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Country Report on Terrorism 2020 - Chapter 1 - Somalia

Overview: Al-Shabaab (AS) continued to pose a significant terrorist threat in Somalia and the region in 2020, despite shared efforts by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), the United States, AMISOM, and other partners to combat the group. AS leveraged its influence in southern and central Somalia to extort millions of dollars in revenue from residents and businesses, according to the UN Panel of Experts on Somalia. The group spent much of its money on operations, which this year included IED and indirect fire attacks, suicide bombings, complex attacks against government and civilian facilities, targeted assassinations, and ambushes along supply routes. AS maintained an ability to strike U.S. interests in the region and on January 5 attacked a U.S.-supported Kenya Defense Forces military base in eastern Kenya, killing three U.S. citizens.

The Islamic State branch in Somalia (ISIS-Somalia) faced battlefield setbacks because of CT pressure in Puntland, where the group is concentrated. ISIS-Somalia conducted sporadic attacks in Puntland and Mogadishu this year.

The FGS made modest, localized security gains with significant international assistance. The Somali National Army (SNA), including the U.S.-trained Danab Advanced Infantry Brigade, cleared AS militants from key locations in the Lower Shabelle region and transitioned control of these areas to local authorities. Political and logistical constraints prevented the government from achieving more durable progress on institutional reforms, force generation, and military operations targeting terrorists. AS fighters contested SNA control of defensive positions and supply lines. Somalia suffered from continual, low-intensity conflict between government-aligned forces and terrorists in 2020.

2020 Terrorist Incidents: Some higher-profile terrorist incidents in Somalia included the following:

- On November 27 a suicide bomber targeted a popular gelato shop near Aden Adde International Airport (AAIA), killing eight people. AS claimed responsibility.
- On August 16, militants detonated a vehicle-borne IED (VBIED) and conducted an armed assault on a beachside hotel in Mogadishu, killing 18 persons and injuring 25 others. AS claimed responsibility.
- On August 10, AS prisoners at the Mogadishu Central Prison staged a riot, allowing an AS member to escape. The prisoners had conspired with outsiders to smuggle weapons into the facility.
- On June 23 a suicide bomber attacked a Turkish military base in Mogadishu. AS claimed responsibility.
- On January 8, attackers detonated a VBIED near Parliament and other government buildings, killing at least 5 persons and wounding 10 more. AS claimed responsibility.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: The FGS and local authorities demonstrated a continued commitment to improve the quality of Somalia's law enforcement and judicial entities and made progress on U.S.-supported CT initiatives. In 2020 the Somali Police Force (SPF) increased its capacity to anticipate, investigate, and support the prosecution of terrorism cases. Airport police officers enhanced their observation and investigative skills in support of airport operations and improved screening of passengers, luggage, and cargo entering AAIA. FGS and state leadership continued to recruit and train criminal investigators throughout the country and improve Somalis' access to formal justice systems. Parliament has not yet passed the proposed Targeted Financial Sanctions Law, which would provide another tool to address illegal financial transactions.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Somalia is a member of MENAFATF. The FGS expanded its use of the Financial Reporting Center (FRC), a government-led FIU, to counter money laundering and the financing of terrorism. The FRC is now capable of referring cases for investigation to the SPF and international law enforcement and continues to monitor reports submitted by financial institutions. The government also enacted stricter mobile money regulations for Somalia-based banks and

telecommunications companies, in accordance with legislation passed in 2019. In November the House of the People passed legislation to establish a national identification under a new government agency. The law will require presidential approval and funding before implementation. Uniform, national identification could enable financial institutions to vet customers and curb fraudulent financial activities.

Countering Violent Extremism: The Office of the Prime Minister is responsible for coordinating FGS efforts and international support for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism. The PCVE coordinator, established in 2018, contributed to stabilization efforts that amplified credible voices for peace. The National Strategy for Public Awareness was established by the Ministry of Information, Culture, and Tourism in 2018 as a three-year strategy that includes specific lines of effort to counter violent extremism through the media. This year, the FGS and the SNA increased strategic communications that aimed to deny AS control of public media narratives. The FGS provided vocational training and rehabilitation services to select prison populations. The FGS, with U.S. support, launched a messaging campaign that increased enrollments in defector rehabilitation centers and provided training to community leaders and citizens to help defectors reintegrate into society.

International and Regional Cooperation: The FGS worked with AMISOM to prepare for a transition of security responsibilities from AMISOM to Somali security forces by the end of 2021, as mandated under the Somali Transition Plan (STP). As of December the FGS had not yet finalized a Somali-led revision of the STP that the United Nations had requested by the end of September. The United Nations will review AMISOM’s mandate in 2021.

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