparently, this long-distance recruitment scheme worked well and a second wave of recruits emerged a year later.¹⁰¹ The following brief overview outlines a number of cases in order to identify the characteristics of each subgroup, while issues specifically related to their radicalisation and subsequent recruitment will be dealt with in the final section.

Converts

The sub-group of American converts who have fought in Somalia is indeed small as it consists of only four known individuals. However, the amount of attention this group has received from the media, intelligence services, and certainly al-Shabaab itself requires an elaboration. The group is

remarkable from a radicalisation and recruitment perspective in the sense that none of them had any prior association with Somalia as they were all American converts to Islam. They all seemed to revel in their new-found identity as Muslims and changed their appearances, habits, views, and circle of friends quite dramatically before signing up for Jihad in the Horn of Africa. With a single possible exception, the members of this group were not recruited but instead volunteered.

The first to arrive in Somalia was the African American convert Ruben Luis Leon Shumpert, known in militant circles as Amir Abdul Muhaimin. Two excellent sources describe his exploits in detail; his own account and that provided by al-Shabaab after his death. Shumpert radicalised in the Seattle and travelled to Somalia in late 2006. He was wounded in the battle of Bardale and evacuated to Mogadishu but when the ICU decided to flee to the south, he made his escape towards the Kenyan border. The statement released by al-Shabaab in October 2008 said he had been killed in an ambush.¹⁰²

Daniel Joseph Maldonado moved to Egypt in November 2005 to live as a Muslim which he felt was impossible in the U.S. due to constant harassment. He decided to join the ICU and left for Somalia in late 2006 and was met by ICU militants upon arrival and taken to Kismayo. At first, he spent some time at a safe house in Mogadishu and was later transferred to a training camp in Jilib. Later he moved to Mogadishu and when he was interviewed by the FBI, Maldonado was very explicit about the presence of al-Qaeda in the capital. He stayed at an al-Qaeda safe house in Mogadishu, and elaborated on whom he had met and talked to. Among the fighters in Mogadishu it was well-known at the time that al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda shared the same compounds. The al-Qaeda fighters were held in high esteem and were shown respect. In their conversations with other Jihadis they stressed the international agenda of their mission.¹⁰³ When Mogadishu fell, Maldonado escaped with his wife and children towards the Kenyan border, but his wife died and he was separated from his children. Maldonado described his ordeal as he escaped from an ambush and survived with fellow Jihadis in the bush for weeks. Eventually he was arrested by Kenyan troops in early 2007 and shared a cell with other foreign fighters who had escaped.¹⁰⁴ On return to the U.S., he pleaded guilty of training with a terrorist organization and was sentenced to ten years in prison.

In what appears to have been a strange coincidence Maldonado became acquainted with another American convert who had chosen to relocate to Alexandria in Egypt. The latter was Omar Hammami who a few years later would become widely known by his nom de guerre, Abu Mansour al-Amriki. Amriki and Maldonado met online in April 2006 through an internet discussion forum. They soon realized they were both American converts and soon met in real life. They ventured into underground mosques in Alexandria and started to plan a trip “south”.¹⁰⁵ Both made it to Somalia and by December Amriki had signed up for training with al-Shabaab.

Abu Mansour arrived in Mogadishu in late 2006 and was initially arrested by the ICU accused of being a spy, but was later acquitted.¹⁰⁶ Little reliable information is available about his activities during the first half of 2007 but he appeared in an interview by al-Jazeera in September 2007 and introduced as a trainer for al-Shabaab. At the time he was working with al-Turki.¹⁰⁷ Abu Mansour has participated in training and combat and is rumoured to be a skilled sniper. He presumably leads his own small group of fighters, including both foreigners and Somalis, of about 30. He has become a Jihadi icon, known as an American who has risen in three years to the senior levels of al-Shabaab. He appears to be very well-informed about historical and current events regarding the Somali Islamist environment and has made several propaganda contributions, including communiqués and videos. Perhaps due to his treatment at the hands of the ICU when he first arrived in Somalia, Abu

Mansour has been very explicit in condemning his former allies. In a statement released in January 2008, he explained the ideological rift between the ICU and al-Shabaab; making it abundantly clear who controls the direction of the Jihad. According to his version, linking up with the ICU before the split was a strategic move to combine the strength of each group and to avoid strife. His vision of the future direction of the Jihad is the creation of a new Caliphate under the black banners and he has continuously praised senior leaders of al-Qaeda. In December 2009, he stated his allegiance to Osama bin Laden and that he was ready to die for him. He also added that he considered the U.S. a legitimate target.¹⁰⁸ Currently he is presumed to be operating in southern Somalia where he is involved in providing tactical advice and planning the recruitment strategy of al-Shabaab.¹⁰⁹

Somali-Americans

An impressive amount of investigative journalism has detailed the migration from the U.S. to Somalia, and this case study probably remains the most well-documented in relation to the foreign fighters in al-Shabaab. The major hub of the recruitment effort in the U.S. has undoubtedly been Minneapolis where about 20 young Somali men have disappeared over the past two years. The exact figure is not known since there has been reluctance among the Somali diaspora to report suspicious cases to the authorities. This issue will be described in detail in the section on radicalisation and recruitment. The radicalisation and recruitment effort became more organised during the second half of 2007. Some young Somalis received phone calls and others attended secret meetings.¹¹⁰ They were partly drawn by the clandestine atmosphere and a sense of adventure but also a sense of nationalism. Zakaria Maruf, an active recruiter in the U.S. with a high standing in the community, appears to have played an important role. He was putting pressure on young Somalis whom he contacted through emails, phone calls and conversations in internet chat rooms. Maruf himself would also relocate to Somalia and is presumed to have been killed in 2009.

Those from the Minneapolis area stayed in touch with friends and told them that life in Somalia was much harder than expected; they missed good food and coffee shops.¹¹¹ Three of the young men made it back to the U.S. alive and later pleaded guilty when they were charged with aiding a terrorist organization. The three Somalis, Kamal Hassan, Salah Osman Ahmed, and Badifitah Yusuf Isse recognized pictures of Nabhan and identified him as one of their trainers at an al-Shabaab camp.¹¹² This does not necessarily mean that Nabhan actually recruited the young Americans. Recruitment seems to have been organised by Maruf, but Nabhan was surely positioned to train them once they had arrived in Somalia.

That life was hard and short in Mogadishu, was to be a lesson they learned the hard way. At least four are known to have died in the Somali capital; Zakaria Maruf, Jamal Sheikh Bana, Mohamed Hassan, and Burhan Hassan. The details are not known but the story of Burhan Hassan is interesting because it is likely that he was actually killed by al-Shabaab. In the pattern typical of the Minneapolis youth, Hassan started to spend more time at the mosque when he was 17. Then he vanished without telling his family where he was going, taking only his laptop computer, his passport, and some spare clothes. The journey took him to Amsterdam where he boarded another flight to Nairobi, and the onwards from the Kenyan coast by boat to Kismayo. He called home to say he was safe but would not say exactly where he was.¹¹³ His mother implored him to go back which he agreed to in May 2009. However, a stranger called his mother in early June to tell her that her son was dead. People in the community suspect that he was liquidated by al-Shabaab so he could not inform on them if he returned to the U.S. The fate of other American Somalis remains unknown, among them, Abdikadir Ali Abdi, Abdisalan Ali, and Mohamud Hassan. Another convert, Troy Kastigar, who left with the Minneapolis group, is also presumed dead.

The American converts rose to prominence among the Somali Jihadis but diaspora members have also played a crucial role. Abdulfatah Abdullahi Gutale, a former resident of Minneapolis, has been implicated in the coordinated series of suicide bombings in 2008. According to press reports, the Hargeisa attack was conducted by Gutale.¹¹⁴ Besides planning suicide operations, Somalis have also participated in these actions themselves. The most well-known is Shirwa Ahmed who drove an explosives laden vehicle into the office of the Puntland Intelligence Service in Bosaso on 29 October 2008.¹¹⁵ Ahmed has been described as a shy young man who liked basketball, but his friends noticed a change to the more religious with regards to his manners and dress style. He attended college for a while but eventually dropped out before he left for Somalia. Ahmed fought with al-Amriki in the ambush at Bardale indicating that the U.S. foreign fighters apparently moved in small circles.¹¹⁶ Days after the suicide bombing, a stranger called his sister to tell her that Ahmed had become a martyr and that he was in paradise. One of the suicide bombers who targeted the AMISOM compound in September 2009 was reported to have been one of the missing youth from Minneapolis although this has not been confirmed. The bomber spoke good English and that was one of the reasons why he was allowed to enter the compound in the first place. Unverified sources have claimed that he was a Somali who had lived in Seattle until 2007.

The recruitment of about 20 young Somalis in the U.S. has worried law enforcement agencies. First of all because of the scale of the recruitment, but also because it happened virtually without anyone taking notice. That the Somali communities in the U.S. were vulnerable to extensive recruitment was not expected as other Muslim groups were generally considered to be more susceptible. However, there might be an indication of how the situation can change. Somalis were adamant that the Ethiopian soldiers had no business in Somalia and that ICU was right in fighting back. The intense dislike and suspicion of the Ethiopians materialised in a high level of community support to the armed struggle intended to liberate the country from foreign invaders but things changed around 2008-9 when the Ethiopians withdrew. Al-Shabaab operatives told the American youth that they had to stay on to help establish an Islamic emirate. Some agreed to this change of strategic concept while others had their doubts since this was not what they signed up for. Those who will be signing up for al-Shabaab in the future will do so knowing that they are likely to engage other Somalis.

Canada

Canadian government sources have stated that about 20 Canadians have joined al-Shabaab. In Canada, as in the US, the pattern of mysterious disappearances has been repeated recently. A group of young men from Toronto disappeared in November 2009. At least half a dozen have gone missing within three months in late 2009, according to the Somali community in Toronto.¹¹⁷ Among the missing were Mahad Ali Dhere, a 25 year old university student; and also Mohamed Elmi Ibrahim. However, the movement of fighters from Canada to Somalia was apparently initiated earlier as Abdullah Ali Afrah from Toronto was killed in an ambush in the summer of 2008. He had risen to become a leading member of the ICU

Canadian citizen Abdifatah Mohamad Ibrahim was caught by a militia on 8 March 2009 and appeared in court in the Galgadud region. He was accused of working with al-Shabaab, which he admitted, and was arrested while driving a vehicle with explosives ostensibly to be used in an assassination attempt at leaders of Ahl al-Sunna Wal-Jama'a. The case has been reported on the Somali news sites Garowe and Allpuntland but the exact details of this incident have been difficult to establish.

The parents of young Somalis were bewildered by their son's disappearances as they had all left without saying a word. A few had called home saying that they were in Kenya in eerily similar statements. This has caused parents to believe that they had been instructed about what to tell their relatives. They were in their early 20s to early 30s and all attended the Abu Huraira mosque in North York. Some had dropped out of university or simply lost interest in their studies. They came from respected families, who valued education, and some had found work. In general, they were well integrated into Canadian society. Community leaders in Canada were taken by surprise. They were well aware of the disappearances happening in the U.S. but did not think the same could happen in Canada. According to the community leaders, most could not even speak Somali.¹¹⁸

Australia

The Somali diaspora in Australia has also been affected by the international reach of al-Shabaab. Community leaders in Australia have offered the figure of 10 to 20 young Somali refugees who have returned to fight but the real number may be double according to security officials.¹¹⁹ Some have been killed while fighting but this has not been verified. The traffic of Somalis going to Somalia has existed for several years as evidenced by the case of Ahmed Ali, a resident of Melbourne, who left Australia in 2007 to join the ICU. Reportedly, he has since been killed in action.

In August 2009, four men were arrested on suspicion of planning a terrorist attack on army barracks in Sydney. Two of the arrested were from Melbourne and had travelled to Somalia to link up and train with al-Shabaab. Both were Somalis.¹²⁰ The entire group of suspects in this case comprised 18 people of Lebanese and Somali origin. Police was alerted when one of the Lebanese called another of the conspirators to ask for assistance to travel to Somalia with some friends where they intended to join al-Shabaab. This Somali man has been identified as the facilitator. He was in close contact with Somali insurgents and would arrange for funding, logistics and travel. Also in this case, new recruits would be channelled through Kenya. Upon arrival in Somalia, al-Shabaab would conduct a six-week training course in guerrilla tactics and explosives handling.¹²¹

Foreign fighters from Europe

Examining the extent of recruitment to al-Shabaab from Europe during the past three years has provided interesting insights. First of all, recruitment across Europe appears to be highly problematic in certain countries, whereas it appears to be non-existent in others. The problematic localities are Scandinavia and the UK where the overwhelming majority of foreign fighters originated. Other countries like The Netherlands and Germany have experienced a few cases but certainly not on the same scale as in the severely affected countries mentioned above. In Spain and Belgium for instance which have been plenty of Jihadi recruitment, particularly from North African terrorist groups and al-Qaeda networks, Somalia does not figure as a popular destination at all.¹²²

Jihadi support from Europe to the Horn of Africa is not a new phenomenon. As far back as 1996, Ethiopian forces discovered at least one European national among the dead Mujahedin during the Ogaden fighting against AIAI.¹²³ However, there is no evidence of any large-scale or structured recruitment effort, and the migration from Europe remained very limited until the ICU was confronted and eventually ousted by Ethiopian forces in late 2006. The American-backed Ethiopian intervention gave rise to a wave of nationalistic sympathy for the ICU among diasporas in many European countries. As al-Shabaab rose to prominence as the most capable Jihadi group in Somalia, the migration of Jihadis from Europe gained momentum.

European security concerns are twofold; that European Muslims are drawn to the Jihad in Somalia who will assist in consolidating the Horn of Africa as an al-Qaeda stronghold. Of equal concern is the possibility of the Jihad being re-exported and the prospect of well trained, battle-hardened individuals returning to Europe and staging terrorist attacks on European soil. In order to analyse the internationalization of the Somali Jihad and the implications from a European perspective, it is expedient to enumerate what is presently known about this involvement. Thus, a brief review of some of the known cases in the affected countries is presented which will serve to provide general overview.

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, home to the largest Somali community in Europe, the number of Britons who have joined militant Islamist groups in Somalia has more than quadrupled to at least 100 since 2004, according to intelligence reports.¹²⁴ This has sparked fear that experienced Jihadists will bring their newly acquired skills back to the UK and launch terrorist attacks on British territory. Dozens of extremists are believed to have returned leading to concerns that they will actively take part in the radicalisation and recruitment of other Somalis.¹²⁵ In spite of the substantial numbers offered by a presumably knowledgeable source, the MI5, there is surprisingly little information available through open sources on the identities of these British foreign fighters. The few publicly known cases are currently inadequate to support any form of thorough analysis although this would appear to be critical in a European perspective. If the figure of about 100 is correct, then this would indicate a substantial effort on behalf of Islamist militants residing in the UK, since this could take place without the interference from law enforcement agencies.

Not surprisingly, the pattern of recruitment to the ICU was also present in the UK. When the armed factions of the ICU were in disarray after clashes with the superior Ethiopian forces, many foreign fighters attempted to leave Somalia by fleeing south. In early 2007 at least seven British Muslims were arrested by the Ethiopians suspected of aiding the ICU and an additional four were captured in Kenya.¹²⁶ A possible source of inspiration to these Britons, and others who followed, may have been the call to arms issued by the notorious Anjem Choudary, the leader of the radical Islamist ASWJ. In December 2006, he posted a statement in a password protected internet forum where he told his followers that they must answer the call to Jihad in Somalia.¹²⁷ The statement is of interest because of the unequivocal support offered to the Jihadis and the theme of brotherly duty to support other Muslims in need;

Today the zeal of Islam is being reverberated all over the world and our courageous brothers and sisters in Somalia have asked the Muslims all over the world to support them and Allah (swt) has made it an obligation upon us to support them... The Ethiopians with full international support (from the Christian crusader regimes) and directly backed by illegitimate Israel (zionists) have violated the blood of the Muslims in Somalia. By committing such an act of terrorism the Muslims in Somalia and nearby lands have responded to the divine call of Jihad. The obligation of supporting the Jihad all over the world (including Somalia) is Fard Ayn (an individual obligation). You can fulfill this duty financially, physically and verbally. This honourable act must be carried out according to your own capabilities... no Muslim (man or woman) has an excuse of doing nothing at all.¹²⁸

A reporter from The Independent, who was in Mogadishu in 2007, found numerous Somalis from Western diasporas who had returned to join Islamist forces. Among those were two Somali brothers from London who reportedly acted as bodyguards for an Islamist militia commander, identified as

Sheikh Yusuf. The commander is believed to have been Sheikh Yusuf Mohammad Siad, also known as Indha'adde, a former warlord and head of the ICU's military wing. Hamid, one of the brothers guarding the Sheikh, was quoted for stating that *the true Muslims are the only ones who are honest and who are patriots. We are doing our duty by fighting for our country.*¹²⁹

The scarcity of background information on British foreign fighters is to some extent put into perspective by the notorious case of a young British Muslim who ended up as a suicide bomber in Baidoa. The well-documented case of Ahmed Hussein Ahmed, better known as Abu Ayoub al-Muhajir, is partly due to media reports and his appearance in al-Shabaab propaganda material. Ayoub was raised in the UK but dropped out of his business studies course at Oxford Brookes University in 2007 and left for Somalia. The 21-year-old student from Ealing flew to Nairobi and then crossed into Somali on foot on a dirt track. Upon his arrival, he was met by a group of Jihadis who blindfolded him and driven for 16-hours to the site of a training camp. Ayoub became the first known British suicide bomber in Somalia when he blew himself up at a checkpoint in Baidoa in October 2007. Though he killed about 20 Ethiopian soldiers, he probably missed his real target which was the Somali Prime Minister.¹³⁰ Al-Shabaab released Ayoub's martyrdom video in March 2008, where he was identified as Abu Ayoub al-Muhajir (Abu Ayoub the Immigrant). Speaking in English, he first talked about the war on terror and specifically accused the U.S. of trying to steal Somalia's resources, and he reminded the Americans how they had suffered defeat in Somalia in 1992. He continued by addressing Somalis in the diaspora in an undisguised recruitment effort;

*Are you happy in your comfort while your religion and your people are being attacked and humiliated? What honour is that? ...Is it that you have been deceived by this temporary life and you have fallen into the traps of the disbelievers? The only reason that they opened their lands to you, and grant you free education, income support, free houses, etc., is to make you become one of them, and make you forsake your religion... And I advise you to return to your religion by living for it and dying for it, instead of living and dying for the pursuit of money and fame. I advise you to migrate to Somalia and wage Jihad against your enemies... In this time and situation, hijrah [migration] and Jihad is an individual obligation upon everyone of you who has the ability to do it...As for those of you who are not able to migrate and fight, then it is still obligatory upon you to support the Jihad with your wealth... Know that Allah multiplies the reward of spending for his sake in Jihad 700 times over... So do not waste your money in seeking the luxury of this world, give it instead as a good loan to Allah. Here are your sons, the Shabaab, the Shabaab of Somalia - from different tribes and nations united under the banner of Islam, and sacrificing themselves for this religion and its people.*¹³¹

The case of Ayoub unfortunately does not shed any light on the many other Britons who have joined al-Shabaab in recent years. Understanding how the situation has developed in the UK would in all likelihood be a separate research project; however, one that is much needed and overdue.

The Netherlands

While Dutch links to al-Shabaab are very few indeed, they are of interest in this context because of the apparent overlap with some of the more affected countries already mentioned, specifically the U.S. and Kenya. The Netherlands has about 22,000 Somalis, comparable to the communities in Denmark and Sweden, yet the radicalisation patterns appear to be somewhat different as the scale of the problem is much smaller.

Four Dutchmen were arrested in northern Kenya close to the Somali border in October 2009. The suspects attracted the attention of the police when they hired a tractor to take them to Kiunga; a place of little interest to tourists. Though they claimed to be tourists, they were detained on suspicion of aiding al-Shabaab, yet there was insufficient evidence to prosecute them. All four were subsequently released and returned to The Netherlands. According to their passports, they were all 21 years of age, three were of Moroccan origin while the last was a Somali¹³² The Dutch Ministry of Justice later revealed that one of the men had previously been arrested. This happened in 2005 in Azerbaijan when he wanted to join the Jihad.

In a separate incident, a Somali was arrested in a refugee center in Dronten in November 2009. Mohamud Said Omar is thought to have been in The Netherlands since December 2008 and was suspected of facilitating travel arrangements to join al-Shabaab's training camps in Somalia. This case is of particular interest as the suspect allegedly lived in Minneapolis before he relocated to Europe.¹³³ While he was active in the U.S. his specific role was to facilitate the travel of young Somalis, but it is unknown if he continued in this capacity after he settled in The Netherlands. The accusations against Omar involve fundraising for al-Shabaab intended to purchase weapons and escorting young Somalis to the airport to see them off.¹³⁴ U.S. authorities have requested that the suspect to be extradited. If these suspicions can be confirmed, then this case would represent the link between the U.S. and Europe in terms of the connectivity in al-Shabaab's global recruitment scheme.

Scandinavia

Recruitment to the ICU and later to al-Shabaab in Scandinavia has been quite extensive over the past years. Estimates vary from about 25 to more than 80 of whom the majority has been Somalis. The higher figure includes community based estimates, and may be somewhat exaggerated. Two Scandinavian country studies will be covered in more detail here, because of confirmed cases, and these are Sweden and Denmark. Norway has also been exposed to this trend, but apparently to a lesser degree. Two Norwegian citizens were reported to have been arrested in Mogadishu and at least 13 youth from the Oslo area are suspected of having been recruited to al-Shabaab according to media reports. However, no further reliable information on these incidents were available during this research.¹³⁵ Equally interesting is a case of fundraising in Norway for al-Shabaab between 2007 and 2008 where the money was sent to Ayro who was still leading al-Shabaab at the time. Other funds were diverted to a certain Fouad Shongole, whose exploits will be detailed shortly, and the investigation revealed linkages between radical Somali communities to Sweden.¹³⁶

Sweden

The Somali diaspora in Scandinavia has been comparatively more active in supporting ICU and al-Shabaab, particularly in Sweden and Denmark. Sweden takes a prominent role in the recruitment to Somalia because of the actual numbers of Swedish citizens or residents who have joined the insurgents. Equally interesting is the current role of a former imam in Sweden who presently occupies a senior position in al-Shabaab. According to SÄPO, the Swedish intelligence service, an estimated 20 individuals have left Sweden for Somali to train in militant camps or to fight with al-Shabaab. Of these, about five have been killed in fighting and ten are still believed to be active in Somalia. The security service added that this number might be higher, since the traffic is ongoing and increasing. The Swedish fighters are primarily of Somali origin but individuals with other ethnic backgrounds have also been attracted, and they were between the age of 20 and 30. Noteworthy is the fact that some of the young men have left without telling their families, which resembles the pattern of disappearance noted in other countries.¹³⁷ Somali government officials

who have visited Sweden have expressed their concern over the recruitment of Somalis in Sweden who take up arms with al-Shabaab and have called for greater vigilance.

An early case from 2006 linked a Swedish citizen with Yemen and militant Islamists from the ICU in Somalia. Abdo Osman was arrested in October 2006 in Yemen where he had held meetings with a Yemeni arms dealer, Abdullah Awad al-Masri. Osman had expressed interest in purchasing surface-to-air missiles, sniper rifles, Kalashnikovs, and ammunition on behalf of his controller, known as Qarqaz from the ICU. Initially charged with weapons and explosives trafficking from Yemen to Somalia, Osman was later acquitted and released.¹³⁸

In January 2007, Somali government officials stated that Swedish citizens aligned with the ICU had been killed in the fighting.¹³⁹ Another Swede would be killed in June the same year in northeastern Somalia when his group of foreign fighters was targeted in a U.S. air strike. Five different passports were recovered after the battle, identifying the deceased as coming from Sweden, the U.S., Eritrea, the UK and Yemen.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, a Swedish couple was arrested by the Ethiopians in 2007, but were later returned to Sweden after having been detained for three months in Ethiopia suspected of terrorist affiliations. They were trying to escape the fighting and the young pregnant woman was in the company of Maldonado's wife which attracted the interest of several intelligence agencies. Safia Benaouda and her husband, Munir Awad, would be arrested once again in Pakistan in August 2009 in the company of former Guantanamo inmate Mehdi Ghezali, also from Sweden. Pakistani authorities suspected the group of foreigners, who also included other nationalities, of travelling to a terrorist meeting in Waziristan..¹⁴¹

Probably the most prominent foreign fighter from Europe left Sweden for good to resettle in Somalia in 2004. Fouad Mohamed Qalaf, better known as Fouad Shongole, had actively supported militant Islamists in Somalia for an extended period. He lived in Sweden from 1994 but decided to leave when he felt the unwanted attention of the security service. In the 1990s he served as the imam of a small mosque in Rinkeby outside Stockholm where he was known as a skilled orator who could capture his audience. In an interview with Swedish media, a Somali who knew Shongole while he lived in Sweden, described him as *a hardcore guy who would preach Jihad from his mosque and also went to Afghanistan to fight*. He was very clear in his views during the sermons and said that Americans and Jews should be exterminated.¹⁴² During the rule of the ICU, Shongole belonged to the inner circle of the leadership and actually occupied the position as minister of education. Sources inside al-Shabaab have indicated that at the time Shongole was centrally placed to handle the recruitment of foreign fighters.¹⁴³ At an ICU rally outside Mogadishu in 2006, presided by Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, Shongole was also present to receive a financial donation from a delegation of Somalis who had travelled from Sweden. Shongole used the occasion to encourage all Somalis living in Europe to move back to Somalia. To live among the infidels was unacceptable and he used his own example of migration with his family to encourage others to follow.¹⁴⁴ The exact role of Fouad Shongole was somewhat murky for a while, but he has since emerged as one of the principal leaders and ideologues of al-Shabaab. His influence and standing reached a new level when he appeared as the third on the list of al-Shabaab leaders who signed the declaration of the official merger with al-Turki's Ras Komboni Brigade in late January 2010.¹⁴⁵ He is currently residing in Kismayo where he has played a crucial role in the implementation of Sharia justice. The stoning of Asho Duhulow mentioned previously was conducted according to Shongole's orders as was the punishment by amputation of convicted thieves.

Gouled Hassan Dourad, alias *Guleed Hassan Ahmed* and *Hanad*, was born in Somalia but his family sent him abroad when the civil war began in 1991. He arrived in Germany and subsequently relocated to Sweden in 1993 where he gained asylum. Dourad attended a mosque in Sweden where the imam facilitated his travel to the Khalden training camp in Afghanistan for ten months in 1996. It has not been established if the organizer was Fouad Shongole though this appears very likely. After finishing a course in assassination techniques, Dourad returned to Somalia in late 1996 where he joined up with al-Ittihad and became a full member of the group in 1997. He was committed to the Jihadi cause because he wanted to regain the Ogaden region from Ethiopia. He fought continuously between 1997 and 2002 when he was not training al-Ittihad recruits. When Abu Talha as-Sudani went into hiding in Mogadishu following the Mombasa attacks in November 2002, he later recruited Dourad because of his Afghan experience, his language skills, and education. According to U.S. intelligence transcripts, Dourad was the head of an al-Ittihad cell in Mogadishu tasked with supporting al-Qaeda operatives in Somalia. He was involved in money transfers, arranging safe houses and procuring weapons and explosives and was intimately involved in various terrorist plots. His luck ran out in 2004 when he was captured in Mogadishu by U.S. backed warlords, and is presently held at Guantanamo as a high value detainee. The summary of evidence presented at the tribunal at Guantanamo stated that Dourad had been a prominent member of al-Ittihad who had received extensive training in Afghanistan and Somalia. He had personally taken part in al-Ittihad operations in Mogadishu in 2002 that targeted Ethiopians and those suspected of collaborating with them. Besides these charges, he was also identified as an al-Qaeda cell leader in Djibouti and a senior facilitator. In September and October 2003 he conducted surveillance at the U.S. base at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti on behalf of as-Sudani in preparation for a vehicle suicide bombing.¹⁴⁶

Sweden has also played an important role in relation to fundraising and distribution of propaganda on behalf of Somali Jihadis. The alqimmah.net website has distributed press releases from al-Shabaab in English and Arabic. This website is owned by Ralf Wadman, known as Abu Usama al-Swede, who is a Swedish convert and a former neo-Nazi.¹⁴⁷ In September 2008, alqimmah.net organized an online session on Paltalk with Sheikh Robow and Shongole who prematurely proclaimed that Somalia would very soon become an Islamic emirate.¹⁴⁸ Several Swedes with Somali background have been arrested on suspicion of fundraising for al-Shabaab. In the best known case, Yassin Ali was arrested in April 2008 together with two other suspects, but the prosecutor dropped the case in September because of insufficient evidence. Ali moved to the UK where he was arrested once again in May 2009 on identical charges.¹⁴⁹ After his release he returned to Somalia where he assumed a leadership position in Hizbul-Islam which was still allied with al-Shabaab at the time. The support to al-Shabaab in Scandinavia also involves transnational linkages, especially between Sweden and Denmark, and some of these will be highlighted in the following section.

Denmark

Rumours of recruitment to al-Shabaab in Denmark surfaced around 2006, initially as support to the ICU. The Somali prime minister complained in December 2006 that Somalis holding Norwegian, Danish, British and Australian passports were fighting with the Islamists militias against the government forces and that recruitment was taking place in Denmark.¹⁵⁰ Danish media reported that Danes had been apprehended in Kenya in early 2007 as they attempted to escape from the fighting in southern Somalia. However, no details were offered on these individuals, indeed, even the number fluctuated between two and five confusing the media and the Danish government. Partly, the confusion was due to the fact that fleeing fighters assumed a nationality according to which

European governments would be most likely to assist its citizens or residents, and many claimed to be Dutch or Danish. The Kenyan minister of foreign affairs confirmed that several had been apprehended as they tried to cross the border from Somalia and stated that it was obvious that some of these people were foreign fighters on the run.¹⁵¹

However, the first linkages between Denmark and the Islamist militants in Somalia went through Yemen in 2006. When Swedish Abdo Osman, mentioned previously, was arrested and charged with weapons smuggling to the ICU, two Danes were also connected to the case. The first was a young Danish convert, Kenneth Sørensen, also known as Murad Storm, who had resettled in Yemen in 2004 with his wife and child.¹⁵² He had been studying at the Imam University in Sana'a and when Yemeni police searched his residence they discovered al-Qaeda linked documents and a large amount of cash. Sørensen was known to the Danish security service for his relations to individuals in a separate terrorism incident, the Glostrup case, although he was not involved in that plot. The Yemeni authorities suspected Sørensen of conspiring to commit an act of terrorism, weapons smuggling to Somalia, and of being linked to al-Qaeda, but was released after two months imprisonment. The second man was a Danish resident of Somali origin, Abdi Othman Soli, who was likewise suspected of procuring arms to the ICU. Curiously, Soli confessed to the charges brought against him, the court ignored him. Soli was later notified in writing by the Danish government that his residence permit had been cancelled because he was considered a threat to national security.¹⁵³

Another Danish convert, known only by the name "Allan", was apprehended by Ethiopian forces in January 2007. He was fighting with militant Islamists in support of the ICUs declared intention of implementing Sharia rule in Somalia. Allan was released from captivity later in 2007 and flown to Denmark with the assistance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In a rare interview with Danish media he expressed no regrets about his African experience; *we defended our right to be Muslims in Somalia* and when asked about his views on Sharia he stated *it has never been so peaceful s during the six months when there was Sharia rule.*¹⁵⁴

The migration from Denmark to the Horn of Africa was widely known in the Somali community, although very few wanted to comment publicly on this development. One of the few who did was the spokesman of the Somali society in Aarhus, Abdirashid Sheikh Mohamud, who expressed concern over the situation. Mohamud estimated that about 15 Somalis from Jutland had gone to Somalia to train or fight with al-Shabaab and he assumed that even more had left from Sealand. Other Somali voices have suggested that about 50 young men have left to join al-Shabaab though this figure cannot be verified independently.¹⁵⁵ This development worried him and he had personally attempted to warn about the extremist group but had not been able to reach out to a small number of poorly integrated Somalis who mostly acted quite threatening when the subject of al-Shabaab was brought up. Concerns were justified, however, in 2009 and 2010 by two separate incidents that would shock the Somali community in Denmark.

December 2009 witnessed the first Danish suicide bomber ever. The bomber has been identified as 24-year-old Abdi Rahman Mohamed who detonated explosives hidden under his clothes during a graduation ceremony for Somali doctors at the Shamo Hotel in Mogadishu in December 2009. Different figures have been offered by the Somali authorities, but it is assumed that the suicide bomber killed about 24 people, including four government ministers, and injured more than 40. Quite interestingly, al-Shabaab denied responsibility for the bombing in a statement by spokesman Ali Mohammed Rage the day after the bombing and instead blamed TFG officials who had acted

suspiciously.¹⁵⁶ This does not appear as a credible explanation, especially when suicide bombings have become the exclusive domain of al-Shabaab and the movement's trademark. However, the bombing caused considerable outrage in Mogadishu because of the senseless violence that specifically targeted one of the most needed groups of professionals in Somalia. It appears likely that al-Shabaab miscalculated the effects of the bombing and instead opted for not taking credit for the incident, or alternatively, that hardline elements within al-Shabaab ordered the suicide bombing without conferring with other factions. Somalia is no stranger to bombings, shellings, and assassinations, but this particular incident seems to have outraged Somalis because of the cruelty of the attack. An emotional editorial in the Somali newspaper Hiiraan summed up the new situation after this incident; *all bets are off the table. It is the drum beat for all out war, complete control of all of Somalia or nothing.*¹⁵⁷

Abdi Rahman Mohamed came to Denmark at the age of five and spent the next 15 years in a suburb of Copenhagen. A childhood friend remembered his personality change as he grew more serious about his religion and started to criticise his former friends for having abandoned Islam altogether. Eventually he came to the conclusion that Denmark was the wrong place for him as it was not a Muslim country.¹⁵⁸ In 2008, he moved back to Somalia with his wife and child where they stayed at the house of his mother in law in Marka. Mohamed's own mother was very concerned about the young family's relocation to Somalia and hid his passport to prevent him from leaving. She later explained that she was worried because her son was a little naïve, and that could get him into trouble in Somalia.¹⁵⁹ Apparently she was right, but Mohamed's doings in Somalia between his arrival and the suicide bombing more than a year later remain unknown.

When the crisis erupted over the cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohamed as commissioned by the Danish newspaper Jyllandsposten in 2005, many Jihadi groups incorporated this incident into their propaganda as definite proof of existing anti-Muslim sentiments in the Western world. Al-Shabaab has also followed this line of reasoning, although somewhat belatedly. In late 2008, two videos were released stating that revenge must be exerted against one of the cartoonists, Kurt Westergaard specifically, and Denmark in general. These threats culminated in a violent attack on Westergaard in January 2010, when, according to the official statement from PET, the 28-year-old MMG¹⁶⁰ broke into the house of Kurt Westergaard armed with an axe and a knife. When police arrived shortly after, they were attacked by MMG who was shot twice. He was subsequently charged with attempted murder and of planning an act of terrorism. The attacker had been of interest to PET for an extended period. He had been under surveillance, his phone had been tapped and his house had been searched unbeknownst to him. The official statement specified that he had close relations to al-Shabaab and senior leaders in AQEA, and he was suspected of having been involved in terror related activities during a previous stay in East Africa.¹⁶¹ MMG was treated for his injuries after the violent encounter with the police and is currently awaiting trial.¹⁶² No information has been released about MMG's intentions after he had carried out his deed, so it is impossible to establish whether he intended to flee Denmark or had other plans. Al-Shabaab issued a press release less than 24 hours after they attack. In this, none other than Sheikh Robow denied that al-Shabaab had anything to do with the assassination attempt, but that the movement held the opinion that this was a perfectly understandable act to defend the honour of the Prophet. Furthermore, Robow stated that MMG was not a member of al-Shabaab. The following investigation, and especially the intensive media coverage of the incident, would cast doubt over Sheikh Robow's statement concerning MMG's relations to Islamist militants in the Horn of Africa.

Outwardly MMG appeared successful, friendly and well-integrated to his surroundings. He was very skilled in computers and had worked as an independent consultant. Besides acquiring an education and a job, he also had the energy and social skills to help immigrant youth to stay out of trouble. He married a Somali woman, together they had three children. But the marriage broke up when the couple drifted apart. A fellow social worker remarked that MMG had visited Somalia several times and at one point returned to Denmark injured. Another former friend recalled that MMG broke with his former friends in the Somali milieu when he acquired a new circle of friends and began to frequent terror related websites.¹⁶³ In 2009, he visited Gothenburg in Sweden with his friend, Abdi Rahman Mohamed, who would later become the suicide bomber previously mentioned.¹⁶⁴ The two of them attracted attention because of their clear sympathies towards al-Shabaab and they engaged in fundraising and indoctrination of Swedish-Somali youth.¹⁶⁵ In July 2009, MMG once again attracted attention to himself, this time from Kenyan intelligence who conducted surveillance of MMG and a group of other Somalis. The group had acted suspiciously in Nairobi in the days preceding an official visit from the U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton.¹⁶⁶

At the time there was rife speculation about a possible terrorist plot against Clinton, but the investigation later revealed that possible preparations were tenacious at best; indeed it might even have been a hoax by Islamist militants.¹⁶⁷ MMG was arrested in House no. 48 in Juja Estate in Eastleigh on 29 July 2009 with four other suspects, among them Ahmed Abdullahi.¹⁶⁸ The residence, which also includes a mosque and a small hotel, was known to the Kenyan authorities because some of the former visitors had been linked to al-Qaeda. For instance, Saleh Nabhan had reportedly frequented the house before his death in September 2009.¹⁶⁹ The primary target of the police raid was the Ahmed Abdullahi, who was suspected of having relations to al-Shabaab.¹⁷⁰ However, MMG was released on 12 August and repatriated back to Denmark several weeks later when a new passport could be procured by the Danish embassy. He remained a terrorist suspect according to Kenyan authorities, but the evidence needed to press charges were insufficient.¹⁷¹ Since his release, there has been a diplomatic row between Denmark and Kenya concerning who was informed about the terrorist suspicion and when.¹⁷² In the attempt to refute allegations of possible misconduct, the Kenyans have revealed interesting details related to their suspicions about MMG. According to this information, he held a much higher position in al-Shabaab than previously anticipated. Ahmed Abdullahi, who was seriously injured in June 2009, held a senior position in al-Shabaab's intelligence organization, and the Kenyans had received intelligence that a Dane was on his way to Nairobi to take over Abdullahi's responsibilities. MMG was identified as his replacement.¹⁷³ Abdullahi and Nabhan had for some time been looking for a clean person, meaning someone who was not on any terrorist watch list. Moreover, the candidate was expected to have a Western education and to be able to travel in many countries without attracting attention.¹⁷⁴ Apparently, MMG was destined to be the head of intelligence for East Africa and his primary duties would be to take care of Somali diaspora recruits from North America and Europe.

The prospect of having witnessed the first Danish suicide bomber and possible the first returnee within a short time span is clearly cause for concern. As evidenced by the case studies this development has affected other countries as well, and has raised questions about the enabling environment which is topic of the final part of the report.

Radicalisation and recruitment

The literature on radicalisation processes has established beyond any doubt that there is no single formula that leads to involvement in a militant Islamist movement. While this remains true in the Somalia context, there are, however, some similarities, or patterns, related to radicalisation and the subsequent recruitment, especially in the diaspora communities. The pathways to Jihadi activism in Somalia affiliated with al-Shabaab involve several aspects which will be dealt with here. First of all, the recruitment propaganda is of interest as it presents a window into an otherwise closed environment for prospective recruits and volunteers. However, future foreign fighters located outside Somalia are all situated in an enabling environment which is characterised by specific circumstances, that in turn affects their motivations for joining the cause. This environment is of high importance because it is here that Somalis first become exposed to al-Shabaab, and the key findings from the fieldwork which was conducted in Denmark in 2009 will be presented here to provide a more nuanced analysis. Adding to the complexities of understanding the enabling environment are the individual motivations for joining. In this context they may involve religious perspectives, a sense of nationalism, the experience of alienation in a foreign culture, political views and actual pressure exerted by recruiters. Once an individual has been radicalised and recruited there are concrete logistical steps that must be taken before he arrives in a training camp or later at the frontlines in Somalia. These aspects will be dealt with in the following section to present some of the specific conditions related to the radicalisation and recruitment of foreign fighters to al-Shabaab.

The role of propaganda

Al-Shabaab launched a sophisticated recruitment campaign during 2008 that was heavily endorsed and technically supported by al-Qaeda. Statements from senior al-Qaeda leaders have emerged in support of the Jihad in Somalia in addition to material distributed through GIMF as well as al-Shabaab's own publications and videos. While there is plenty of online material available that encourages Muslims everywhere to join the fight, the recruitment propaganda issued by al-Shabaab, or by other supportive Jihadi groups, is noteworthy. It is remarkable how the encouragement to fight has evolved in just three years, from barely existing to highly professional productions¹⁷⁵, and a few examples will outline this trend which is expected to continue in the near future.

Abu Yahia al-Libi was quite blunt in a statement from February 2007 in addressing prospective Jihadis. If interested parties found it too difficult to journey to Afghanistan, Palestine, Chechnya or Algeria, then the door to Somalia was wide open. This message should be seen as particular relevant in light of the defeat of the Somali Jihadis at the hands of Ethiopia. Although most observers to the conflict in Somalia considered the armed wing of the ICU as having been decimated, GIMF meanwhile issued a statement in March 2007 that called on Muslims to travel to Somalia and specifically encouraged Jihadis with experience in explosives and guerrilla warfare. Explicit support to al-Shabaab was offered in this statement and it seems that al-Libi was very well informed about the guerrilla war about to be launched.

Gradually the Somali diaspora has received increased attention. In the martyrdom video from October 2008, the young suicide bomber Abdul Aziz Saad directly addressed the diaspora communities when, in fluent English he stated,

*To those people still sitting at home, relaxing, having good food, good sleep... what you see of Chechnya, Iraq and Afghanistan and such likes... too much watching... with no action - it leads to hypocrisy. Jihad becomes something of talk. But jihad is real. There is no way you can tell the sweetness of jihad until you come to jihad... If you don't come to jihad, Allah... will ask you why you didn't come to jihad... How can you sit at home when our brothers and sisters are being murdered in our land? How dare you sit at home, looking at the TV, seeing people being killed, Muslims getting killed?... Those who are in Europe and America: You should get out of those countries, you should make hijra. I'm telling the kuffar, the English People, the American people... We're coming for you. We're going to exterminate you all! We are muhajirun. We have come to the land of jihad, and we're doing OK. You guys can also do the same way. You can make hijra to this land, and fight the kuffar... To the people who say that there are no muhajirun in Somalia, I'd like to say that there are muhajirun. We are muhajirun... All I can say is, I invite you to come to this land of jihad.*¹⁷⁶

Recruitment video releases throughout 2008 showed footage of foreign fighters speaking English, Arabic, Urdu, and of course Somali and the recruitment pitch had clearly become global. Abu Mansour al-Amriki appears to be the star in the recruitment scheme. Even though his style at times clash with traditional tenets of Jihadi culture, the application of hip-hop tunes can only be interpreted as specifically aimed at a young, Westernized audience. His background is obviously an asset to al-Shabaab. As a native English speaker and someone who has clearly turned his back on the U.S., he has appeared in several videos and has gradually assumed a more prominent role.

In December 2008, al-Amriki reiterated the appeal; *we welcome any Muslim from anywhere in the world who wants to join us. We will allow him to marry our daughters and share our crops.*¹⁷⁷ *Many have died fighting for our cause, and others are here with us.* A few months later in March 2009, in another production called *Ambush at Bardale*, Abu Mansour spoke of the fighting against Ethiopian troops. Again speaking in English, he implored his audience to send their children, neighbours and anyone around them to join. Mansour is seen next to Sheikh Robow, a clear sign of his status.

In another display of awareness to a Western audience, an al-Shabaab video of a press conference held in southern Somalia was posted on a Somali website in April 2009. In the video, two men, identifying themselves as Abu Muslim and Abu Yahye, said they were “Somali youth” from the U.S. who were now stationed near Kismayo, waiting to die as martyrs. The men spoke with American accent and proclaimed, *we are here to invite others to come and join us.*¹⁷⁸

Saleh Nabhan appeared in a video from August 2008 which showed footage of actual training and stated that; *we have opened the doors so that you can join, and we are waiting for reinforcements from Yemen and Sudan.* This is perhaps the most important recruiting video to have been produced so far; the 40-minute production titled *As part of the preparation of the attack, no peace without Islam.* This feature contained messages in Arabic, English and Somali and was clearly aimed at a global audience. There is extensive footage of actual training taking place in a camp indicating that the infrastructure for terrorist training is in place.

These brief examples of the dedicated online recruitment effort by al-Shabaab illustrate the break from past ICU practices of turning foreign fighters away. Al-Shabaab has adopted an aggressive media strategy and propaganda videos appear in such a way that they ill appeal to Western youth. The efforts mirror a profound understanding of the potential of the internet in radicalising and recruiting from afar. All of this material is easily available on the internet and a simple YouTube

search reveals a proliferation of videos related to al-Shabaab. A more sophisticated development, which, concerns the Minneapolis group, is the continuation of recruitment even after they had arrived in Somalia. Investigators have pointed out that Somalis related to the missing youth were using Facebook as a platform to disseminate radical and violent messages.¹⁷⁹ According to the content of their messages, they appeared to have been motivated by a combination of politics and Islam, yet their friends said they were driven by unfulfilled ambition.¹⁸⁰ They may have found an outlet for their frustration by becoming a Jihadi, a perspective that is supported by their enthusiastic correspondence.

The enabling environment

Somali society has generally not been susceptible to militant Islamism for several reasons. The prevalence of Sufism and the clannish structuring of traditional society have served as inhibitors of Islamism, in particular the violent strands. However, things have changed. 20 years of fighting, the collapse of traditional structures, the absence of a viable government and the increasing significance of diaspora milieus have all contributed to gradual changes in the recruiting environment. These changes are easily identifiable within Somalia, but as this report is concerned with foreign fighters it is of equal importance to understand how external environments have been affected; primarily the Somali diaspora, but also other Muslim communities. The previous overview of the global extent of recruitment to al-Shabaab verified that it is not just Somalis which have been attracted to this particular Jihadi movement, but also other nationalities and even some converts. Since extensive recruitment has been verified in Western diasporas, there must be specific elements in these environments that somehow drives primarily Somali youth towards al-Shabaab.

Context of fieldwork

The purpose of conducting fieldwork in Denmark was to investigate the resonance of militant Islamism in the Somali community in Denmark. More specifically, the aim of the fieldwork was to expose different perspectives on al-Shabaab and the ongoing Somali conflict in general. Most of what has been published on the subject tend to ignore the internal dynamics, social control mechanisms and socio-political stratification of diaspora communities. By conducting in-depth interviews and examining the sentiments towards the different parties in the conflict, the authors have sought a more nuanced picture of al-Shabaab support, be it ideological, nationalistic, or pragmatic of nature, rather than detailing exact numbers of sympathizers, activists or recruiters, all issues that are within the domain of intelligence services.

Data collection consisted of fourteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews with selected Danish Somali informants and an additional four informal interviews with persons at the fringe of the field who had valuable insights to share and assisted in establishing contact with key informants. Interviews were conducted over a three month period in late 2009 and early 2010 in Copenhagen and Aarhus. The limited number of interviews necessitates a note on representativeness. Of an estimated Somali population in Denmark of 16-18,000, the authors do not intend to claim that the interview findings represent all Somalis nor do they cover all ideological positions held by Somalis in Denmark. Taking into account the difficulties of gaining access and the limitations of this study, this report should be seen as a preliminary probe into the discursive landscape of Danish Somalis rather than an exhaustive study. A more comprehensive understanding of the factors driving or diminishing support of al-Shabaab among European diasporas obviously calls for further studies on the topic.

Al-Shabaab remains a controversial and highly sensitive topic among Somalis in Denmark. Support for the movement has largely been absent from the broader public domain. In addition, requests of interviews with imams from mosques, some of which have been suspected of diffusing radical messages, were declined as were attempts to approach their congregation. Unable to draw on this source of information, informants were instead carefully selected according to their knowledge of the various currents at play in the community. Several informants would be considered role models for other Somalis in being well integrated and holding respectable jobs, some were students, and yet others held positions within local associations. The latter category proved particularly insightful as personal organizational engagement can be seen as a way of regaining status and of achieving recognition as a man of competences and resources. More often than not these informants were consulted by other Somalis and asked for advice on matters like education, gender issues, religion, discrimination, family life and so on. The advisory function of these informants endowed them with a profound understanding of the concerns and aspirations of community members.

All informants were males ranging from their early twenties to mid-fifties thus offering the perspectives of two generations. Somali women were a much desired category to include in the interviews, however, repeated attempts to obtain such participation did not succeed. All interviewees declared themselves to be Muslim; some described themselves as very devoted while others settled for observing the basics rituals. Common to all, informants went to great length to participate in the interviews held at various locations. Other doings were sometimes disregarded or re-scheduled to participate and helpfulness was shown throughout the process despite the sensitive nature of the topic.

Key findings from the Danish fieldwork

No explicit support for al-Shabaab was aired in any the interviews. On the contrary, informants predominantly dissociated themselves from the ideology of al-Shabaab. Still, the existence of al-Shabaab support was confirmed by narratives and knowledge of the community. Responses to questions concerning the influence of al-Shabaab in Denmark fell roughly into two distinct categories: from the steep denial of any recruitment at all to incredible accounts of the problem's magnitude. Especially in the initial phase of the interviewing process, the existence of any al-Shabaab recruitment in Denmark was often dismissed as pure invention. This situation changed over time with the Shamo Hotel bombing and the Kurt Westergaard attack that involved Somalis with a Danish background. These incidents had a tremendous impact on the community forcing it to recognize and deal with the issue.

Support for now dissolved ICU remained paramount within the Somali community. All informants declared their support for the ICU and, contrary to any potential sympathies towards al-Shabaab, were not hesitant to do so. The outspoken sympathies appear publicly accepted, certainly among Somalis but also to a certain extent in broader public perception. ICU was widely regarded as a legitimate resistance movement admired for its fight against the Ethiopians in 2006. All respondents but one expressed hostile attitudes towards Ethiopians, mentioning not only the 2006 intervention but also displayed an acute awareness of historical hostilities between the two nations. Interestingly, only few cared to comment on the fact that Ethiopians are Christians, indicating that the arch enemy was not necessarily looked at in religious terms. Most informants also merited the ICU of restoring peace and imposing the rule of law to Somalia. Having left relatives and friends behind in the homeland, the much coveted stability would motivate support for the ICU through pragmatic deliberations rather than expressing orthodox or militant ideologies. Indeed, while some informants did not reject the notion of Sharia, most felt inclined to put aside ideological disagreements with the

ICU, particularly so when the Jihadi orientation became more pronounced at the end of its existence. Support of the ICU thus appears to be a mix of nationalistic, religious, and pragmatic motivations. With ICU's *raison d'être* being undermined by the withdrawal of the Ethiopian military and TFGs subsequent imposition of Sharia in some parts of the country, there has been a spill over of sympathy for al-Shabaab in the Somali community. Expressions of support are ambiguous, though. The community reflects tensions between those who see themselves as part of al-Shabaab and al-Qaeda's global Jihad and those who prioritise the imposition of Islamic law in Somalia. When the lines between support for the ICU and al-Shabaab became blurred, the interpretation may very well be that sympathizers did not possess adequate knowledge. Ideological differences between said Islamist movements would be secondary to the fierce opposition to any foreign involvement which indicates that al-Shabaab support to a certain extent can capitalize on the "my enemy's enemy is my ally" logic. Informants rejected the brutal religious practices of al-Shabaab, like for instance stoning and amputations. When asked why some would support al-Shabaab, several replied that this particular movement was the one option that could bring about peace to Somalia. However, others held the opinion that if you support al-Shabaab it can only be because you are ideologically committed to their cause.

Social control

The application of social control mechanisms by al-Shabaab to enforce their rule is by no means confined to Somalia. On the contrary, methods of hampering opposition to al-Shabaab appear to thrive in the Somali community. Obviously, there are differences in the means of practice. It would be preposterous to compare al-Shabaab's culture of Talibanization and methods of imposing justice within the Danish-Somali community, instead there seems to be a concerted effort to impose silence on any al-Shabaab opposition. This has had implications for those affected, sometimes at great personal cost. There have been numerous incidents of isolation and character assassination of adversaries, intimidation, threats, and even incidents of physical assaults. In one incident described by Danish media, a Copenhagen mosque in 2007 issued a fatwa and death threats against the leader of a local Somali association after he met with the Ethiopian ambassador in Stockholm. He was labelled a traitor and an apostate, the gravest accusation which can be levelled against a Muslim. The damage sustained from acts of defamation and tarnishing of one's reputation is often difficult to reverse or rectify and may lead to social exclusion from at least part of the community. The reach of Islamist sympathizers go far beyond the Danish Somali community. Several community members have felt subjected to censorship or out consideration for relatives in Somalia and elsewhere. Following negative remarks on al-Shabaab, an informant's family grave site was destroyed in Somalia. No hard evidence exist that the two are directly related, but suspicions are interpreted as facts, and said suspicions in turn regulate behaviour. Another informant's relatives living abroad were repeatedly threatened by Somalis in Denmark to control their relative who had openly spoken against al-Shabaab, and yet another knew of a man whose father, living in the countryside in Northern Somalia, was told on the telephone that his son had displayed unacceptable behaviour and had become an accomplice of the *kâfir*. Such intimidation has contributed to a climate of anxiety in which community members must seriously consider whether it's worth speaking up, particularly so, if relatives are left behind in al-Shabaab controlled strongholds in Kismayo or in southern Somalia.

The extent of al-Shabaab support

According to the respondents conservative estimates, about 25 percent of Somalis in Denmark are considered very religious and frequently visit the mosque. Of these, there exists a core of 5 to 10 percent who are supportive of al-Shabaab. This translates into approximately 200-400 supporters

nationwide supplemented by a larger group of loose affiliated sympathizers. The major problem, according to several informants, is that these few, by the use of social control, have arrogated to themselves a disproportional position of power over the community. At the same time, the al-Shabaab sympathizers have succeeded in building up an almost impenetrable atmosphere of secretiveness shielding them from undesired scrutiny and making it very difficult to initiate counter radicalisation measures. The apprehensiveness would partially account for a sense of denial which is characteristic of the community, and this also impacts on research efforts to understand the milieu. Complicating matters even further was the extreme awareness of the stigmatizing impact of the Jihadis on the Somali community.

The relatively high degree of isolation from Danish society is curiously contrasted by the linkages to Somalia which practically occur in real-time. The communication flow between Somalia and diaspora members in Denmark runs unimpeded. Indeed, community members are extremely well-informed and updated on local events in Somalia. For instance, the disturbing graphics and personal details of the perpetrator of the Shamo Hotel suicide bombing were circulating among Danish Somalis within minutes after being available on the internet, and not just among a small militant segment but widely in the community. Through a considerable number of Somali websites containing local news of variable quality, updated information will reach diasporas in no time. Furthermore, community members are extensively linked to Somalia via mobile phones. The exertion of social control described above, where information will quickly reach even remote areas, testifies that this is a two-way traffic. An informant rather laconically commented that one of the major living expenses for Somalis in Denmark is the telephone bills, referring to the frequent contact with relatives and friends in Somalia.

Fieldwork derived estimates of individuals who have joined al-Shabaab in Somalia range from none to twenty-five. News media have reported rumours circulating within the community that mention the much higher figure of fifty. Evidently, the lowest figure has a hollow ring and the latter, in turn, appears somewhat exaggerated when compared to estimates and diaspora demographics in other European countries. The true figure falls under the responsibility of the security service, whereas social scientists are concerned with perceptions of reality that facilitates or inhibits current and future radicalisation and recruitment.

Radicalisation and recruitment perspectives

The interviews offered no specific details on recruitment networks in Denmark. However, by piecing together informant's accounts, a strikingly familiar narrative of the path to Jihad emerged. At the general level, informants painted a picture of vulnerable and marginalized youths, unable to fulfil their parent's ambitions. At some point, somebody will stress the importance and advantages of going to the mosque which is initially welcomed by many parents. In the mosque they will slowly isolate into smaller groups. Their interest for the conflict in the homeland is sharpened, but Jihad is not mentioned at all. After a while, somebody from the mosque might invite them on a trip to Gothenburg or Stockholm to attend an interesting seminar, and this is exiting to some of the youngsters who have not been outside Denmark. Repeatedly they are told they must help their Somali brothers who are suffering through an infidel invasion and an illegitimate government and this message now falls on receptive ears. They will alienate themselves further from the community and begin to denigrate the behaviour of other community members as un-Islamic. Eventually, a passport is missing and the family receives a long distance phone call.

Families, especially parents, were considered important players, not just as a source of valuable knowledge but also as a crucial element in stopping the migration of their young men. Following the Shamo Hotel bombing, some informants warily reported at least five cases in which parents have seen their sons gone missing under suspicious circumstances. This information was highly unlikely to have been divulged at an earlier stage. As several informants pointed out, parents are reluctant to contact the authorities because they are afraid of being suspected of complicity in their son's actions or at least to have turned the blind eye to their militant transformation. The fear of the police and the security service in particular, is fuelled by wild speculation on possible sanctions against them. Some of these exaggerations are completely unfounded, yet they continue to perpetuate a climate of repression.

An important issue which seems largely neglected in the debate was an observation offered by an informant, who described the collective Somali state of mind as a bomb waiting to go off. Many Somalis have left the Horn of Africa with severe psychological scars from having witnessed or personally experienced the brutalities of war. In Denmark, many Somalis presumably continue to struggle with untreated traumas from the war. The problem is, according to the informant, that it is not customary among Somalis to openly admit to emotional suffering and hardship. As he put it, *for Somalis there's sanity and there's insanity. There's nothing in between.* Therefore, to avoid the social stigma of being labelled as deviant, only few seek medical treatment.

Radicalisation factors and motivation

There is no evidence of a single motivational factor for young Somalis joining al-Shabaab from the diaspora, instead there seems to be convergence of several factors. While some are indeed ideologically motivated, others are less so. Some joined to oust the Ethiopians at a time when al-Shabaab seemed to be the only armed group capable of doing so, others were pressured to join the ranks. The pathways leading into membership of al-Shabaab are quite varied, yet a range of common themes surface when the confirmed cases of recruitment are scrutinised more closely. A few specific issues related to radicalisation processes with regards to al-Shabaab deserve attention. Hostility towards any foreign presence in Somalia ranks very high, especially with regards to Ethiopia and the U.S. Furthermore, the Somali diaspora is beset by a range of cultural as well as socio-economic problems. The role of mosques appears time and again and so does the possible relevance of clan affiliation and lastly, the curious role of converts.

Foreign armies in Somalia

There has been a consistent and fierce opposition to any form of Ethiopian military intervention in Somalia. This was particularly true in the days of the ICU when young Somalis were attracted to take up arms in the struggle for national liberation, and this been mentioned several times throughout the previous case studies. Somalis living in Europe and America were outraged by the Ethiopian invasion in 2006 like the rest of the scattered diaspora. There was a lot of talk of fighting the Ethiopians and widespread support for the ICU; however, al-Shabaab was apparently not particularly well-known, meaning that some presumably signed up for a different fight. Radical imams and recruiters were able to utilize these sentiments in instilling a sense of nationalism towards Somalia which tapped into an unspoken longing for a distant homeland and a desire to rebuild it. This sentiment has remained a common obsession among Somali youth, whether or not they acted upon it. The language used by al-Shabaab to characterize Ugandan and Burundian peacekeepers in Mogadishu is equivalent to previous references on the Ethiopians, although it is a different situation and with different mandate.

Isolated diaspora

A main reason why the existence of a structured and well-organised recruitment effort went undetected for a long period in Western countries is related to the unfortunate fact that Somali communities live quite isolated from their host country population. Relatively speaking, Somalis remain an isolated group that is not well-integrated even when compared to other diaspora Muslim groups, like the Palestinians for instance. A common problem in solving the missing person's case in the U.S., which is also highly relevant in Europe and elsewhere, is the widespread fear of the police, and this has been verified through the Danish fieldwork. Somalis are generally not keen on collaborating with law enforcement and this reluctance is most often rooted in very bad personal experiences from Somalia or the perception that nothing good could ever come from any contact with the law. The deep seated distrust in the Western legal system has spawned a culture where even the most outrageous beliefs are left uncontested and conspiracy theories thrive. Conflicts are handled within the community making outside detection of new developments very difficult and even severe crisis, like missing relatives, are not referred to authorities.

This seclusion is compounded by other difficulties also seen across diaspora communities. An issue which has been mentioned in relation to identified foreign fighters and expanded on by community leaders, concerns the existence of an identity crisis among Somali youth in the West. Shirwa Ahmed, the Minneapolis suicide bomber, tried hard to fit in and be an American but was told by his peers to go back to Africa. According to some who knew him, the Ethiopian invasion simplified everything. Al-Shabaab would provide status and redemption and very few seemed to look too close at the movement. Furthermore, these youth were approached by well-known individuals in the community, like Maruf in Minneapolis, who were difficult to turn down. The pattern of alienation appears to be common to the Somali diaspora, which can be seen in a recent interview with a Danish-Somali community leader, Ahmed Dualeh; *when you get into these extreme ideas, it is because you feel bad about yourself and your life. It's frustration, lack of education, unemployment and a sense of not belonging.*¹⁸¹

In the UK, recruitment takes place among unskilled and vulnerable Somali youth who are beset by unemployment and poor living conditions. Interviews have revealed a high degree of support to the ICU and al-Shabaab that is widely reported among young British-Somalis. This seems to be true of both the first generation of refugees and their children who were born in the UK.¹⁸²

The relevance of clan affiliation

There has been speculation that the foreign fighters from the Somali diaspora have to some extent been drawn into the conflict due to their individual clan allegiance. This assumption has been impossible to verify or reject empirically since almost no media reporting has described the particular clan affiliation of the foreign fighters. However, understanding whether or not the clan structure impacts on the radicalisation process is highly relevant in a diaspora setting. In this context it should be recalled that Shabaab means "youth" and one likely explanation for the enthusiasm of Somali youth to join the militia, especially in its early days, can be evidenced by local perspectives on living under a rigid clan structure. This local empowerment and the transformation of the perspectives of Somali youth is underscored by Joakim Gundel's brilliant study on the role of traditional cultures and their transformation in Somalia. Gundel's study details how Somali youth are generally in favour of leadership through clan elders. However, they also pointed out their own very limited influence and that elders do not adjust to societal change, which leads to clashes between norms and aspirations. In Marka, the youth expressed their dissatisfaction with traditional clan structures as they obstructed development and opportunities, leaders were perceived as selfish

and disregarding their constituencies.¹⁸³ The potential for friction is clearly there, also outside Somalia. Young Somali men are raised to honour their clan but this does not always seem to work in a diaspora setting where there is a cultural divide between the traditional and host country culture. A most striking example of these cultural changes can be found in Canada. Omar Kireh, who administers the Abu Huraira mosque in North York, said that it was curious that these young men who originated from northern Somalia would even consider getting involved in a southern insurgency, adding that nothing is predictable with the younger generation to whom tribal culture and lineage means very little.

Mosques

Before 11 September 2001, recruitment to militant Islamist movements was conducted quite openly in Europe. In the 1990s, a handful of specific mosques played a crucial role in connecting European Muslims with international Jihadis. This situation changed when radical mosques came under scrutiny from the authorities and the radicalisation and recruitment process went elsewhere. While it was certainly not eliminated, it moved to other places outside the mosque environments. With these changes in mind, it is interesting to note that a commonality between recruitment processes in the U.S., Canada, Australia, Scandinavia, and Kenya is the seemingly very local nature of recruitment and that a single mosque is always identified. These coincidences should not be confused with certain proof that the said mosques have functioned as terrorist facilities; actually there is little evidence to support such an interpretation. While some of the mosques have occasionally hosted firebrand imams who have praised al-Shabaab, this interpretation does not appear to have been the general doctrine among Somali worshippers. What seems more likely, is the prospect that young Somali men have been spotted at the mosque by al-Shabaab recruiters who would then continue to approach and vet them, but at a location outside the mosque to keep them away from unwanted interference.

According to testimonies from relatives, some members at the mosque were adamant that the disappearances be kept quiet. Those who spoke about this issue were labelled as bad people. More interesting, parents have been told that if they reported a missing person's case to the FBI, their sons would end up in Guantanamo. Adding to their dire personal situation, the mosques and the entire Muslim community would suffer severely, and this pressure would explain their reluctance to go outside Somali circles. In a sense there was a conspiracy of silence that was followed up by direct or veiled threats which has been very efficient in keeping recruitment away from the public.¹⁸⁴ While the mosques as institutions have been blamed for terrorism related incidents, it is perhaps more relevant to study the problem by looking at specific individuals. A senior TFG army officer remarked that they knew very well which radical preachers were touring Europe and offered several names to back up this claim. The frustration about not being able to stop this indoctrination was compounded by the fact that European governments seemed incompetent or indifferent to prevent this radicalisation from taking place.¹⁸⁵

Converts

Though probably numbering less than a dozen, the presence of converts in the ranks of al-Shabaab is of interest and this particular sub-group of foreign fighters appears to be markedly different. The two most well-known converts, Omar Hammami (Abu Mansour al-Amriki) and Ruben Shumpert, are both representatives of a peculiar development regarding their newfound religious identity. They have described themselves as seekers, and as someone who has strayed from the right path before they converted and embraced Islam wholeheartedly and with a vengeance.

Hammami strived to find a purpose in his life; a sense of direction, and before converting as a teen, he experienced a profound conflict on whether he was a Christian or a Muslim.¹⁸⁶ This was a gradual spiritual journey when he converted in high school that also brought him trouble and also later when he went to university in Alabama.¹⁸⁷ At first he converted, but possessed a shallow understanding of Islam. The introduction to Salafism gave him a sense of brotherhood and also instilled discipline to his life. He rearranged his daily life together with a small circle of friends, with whom he observed strict behavioural codes, and he became very dogmatic. Hammami spent a year in Toronto where he married a girl of Somali origin, and he worked hard to become a Somali himself. He had Somali friends, ate at Somali restaurants and prayed at the Somali mosque.¹⁸⁸ In Toronto he was known as a Salafi, but not a Jihadi. It was only after he moved to Toronto that he was exposed to extremist literature, until then he had very little knowledge about current events. He began to read radical literature and revised his non-violent Salafi stance. In June 2005, he left with his wife and small daughter for Egypt where he wanted to study. His volunteer exile, a *Hijra*, to Egypt was a disappointment as he found this Muslim country too secular.

Ruben Shumpert has been quite outspoken about his unusual life. Until his conversion to Islam, he described his previous life as filled with 24 years of indecency, drug abuse, crime, and hardships.¹⁸⁹ Perhaps most telling in this respect is the deliberate use of his names; the Ruben he was before he converted who led a miserable life, and the Amir he became after his conversion. When he embarked on a new moral path, he turned very religious even as he worked in his small barbershop in Seattle. Most telling about Shumpert's view of himself and his life, in his own words, is his longing for normality. The martyr's biography on Shumpert which was released by al-Shabaab in October 2008, provides some interesting details. In an almost classical pattern to new converts he shopped around in various Muslim circles, including the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which he renounced for abandoning Jihad. As he floated between various Islamic movements, he met a couple of veterans from the war in Chechnya. They showed him Jihadi videos of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and he decided to join the brothers in Iraq. The crucial turning point, according to his biographer, came one day when he met a Somali who held Jihadi beliefs, who persuaded him to join the ICU, and offered to help him with the necessary documents. Travelling via Dubai, he ended up in Mogadishu where the brothers took care of him. Shumpert participated in the battle of Bardale where he was wounded. He was subsequently evacuated to a medical facility in Mogadishu and escaped towards the Kenyan border but was killed in an ambush.¹⁹⁰

These examples both outline a process of disengaging from an unsatisfying life, and by becoming Muslims they broke with their past. Both parallel processes involved a period of trial and error in identifying a particular interpretation of Islam that appealed to them and they were perhaps easy prey for persuasive individuals associated or at least sympathetic to Jihad.

Recruitment pipelines and networks

Very few details have surfaced about the specific steps in the recruitment process in the Somali diaspora. However, people in the Somali community in Sweden have spoken about what actually happened inside a recreation center supported by the municipality. Apparently, the recruitment drive was organised by an unidentified youth leader at the center. This individual would show videos from YouTube to a young audience, and the content encouraged them to sacrifice themselves for their beliefs. In an interview with Swedish media, one young man described the atmosphere at such a closed session;

*I saw how they showed images of war victims, decapitated heads, and all sorts of horrible things while repeating the same message the whole time. It had a big impact on those who weren't strong enough to stand up to it.*¹⁹¹

The Somali youth who had been radicalized changed their behavior. Specifically, they broke off contact with their family and became more isolated. Outwardly, some were doing fine, attending their studies or jobs, and one was even in the process of planning his wedding. Then they disappeared.

The propaganda and recruitment effort was not quite developed in 2006, yet the armed wing of the ICU at the time, meaning al-Shabaab, certainly had the capacity to receive and integrate foreign fighters. Abu Mansour al-Amriki singled out two individuals whose efforts were crucial at the time; Sheikh Fouad Shongole and Abu Talha as-Sudani who were instrumental in taking care of new Jihadis at Mogadishu airport.¹⁹² However, large scale and organised recruiting would be developed by 2007 and to some extent make use of identical practices and tradecraft. The recruitment cases from Scandinavia, Canada, Australia, and the U.S. deserve particular mentioning due to the commonalities between different localities. Regardless of geographical distance, there has been a remarkable level of similarity, not only in the way they were recruited but also in how they went from their respective host countries to Somalia.

Perhaps the best documented cases are related to the two groups of young Somalis from the Minneapolis area who were able to disappear without raising suspicion or alerting authorities. The first batch of recruits from Minneapolis was in the 20s and 30s and left in late 2007. Generally, individuals of this group struggled to find their place in American society, and apparently felt they were caught between two cultures. The second wave was younger and seemingly better integrated and they left the U.S. in late 2008. They are believed to have been recruited in small groups outside their local mosques. They met with their handlers in shopping centres, coffee shops, and restaurants where they were offered flight tickets.¹⁹³ Handlers would play on nationalist sentiments and a youthful embrace of adventure. Saleh Osman Ahmed testified that he attended secret meetings in Minneapolis as early as October 2007. At these events some of the participants talked about returning to Somalia to fight Ethiopian troops.¹⁹⁴ Ahmed told the court that his handlers assisted him in buying the flight tickets.

It is precisely because this process did not attract attention that it deserves special interest. The operational capability of moving several dozen youngsters, many of whom would certainly not have managed on their own, is a significant indicator of professional tradecraft. While some families had no idea what their sons were involved in, others knew, but felt sufficiently intimidated to keep their silence and avoid the authorities. The American Somalis practically vanished overnight with no messages to their relatives on where they went or how they could be contacted. Bringing only a few belongings, they left for Africa in staggered departures, meaning they did not travel as a group but individually, and through different airports to avoid raising suspicion.¹⁹⁵ The Minneapolis youth were met by Zakaria Maruf upon arrival in Somalia and taken to a safe house in Marka. Later they were moved to a training camp where they received special treatment and had a higher status as foreigners. Most unusual, they remained in contact with friends back home through Facebook messages, and they seemed to revel in their new status as fighters.

This pattern has been repeated elsewhere and indicates the existence of either a centralised recruiting network or a series of regional networks operating independently of each other although

using identical operational procedures. That the existence of pipelines is not an exclusive phenomenon to Western countries, can be seen in the lengthy posting by a Saudi Jihadi who travelled to Somalia. This case has been mentioned previously in the section on foreign fighters from the Arab world, yet the details of this particular journey are noteworthy because of the description of an alternative pipeline from the Arabian Peninsula to Somalia via Kenya. Unfortunately the document does not contain specific dates, yet the description of his journey deserves special attention.

Having made up his mind to join the fight, this Saudi Jihadi deliberately sought out a Somali at the mosque who offered to help him out. In a matter of days the author was instructed to leave Saudi Arabia for an African country where one of the brothers would meet him on arrival. He departed from his wife and children and left for Kenya, although the destination is not actually named in the narrative. He would pose as a tourist interested in the local wildlife, but this particular safari took him to the border region where a small group of men waited for weeks in a hotel. Then they were picked up and taken across the border where they passed five checkpoints without any incidents and were dumped in a forest in southern Somalia. When they managed to meet their contact on the other side of the border they were told to rest and that in a couple of days they would be taken to al-Shabaab. The person in charge of new arrivals was British, a dark-skinned small person wearing Afghan style clothes. The newly arrived volunteers were taken by car on a long drive to the *House of Hospitality*, and the author was surprised by the number of foreign fighters he met there. They were from African countries but in spite of their Arab-like appearance they only spoke English and Swahili. A few days later, another person showed up who did speak Arabic, he had picked up his language skills while fighting in Afghanistan. After a period of waiting at the house, the new group was sent to a training camp. The leader of the very basic training facility was an Asian with a Saudi dialect, and he organized physical exercises, military and Sharia studies. At the graduation ceremony they were each assigned their duties and weapons and took off for Mogadishu where they were divided into smaller groups and sent to the frontlines.¹⁹⁶

The evidence of a highly organised and structured process from initial vetting to indoctrination, recruitment, travel preparation, local handlers, safe houses, and training camps signifies the global reach and capability of al-Shabaab. While the pipelines also existed during the era of the ICU, they now seem to have increased and solidified. However, it remains to be seen how resilient they are to pressure or the loss of key operatives.

Conclusion

This research report has outlined how the internationalization of militant Islamism in Somalia has had an impact on radicalisation processes in Europe and elsewhere. Al-Shabaab has over the past few years emerged as a capable movement with a well-developed global network reaching far into the daily lives of Somalis, not only within the country but also in many countries abroad. Based on the case studies mentioned in this report, it seems fair to conclude that the threat from al-Shabaab has been seriously underestimated, and that the movement has made a conscious move towards the global Jihad. Al-Shabaab's ideology, religious perspectives, suppression of the population and style of fighting all clearly indicate a close affinity with Salafi-Jihadism. Moreover, this development has projected al-Shabaab even closer to al-Qaeda.

The presence of foreign fighters in the Horn of Africa is not a new phenomenon, indeed this traffic has been going on for about two decades. The novelty regarding those foreigners, who have travelled to Somalia to take up arms, is the sheer scale of this recruitment. It should be recalled that during the worst period of the war in Iraq between 2004 and 2006 there was widespread concern that European Muslims would link up with Jihadis in Iraq. Here they would train, fight, and if they survived they would go back to Europe to continue along the path of Jihadi terrorism. This certainly happened, but fortunately not on the scale some had feared. While figures on the traffic between Europe and Iraq are notoriously unreliable, there seems to be general consensus that only a few hundred signed up. The Iraqi situation is comparable to the influx of foreign fighters to Somalia, yet as this report illustrates clearly, there are too many unknowns regarding this phenomenon. However, the figures from the UK and Scandinavia alone are cause for concern, and it seems an established fact that Europe has emerged as a major recruitment hub in al-Shabaab's global network.

The key findings from fieldwork in Europe and Africa certainly underscored one issue in particular; and that is how little we actually understand about these specific processes of radicalization and the subsequent recruitment to Jihad. Recruitment in an almost classical sense has been identified, but also different circumstances, for instance, the often very harsh means of social control applied by al-Shabaab sympathizers residing in Europe. The role of the diaspora in supporting al-Shabaab, whether it is done voluntarily or as the result of coercion, is crucial to the continued existence of this militant movement. This study is no more than a probing into the complex relationship between Somali groups and further studies are indeed merited, if not overdue. This will not be easy, since far too many Somalis have been exposed to trauma, have been uprooted and belong to the most vulnerable groups in socio-economic terms. Moreover, they are also very frightened of al-Shabaab, which further complicates research and outreach.

Recent incidents and developments have resulted in consensus among analysts and counter-terrorism officials, that radicalized, westernized Somalis returning from training or fighting in Somalia pose a serious threat. This view is echoed by Somali community leaders in Western countries who warn that it is only a matter of time before radical Somali men successfully target a Western country. With the recent attack on Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard in mind, these fears seem justified. Dozens of Islamist extremists have returned to Britain from the training camps in Somalia, the British security services believes. Intelligence analysts are worried that they may

attempt to launch attacks in the UK, or use their status from having trained and fought in Somalia to try to attract new recruits.¹⁹⁷

Having established beyond doubt that the recruitment of foreign fighters to al-Shabaab has indeed occurred, and that it is presently on the rise, it is important to understand how this situation will develop in the near to mid-term future. As this report has hopefully outlined, there are no simple or easy answers to issues related to the current conflict in Somalia. The authors do not claim to be positioned to predict how things will develop with accuracy. Instead, a range of factors have been identified that certainly will have an impact on future developments regarding the recruitment of foreign fighters. Generally speaking, there appears to be two opposing trends working simultaneously. One is pulling foreigners towards Jihad in Somalia, and the other works to keep them away. These factors must take developments in Somalia and Europe into account, and this once again testifies to the international relevance of the al-Shabaab. The factors are listed below, and perhaps they may serve as inspiration and stimulate much-needed further analysis and debate on the future trajectory of a-Shabaab.

Speaking for an increased threat and further recruitment of foreign fighters;

- Somalia has emerged as one of the most significant new fronts in the global Jihad
- International attention and concern has not been matched with activities in Somalia, and all the fundamental problems persist and some are even getting worse
- Al-Shabaab has become much more hardline over the past three years, and this is partly due to the uncompromising stance of foreign fighters
- The tactical reach and proficiency of al-Shabaab has improved considerably
- Ideological and material support has been extended by al-Qaeda to al-Shabaab
- Continuous and professional propaganda releases have effectively been directed at a vulnerable target group
- Access to Somalia is much easier compared to Iraq or Afghanistan. Infiltration from Europe or North America is relatively easy through resilient recruitment pipelines
- Senior al-Shabaab leaders with a background in Europe or the U.S. may inspire others to join
- Somali diasporas are among the most isolated and vulnerable compared to other migrant groups, and much recruitment has occurred virtually undetected
- Social control mechanisms will continue to prevent al-Shabaab opponents from speaking out or organizing themselves

Speaking against an increased threat and further recruitment of foreign fighters;

- Al-Shabaab's Salafi-Jihadi ideology is not popular in Somalia or in the diasporas
- A possible merger with al-Qaeda will likely mark the point of no return for al-Shabaab
- There is increasing awareness among Somalis, that al-Shabaab is in fact a terrorist organization, and not just a nationalistic liberation movement
- The stigmatizing effect of being associated with Jihadis is having an impact on Somalis in the diaspora
- Stories are circulating in Somali communities about the real fate of the youngsters who disappeared and how they were trapped or died needlessly
- Local, national and transnational counter radicalization networks are beginning to surface because the communities feel threatened
- The understanding of the threat by intelligence services has improved recently

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- ¹ The authors can be contacted at: taarnby.hallundbaek@gmail.com
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