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Country Report on Terrorism 2022 - Chapter 5 - al-Shabaab (AS)

Al-Shabaab

Aka Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahidin; al-Shabab; Shabaab; Youth Wing; Mujahidin al-Shabaab Movement; Mujahideen Youth Movement; Mujahidin Youth Movement; al-Hijra; al Hijra; Muslim Youth Center; the Youth; MYC MYM; Pumwani Muslim Youth; Pumwani Islamist Muslim Youth Center; Hizbul Shabaab; Hisb'ul Shabaab; al-Shabaab al-Islamiya; al-Shabaab al-Islaam; al-Shabaab al-Jihaad; the Unity of Islamic Youth; Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujaahidiin; Harakatul-Shabaab al Mujaahidiin; Mujaahidiin Youth Movement.

Description: Al-Shabaab was designated as an FTO on March 18, 2008. Al-Shabaab pledged allegiance to al-Qa'ida in 2012 and has ties to other al-Qa'ida affiliates, including al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula and al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb. Al-Shabaab formed originally as the militant wing of the former Somali Islamic Courts Council that took over parts of southern Somalia during the second half of 2006. Since the end of 2006, al-Shabaab and associated militias have engaged in violent insurgency using guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics against the transitional governments of Somalia.

Composed of Somali recruits and foreign terrorist fighters, al-Shabaab since 2011 has seen its military capacity and territorial control reduced owing to the efforts of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS; formerly African Union Mission in Somalia [AMISOM]) and Somali forces and to clashes within the group itself. Despite al-Shabaab's loss of urban centers since 2012, the group has maintained its hold on large sections of rural areas throughout Somalia and has conducted attacks in Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda.

Activities: Al-Shabaab has used intimidation and violence to exploit divisions in Somalia and undermine the Somali government, recruit new fighters, extort funding from local populations, and kill activists working to bring about peace through political dialogue. Al-Shabaab has murdered numerous civil society figures, government officials, journalists, international aid workers, and members of non-governmental organizations.

The group has claimed responsibility for numerous high-profile bombings and shootings throughout East Africa against civilians, AMISOM troops and other foreign forces, and Somali officials, including suicide bombings in Kampala, Uganda, in 2010 — its first attacks outside of Somalia, killing 76 people, including a U.S. citizen. Other attacks include the 2013 multiday siege against the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, resulting in the deaths of at least 65 civilians, including foreign nationals from 13 countries as well as six soldiers and police officers; the 2015 raid on Kenya's Garissa University College that killed 148 people; the 2016 attack against a Kenyan AMISOM base that killed more than 100 soldiers, one of the deadliest attacks against AMISOM troops in Somalia; the 2020 attack against U.S. and Kenyan personnel at the Manda Bay Airfield in Kenya, killing three U.S. citizens; and several attacks and bombings against civilians, as well as security and military personnel in 2021.

In 2022, al-Shabaab detonated two car bombs at a busy market intersection near the Ministry of Education in Mogadishu, killing at least 121 people and wounding at least 300. Al-Shabaab also continued to expand its cross-border attacks in 2022, sending hundreds of militants to infiltrate the Ethiopian border, killing 17 people including several Ethiopian soldiers.

Strength: Al-Shabaab is estimated to have between 7,000 and 12,000 members.

Location/Area of Operation: Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda.

Funding and External Aid: Al-Shabaab receives and generates enough income to launch attacks throughout East Africa, including against ATMIS bases and other civilian targets. Al-Shabaab obtains funds through illegal charcoal production and exports, “taxation” of local populations and businesses, and by means of remittances and other money transfers from the Somali diaspora (although these funds are not always intended to support al-Shabaab members).