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Country Report on Terrorism 2019 - Chapter 5 - Al-Shabaab (AS)

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, MYC, Pumwani Muslim Youth, Pumwani Islamist Muslim Youth Center; Hizbul Shabaab; Hisb'ul Shabaab; al-Shabaab al-Islamiya; al-Shabaab al-Islaam; al-Shabaab al-Jihad; 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 was 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.

Al-Shabaab is an official al-Qa'ida (AQ) affiliate and has ties to other AQ affiliates, including al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula and al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb. The group's leader is Ahmed Diriye aka Ahmed Umar aka Abu Ubaidah.

Al-Shabaab is composed of Somali recruits and foreign terrorist fighters. Since 2011, al-Shabaab has seen its military capacity reduced owing to the efforts of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Somali forces, and 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 Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, and Djibouti.

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. The group has claimed responsibility for several high-profile bombings and shootings throughout Somalia targeting AMISOM troops and Somali officials. Al-Shabaab has assassinated numerous civil society figures, government officials, journalists, international aid workers, and members of non-governmental organizations.

Al-Shabaab was responsible for the July 11, 2010, suicide bombings in Kampala, Uganda – its first attack outside of Somalia. The attack, which took place during the World Cup, killed 76 people, including a U.S. citizen. In September 2013, al-Shabaab staged a significant attack against the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya. The multi-day siege resulted in the deaths of at least 65 civilians, including foreign nationals from 13 countries as well as six soldiers and police officers; hundreds of others were injured. In April 2015, al-Shabaab carried out a raid with small arms and grenades on Kenya's Garissa University College that killed 148 people.

Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for one of the deadliest attacks against AMISOM troops in Somalia in January 2016. Using a VBIED and small arms fire, al-Shabaab massed against a Kenyan AMISOM base and killed more than 100 soldiers. In February, al-Shabaab attempted to down Daallo Airlines Flight 321 with 74 passengers on board, but only the suicide bomber was killed in the explosion.

Al-Shabaab continued a steady pace of attacks in 2017, including in car bomb attacks in Mogadishu in January, March, and June that killed more than 70 people. In October 2017, it is believed that al-Shabaab conducted a double truck bombing in a Mogadishu intersection with heavy vehicle and pedestrian traffic that killed more than 500 people and injured 300 others.

In July 2018, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for an attack on Somalia's interior ministry compound, killing at least nine people. In November 2018, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for an attack in which suicide attackers set off two car bombs at a hotel near the headquarters of Somalia's Criminal Investigations Department in Mogadishu, killing at least 17 people.

In 2019, al-Shabaab was involved in more than 1,000 violent events in Somalia and eastern Kenya. In January, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for a hotel attack in Kenya that killed 21 people and injured 28 others. In March, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for an attack on the government ministries in Mogadishu, killing 15 people including a deputy minister and injuring 11 others. In July, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing at the office of Mogadishu mayor Abdirahman Omar Osman, killing eight people including Osman and injuring several others. In October, al-Shabaab conducted an attack on the UN and AMISOM compound in Mogadishu, killing seven people and wounding others. In December, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for an attack on a passenger bus in northeastern Kenya that killed eight people, including Kenyan police officers, and injured others. Later that month, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for a bomb blast in Mogadishu that killed more than 90 people.

Strength: Al-Shabaab is estimated to have between 7,000 and 9,000 members.

Location/Area of Operation Somalia, Kenya, and Uganda

Funding and External Aid: Al-Shabaab receives enough income to launch attacks throughout Somalia, including against AMISOM 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).

ecoi.net summary:



Brief description of the Al-Shabaab (Excerpt of chapter 5 of the country report on terrorism 2019)

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Kenya, Somalia, Uganda

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