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Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Somalia

Somalia

Overview: Al-Shabaab continued to pose a significant terrorist threat in Somalia and the wider region in 2021, despite shared efforts by the Federal Government of Somalia, the United States, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and other partners to combat the group. Al Shabaab continued to leverage 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 conducted deadly operations, including IED attacks, suicide bombings, complex attacks against government and civilian facilities, targeted assassinations, ambushes along supply routes, and indirect fire. There was one complex hotel attack in 2021 in which al-Shabaab's target appeared to have been a high-profile Somali National Army (SNA) general.

Throughout the reporting period, al-Shabaab also deployed several car bombs against tea shops and restaurants in Mogadishu likely targeting security forces known to congregate therein. Al Shabaab tactics, techniques, and procedures focused on targeted attacks, and the group maintained an ability to strike U.S. interests in the region. It conducted a major propaganda campaign late in the year to increase recruitment of FTFs.

The Islamic State branch in Somalia (IS-Somalia) focused its efforts on revenue generation, extortion activities, and low-level targeted attacks with grenades and an occasional IED in Puntland and Mogadishu. It faced battlefield setbacks in Puntland, where the group is concentrated, owing to pressure from al-Shabaab.

The Federal Government of Somalia made modest, localized security gains with significant international assistance. The SNA, including the U.S.-trained Danab Advanced Infantry Brigade, conducted clearing operations against al-Shabaab in the Benadir, Galgaduud, Lower Jubba, Lower Shabelle, Middle Shabelle, and Mudug regions and transitioned control of some of these areas to local authorities. Holding recovered areas remained a significant challenge, inhibiting stabilization efforts in those areas. Political instability and logistical constraints prevented the government from achieving more durable progress on institutional reforms, force generation, and military operations targeting terrorists. Al-Shabaab fighters contested SNA control of defensive positions and supply lines.

2021 Terrorist Incidents: Somalia experienced continual, low-intensity fighting between government-aligned forces and terrorists in 2021. Some higher-profile terrorist incidents included the following:

- On January 31 a car bomb detonated at the Hotel Afrik in Mogadishu, and gunmen stormed inside, killing five persons, including an American, before security forces responded and killed the attackers. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility.
- On March 5 an attack on the Bosasso, Puntland, jail killed seven security officers and freed almost 400 prisoners, many of them members of al-Shabaab, which claimed responsibility.
- On April 2 a car bomb detonated at the SNA base at Bariire in Lower Shabelle while a simultaneous attack occurred nearby at the Awdheegle SNA base with a car bomb and fighters. At least 48 soldiers were reportedly killed. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility.
- On May 10, a suicide bomber killed six police officers and wounded six more at a police station in Mogadishu. An American citizen was also killed. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility.

- On June 28, multiple car bombs were used to assault a military base in Galmudug, triggering a fight with government troops and armed locals, and killing an estimated 30 people, including soldiers and civilians. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility.
- On August 18 the mayor of a town in central Puntland was killed at a tea shop by a large group of militants with firearms. IS-Somalia claimed responsibility.
- On November 25 a suicide car bomb attacked a UN convoy in Mogadishu, killing at least eight persons and wounding 17. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility.

Legislation, Law Enforcement, and Border Security: The Federal Government of Somalia and local authorities demonstrated a commitment to improve the quality of Somalia's law enforcement and judicial entities and made progress on U.S.-supported counterterrorism initiatives. In 2021, the Somali Police Force (SPF) leveraged U.S. mentorship and increased its capacity to investigate and prosecute terrorism cases. Somalia hosted an adviser through the U.S. Watchlisting Assistance and Support Program to help develop a national-level watchlisting system. The Federal Government of Somalia and state leadership continued to recruit and train criminal investigators throughout the country and improve Somalis' access to formal justice systems.

Countering the Financing of Terrorism: Somalia is a member of MENAFATF. Al-Shabaab uses Somalia-based banks and mobile money services to manage its funds. The Federal Government of Somalia expanded its use of the Financial Reporting Center (FRC), a government-led financial intelligence entity, 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. U.S. funding supported the FRC's messaging campaign through outreach activities and the establishment of a public reporting hotline.

Countering Violent Extremism: The Office of the Prime Minister is responsible for coordinating Federal Government of Somalia efforts and international support for the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE). In 2021, the Federal Government of Somalia and the SNA increased strategic communications that aimed to deny al-Shabaab control of public media narratives. Somalia, with Bureau of Counterterrorism support, continued a messaging campaign that increased enrollments in defector rehabilitation centers and created a resurrected defector hotline.

International and Regional Cooperation: The Federal Government of Somalia worked with African Union (AU) and international partners to start preparing for a new AU-led mission to succeed the African Union mission in Somalia.