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Supporters of the Islamic State group reportedly carried out one of their first attacks in Somalia this month, in a potentially significant development that may presage the group spreading into other parts of East Africa. The incident occurred in Puntland, an autonomous self-governing region in the northeast of Somalia, where government sources were reported by local media as saying that at least seven people were killed in a clash between government troops and an pro-Islamic State militia (Horseed Media, November 27). Although details were sparse, local reports said that the attack occurred near the village of Galgala, and began when the Islamist fighters shelled a military encampment. The rebels are believed to be former members of al-Shabaab who retreated to the mountainous region when the movement was driven out of central Somalia. These subsequently evolved into two separate groups, one loyal to the al-Qaeda-aligned al-Shabaab and one which pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and is led by Shaykh Abdul Qadir Mumi, a former al-Shabaab spiritual leader (VOA, November 25). Mumi had earlier pledged allegiance to Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in an audio recording released online and Mumi's active followers are believed to number around 20 (Reuters, October 23).

The violence occurred against the backdrop of fighting in Galkayo City between the Puntland government and rival clans from Galmudug, which the Puntland authorities have claimed are backed by the country's federal government (Horseed Media, November 19). This development underscores that Islamist militant groups are continuing to evolve, and in some cases become even more extreme, despite the group being driven out of both Mogadishu and central parts of Somalia. The fresh violence also shows that Puntland, whose self-declared autonomous government is weak in part because it is not internationally recognized, remains potentially vulnerable to extremist movements. The Islamic State had previously in October released a video, "From the Land of al-Sham [Syria] to the Mujahideen in Somalia-Wilayat al-Khayr," aimed at encouraging Somalis, both in Somalia and in the Somali diaspora, to support the group (Jihadology, October 3). The video featured Somali Islamic State members, apparently in Iraq or Syria, and included one

British-Somali man telling viewers in English that "establishing Khilafah [caliphate] in Somalia will not only benefit you, but will benefit the Muslims in Somalia and East Africa." Tellingly, however, most of the video was delivered in either English or Arabic, suggesting that the Islamic State has limited Somalis willing and able to star in its media productions. This factor seems likely to limit the group's ability to wean fighters away from al-Shabaab, a group which is not only long established in Somalia, but which is also extensively embedded in Somalia's tribal landscape.

Nonetheless, the emergence of the Islamic State in Somalia has the potential to pose a substantial distraction to al-Shabaab, which is already beleaguered by increasing military pressure from African Union (AU) troops and from increasingly numerous and effective Somali government forces. Indicative of this is that al-Shabaab has threatened to "cut the throat" of any of its members who join the Islamic State (Capital FM [Nairobi], November 24). Al-Shabaab's senior spiritual guide, Shaykh Abdalla, also reportedly warned in a broadcast on the group's "Radio Andulus," that suspected Islamic State supporters would be "immediately beheaded" (The Star [Nairobi], November 25). Backing up its threats with actions, al-Shabaab has reportedly killed a number of former members who have defected to the Islamic State, notably killing Shaykh Hussein Abdi Gedi and four others near Gududley village in Middle Jubba region (VOA, November 22). Gedi was formerly al-Shabaab's deputy governor of the Juba region and was a significant figure within the movement, indicating how seriously al-Shabaab is taking the emerging Islamic State threat to its position as Somalia's premier jihadist group.

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