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Country Report on Terrorism 2017 - Chapter 1 - Somalia

Overview: Through the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), Somali National Army (SNA), and U.S. and partner military actions, al-Shabaab experienced significant military pressure during 2017, but the group still maintained control over large portions of the country. Al-Shabaab retained the ability to carry out high-profile attacks using vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs), suicide bombings, mortars, and small arms. Al-Shabaab was believed responsible for an October bombing in Mogadishu that killed more than 500 people and wounded several hundred more. An ISIS-linked group in Puntland was unable to expand its territory beyond a handful of camps in the mountains.

Despite several law enforcement actions in Mogadishu and other major cities to disrupt plots, many leading to prosecutions and convictions, Somalia remained a terrorist safe haven. Terrorists used their relative freedom of movement to obtain resources, recruit fighters, and plan and mount operations within Somalia and in neighboring countries, mainly in Kenya. Following the February presidential election, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) in May launched a Comprehensive Approach to Security (CAS) in partnership with the international community. The CAS includes military, law enforcement, and countering violent extremism-specific “strands” to address Somalia’s security challenges at the federal, state (Federal Member State or FMS), and local levels.

The FGS increased efforts to encourage defections from terrorist groups as part of its broader counterterrorism strategy and made progress in promoting high-level reconciliation with disengaged terrorists, namely former al-Shabaab leader Mukhtar Robow.

Somalia is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

2017 Terrorist Incidents: Al-Shabaab used a range of asymmetric tactics in its targeted campaign against AMISOM and Somali security forces, members of parliament, and other government personnel, as well as soft targets with less security measures, such as hotels, restaurants, and cafes. The group launched multiple, often coordinated attacks, on a weekly or monthly basis throughout the country, using suicide bombers, VBIEDs, ambush-style raids, targeted killings, and mortar attacks. Al-Shabaab also continued to use its tactic of amassing fighters to overrun AMISOM or SNA bases, allowing the group

to capture weapons, ammunition, uniforms, and other equipment to replenish its supplies. The ISIS affiliate in Puntland also carried out a number of suicide bombings, targeted killings, and small arms attacks in Bosasso and smaller towns, including one in May that killed at least five security officers.

Other notable incidents included:

- On January 2, al-Shabaab employed two VBIEDs to attack a perimeter checkpoint at Mogadishu International Airport, which additionally houses the United Nations and AMISOM headquarters as well as numerous diplomatic missions. Police reported and U.S. mission personnel confirmed at least seven security personnel and civilians dead, with approximately 17 injured.
- On June 7, al-Shabaab fighters using VBIEDs, small arms, and mortars attacked and overran an SNA base in Puntland. Security forces reported approximately 70 soldiers and civilians killed.
- On October 14, a VBIED exploded at a major traffic crossing in Mogadishu, killing more than 500 people and injuring approximately 300 more, according to an FGS investigative committee. Al-Shabaab did not claim responsibility but is believed responsible.
- On October 28-29, al-Shabaab fighters attacked a Mogadishu hotel with a VBIED and small arms, followed by a lengthy standoff with police. At least 29 police and civilians were killed, according to police.
- On December 14, an al-Shabaab suicide bomber attacked the Somali Police Force Academy. Police reported at least 18 officers were killed and 15 injured.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: There are no significant updates to the 2016 report (<https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272229.htm#SOMALIA>), with the exception of border management. Somalia’s porous borders contributed to regional insecurity as al-Shabaab and others continued to move throughout the region mostly undetected. Most countries do not recognize Somali identity documents, leaving Somalia with few options for travel document verification and regional partners unable to properly vet Somali travelers. Somalia has a national immigration screening watchlist and uses Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) screening equipment and software provided by the International Organization for Migration at 15 ports of entry. MIDAS provides biographic and biometric screening capabilities but procedural and network connectivity deficiencies limited its effectiveness. There was little law enforcement cooperation between the FGS and FMS governments, which hampered U.S. law enforcement’s ability to investigate suspected terrorists, kidnappings, and other terrorism incidents.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Somalia is an observer to the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force, a Financial Action Task Force-style regional body. There have been no significant changes since the 2016 report (<https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272229.htm#SOMALIA>). The Government of Somalia continued to work towards strengthening anti-money laundering and

countering the finance of terrorism bodies, including the Financial Reporting Center, the country’s financial intelligence unit. For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the *2018 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes* (<http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>).

Countering Violent Extremism (CVE): Within the CAS process, the Somali government re-launched Somalia’s 2016 National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism in September, and federal ministries and FMS counterparts agreed on a revised National Strategy to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism in November. With support from the European Union, three FMS governments developed regional action CVE plans, and three others were underway at year’s end. The FGS supported CVE research, including a study published in December based on interviews with 70 former al-Shabaab members. The FGS also funded counter-messaging efforts and supported religious and secular curriculum development.

Following the February presidential election, the FGS announced its intent to offer amnesty to any al-Shabaab members willing to denounce terrorism and support the FGS. At the London Conference in May, the FGS stated its intent to develop new amnesty legislation as part of the CAS, and subsequently continued messaging encouraging al-Shabaab members to defect. A donor-supported effort to reintegrate former al-Shabaab combatants continued to expand, primarily through reintegration centers that have been operating in Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baidoa, and Beletweyne for more than three years. Although exact estimates were difficult to verify given limited government oversight of these programs, officials have attributed higher defection rates to ongoing counterterrorism pressure from U.S. airstrikes as well as funding shortfalls that often strain al-Shabaab payments to low-level fighters. In August, former senior al-Shabaab commander and co-founder Muktar Robow publicly denounced al-Shabaab and pledged his support to FGS reconciliation efforts. The FGS welcomed Robow’s announcement and reiterated its call for al-Shabaab members to leave the group.

International and Regional Cooperation: There are no significant updates to the 2016 report (<https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272229.htm#SOMALIA>). The Somali National Army partners with AMISOM, which includes military forces from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda.

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Austrian Red Cross

Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research
and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien

T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583

F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589

info@ecoi.net

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