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Country Report on Terrorism 2021 - 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; 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 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.

Composed of Somali recruits and foreign terrorist fighters, Al-Shabaab since 2011 has seen its military capacity reduced owing to the efforts of the 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 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.

In 2010, Al-Shabaab was responsible for suicide bombings in Kampala, Uganda — its first attacks outside of Somalia. The attacks, which took place during the World Cup, killed 76 people, including a U.S. citizen. In 2013, al-Shabaab staged a significant attack against the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya. The multiday siege resulted in the deaths of at least 65 civilians, including foreign nationals from 13 countries as well as 6 soldiers and police officers. Hundreds of others were injured. In 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 2016. Using a VBIED and small arms fire, al-Shabaab assembled against a Kenyan AMISOM base and killed more than 100 soldiers. Also, that year, al-Shabaab attempted to down Daallo Airlines Flight 159 with 74 passengers on board, but only the suicide bomber was killed in the explosion.

In 2017, al-Shabaab is believed to have 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.

Al-Shabaab was involved in more than 1,000 violent events in Somalia and eastern Kenya in 2019. In 2020, al-Shabaab fighters attacked the United States Armed Forces' Camp Simba in Manda Bay, killing 3 U.S. citizens; attacked a Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) convoy with small arms and grenades in Mandera County, Kenya, killing 1; detonated a car bomb at the gates of the Elite Hotel in Mogadishu, starting a four-hour gun battle with security official that killed at least 16 people; and claimed responsibility for killing 24 Somali troops in the Afgooye District, northwest of Mogadishu.

In January a suicide bomber on a motorcycle attacked a Turkish construction company in Mogadishu, killing at least 5 people and wounding at least 14 others. In April, at least 7 persons were killed and more than 11 others were injured when an al-Shabaab vehicle exploded outside of a police headquarters in Somalia's capital city. In August, al-Shabaab fighters stormed a military base and recaptured the town of Amara, which it had lost to government forces earlier that month. In September, al-Shabaab detonated a car bomb at a Presidential Palace checkpoint in Mogadishu, killing at least eight persons. In November, al-Shabaab was responsible for a large explosion outside a school in Mogadishu that killed at least eight people, including students.

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

Location/Area of Operation: Kenya, Somalia, 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 2021)

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