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aka The Harakat Shabaab al-Mujahidin; al-Shabab; Shabaab; the Youth; Mujahidin al-Shabaab Movement; Mujahideen Youth Movement; Mujahidin Youth Movement

Description: Designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization 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 undertaken a violent insurgency using guerrilla warfare and terrorist tactics against the transitional governments of Somalia. In 2015, the group continued to fight to discredit and destabilize the Federal Government 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, a Specially Designated Global Terrorist.

Al-Shabaab is composed of a mixture of Somali recruits and foreign fighters. Since 2011, al-Shabaab has seen its military capacity reduced due to the efforts of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Somali forces, and clashes – some violent – within the group itself. Despite al-Shabaab's loss of urban centers since 2012, the group was able to maintain its hold on large sections of rural areas in south-central Somalia in 2015 and conducted multiple attacks in Somalia and Kenya.

Activities: Al-Shabaab has used intimidation and violence to exploit divisions in Somalia and undermine the Federal Government of Somalia, recruit new fighters, and kill activists working to bring about peace through political dialogue and reconciliation. The group has claimed responsibility for several high profile bombings and shootings throughout Somalia targeting AMISOM troops and Somali officials. Al-Shabaab fighters and others claiming allegiance to the group have claimed responsibility for the assassination of numerous civil society figures, government officials, journalists, international aid workers, and members of NGOs.

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 nearly 76 people, including one American citizen. In 2013, al-Shabaab again expanded its area of operations when it staged a significant attack in September against the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya. The

siege resulted in the death of at least 65 civilians, including foreign nationals from 13 countries outside of Kenya and six soldiers and police officers; hundreds of others were injured.

In February 2015, al-Shabaab conducted a suicide attack at the Central Hotel in Mogadishu, Somalia, killing 25 people, including the city's deputy mayor and two legislators. During 2015, the group also claimed responsibility for a March siege at the Maka Al-Mukarramah Hotel in Mogadishu, which killed at least 24 people, including six militants, and an April raid with small arms and suicide vests on Kenya's Garissa University College that left nearly 150 people dead. In June, al-Shabaab carried out a suicide attack against a military intelligence base in Mogadishu and a suicide attack on a diplomatic convoy departing the United Arab Emirates embassy in Mogadishu, in which at least six people were killed. In July, the group assaulted an Ethiopian convoy and base predominantly held by Burundian soldiers in Leego, Somalia, killing dozens of AMISOM troops and in September, conducted an attack on a remote AMISOM base in Janaale, Somalia, which killed 37 AMISOM soldiers. Al-Shabaab also claimed responsibility for the November attack on Mogadishu's Sahafi hotel, where government officials and lawmakers stay. The attack left 13 dead.

Strength: Al-Shabaab is estimated to have several thousand members, including a small cadre of foreign fighters.

Location/Area of Operation: Al-Shabaab has lost full control of significant areas of territory. In September 2012, al-Shabaab lost control of Kismayo, a vital port it used to obtain supplies and funding through taxes. In October 2014, al-Shabaab lost another strategic port in Baraawe to AMISOM and Somali troops. In 2015, an AMISOM offensive forced the group out of two of its strongholds and killed up to 100 personnel. Despite these losses, al-Shabaab continued to control large sections of rural areas in the middle and lower Juba regions, as well as the Bay, Shabelle, and Bakol regions. The group also maintained its presence in northern Somalia along the Golis Mountains and within Puntland's larger urban areas, and launched several attacks against targets in Kenya.

Funding and External Aid: While al-Shabaab has seen its income diminish due to the loss of the strategic port cities of Kismayo, Merka, and Baraawe, it has received enough income to launch multiple attacks per week in Mogadishu, launch complex attacks against AMISOM bases, and expand operations against civilian aviation targets. Al-Shabaab obtained funds through illegal charcoal production and exports, and taxation of local populations and businesses.

Because al-Shabaab is a multi-clan entity, it reportedly receives donations from individuals in the Somali diaspora; the donations are not always intended to support terrorism, however, but also to support family members.

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