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Country Report on Terrorism 2018 - Chapter 1 - Somalia

Overview: AMISOM, the Somali National Army (SNA), and U.S. and partner military forces maintained pressure on al-Shabaab in 2018. However, the group still maintained influence over large portions of the country. Al-Shabaab retained the ability to carry out high-profile attacks using VBIEDs, suicide bombings, mortars, and small arms. ISIS-Somalia, located primarily in Puntland, expanded activities, establishing influence in Mogadishu with an intimidation and extortion campaign while declaring war on al-Shabaab.

Despite military pressure and law enforcement actions to disrupt plots (some 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. The Federal Government of Somalia’s (FGS’s) Comprehensive Approach to Security (CAS) partnership with the international community includes military, law enforcement, and CVE-specific “strands” to address Somalia’s security challenges at the federal, state (Federal Member State or FMS), and local levels.

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

2018 Terrorist Incidents: Both ISIS-Somalia and al-Shabaab used a range of asymmetric tactics against AMISOM and Somali security forces, members of parliament, and other government personnel, as well as soft targets with fewer security measures, such as hotels, restaurants, and cafes. Al-Shabaab launched multiple, often coordinated attacks, on a regular basis throughout the country, using suicide bombers, VBIEDs, ambush-style raids, targeted killings, and mortar attacks, and 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. Separately, ISIS-Somalia also carried out a number of roadside IED and small arms attacks, suicide bombings, and targeted killings, primarily in Bosasso in Puntland and the Bakara Market area of Mogadishu, as well as in smaller towns.

Other notable incidents included the following:

- On March 2, al-Shabaab assaulted Somali and AMISOM forces in Lower and Middle Shabelle. After launching an attack on the town of Balaad, al-Shabaab ambushed an AMISOM convoy, killing at least seven Burundi National Defense Force troops, destroying multiple vehicles, and stealing logistics equipment and

weapons. Al-Shabaab also simultaneously attacked an SNA base in nearby Afgoye with a car bomb, killing one SNA soldier and wounding several others, illustrating their continued capacity to launch multiple, simultaneous, complex attacks.

- On October 1, al-Shabaab conducted a suicide VBIED attack on a European Union Training Mission convoy leaving the SNA Headquarters on Industrial Road in Mogadishu.
- On October 13, al-Shabaab conducted twin suicide bomb attacks in the South West State (SWS) capital of Baidoa, killing 22 people and wounding another 40 in the first complex terrorist attack in Baidoa since February 2016. Bombers targeted the Badar restaurant and Bilan hotel, popular locations frequented by politicians and government officials, according to local sources. Some officials maintain that the attacks were an assassination attempt against former al-Shabaab leader-turned-SWS presidential candidate Mukhtar Robow.
- On November 7, al-Shabaab abducted three NGO workers in the Gedo region while they were undertaking a healthcare outreach program.
- On November 9, al-Shabaab conducted a complex attack involving three VBIEDs and five shooters at a hotel in Mogadishu, breaching the hotel wall, but failing to enter the hotel before being killed by responding security forces and hotel security, killing 52 and injuring another 106. The hotel reportedly housed meetings and planning activities for officials and politicians involved in the SWS election, scheduled for the following week.
- In a two-week period in early November, suspected members of ISIS killed 11 employees of Somalia’s leading telecommunications company, Hormuud. A Hormuud manager told local media the victims were killed after the telecommunication company declined to pay extortion fees.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: There were no significant changes to Somalia’s counterterrorism legal framework and law enforcement procedures in 2018.

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 screen 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 16 ports of entry. MIDAS provides biographic and biometric screening capabilities, but procedural and network connectivity deficiencies limited its effectiveness.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: In 2018, Somalia gained membership into Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF), a FATF-style regional body. The Somali government continued to strengthen AML/CFT efforts, including by developing the Financial Reporting Center, the country’s FIU, which achieved initial operating capability in November.

Countering Violent Extremism: The Office of the Prime Minister leads the CAS Strand 4 on the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism (P/CVE), and a P/CVE coordinator was appointed in 2018. Following the 2017 presidential election, the FGS announced its intent to offer amnesty to any al-Shabaab members willing to denounce terrorism and support the FGS. A donor-supported effort to reintegrate former al-Shabaab combatants continued, primarily through reintegration centers operating in Mogadishu, Kismayo, and Baidoa.

International and Regional Cooperation: There were no significant changes in 2018. The SNA collaborates with AMISOM, which includes military forces from Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda. According to media sources, the United States, the United Kingdom, the EU, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, China, and Qatar also provide significant bilateral support.

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