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Somalia: Al-Shabaab [Al-Shabab], including leadership, structure, objectives, activities, areas of operation, ability to track persons of interest, and individuals who are targeted (2021–March 2023)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

According to sources, al-Shabaab is a "terrorist" (CFR 2022-12-16) or "insurgent" group formed in the 2000s (CFR 2022-12-16; US 2020-01-16). The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), an "independent" and "nonpartisan" US-based think tank and publisher on international affairs (CFR n.d.), states that the group aims to make Somalia an Islamic state (2022-12-16). According to a report from Tricia Bacon [1], the Director of the Policy Anti-Terrorism Hub at American University in Washington, DC, the ideology of al-Shabaab is Salafi jihadism and the group believes they are fighting "injustice" from external forces, including "apostate regimes" (Bacon 2022-03, 3, 36). According to the US Department of State's *Country Reports on Terrorism 2020*, al-Shabaab is a "significant terrorist threat" in Somalia (US 2021-12-16). Similarly, a UN Security Council (UNSC) report by a "[p]anel of [e]Experts on Somalia" notes that al-Shabaab is the "greatest threat to the peace, security and stability of Somalia" (UN 2021-10-06, para. 5). In a case-study report [2] focusing on militias in Somalia and published by United Nations University (UNU), a think tank based in Japan (UNU n.d.), Vanda Felbab-Brown, a senior fellow at Brookings Institution, notes that al-Shabaab's numbers have "substantially increase[d]," going from 2,000–3,000 in 2017 to 5,000–7,000 in 2020 (Felbab-Brown 2020-04-14, 120). A report by the US Congressional Research Service (CRS) notes that the US Department of State estimated in 2019 that there were between 7,000 and 9,000 members (US 2020-01-16). Voice of America (VOA), a US-based international broadcaster that is funded by the US Congress (VOA n.d.), notes Somali security data states that there are "as many as" 10,000 fighters in al-Shabaab, active in Somalia and "parts of Kenya" (2022-03-27). A July 2022 UNSC report by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team notes that there are between 7,000 and 12,000 fighters (UN 2022-07-15, para. 21).

2. Leadership, Objectives and Structure

According to CFR, ties to al-Qaeda emerged from 2006 to 2008 and the leaders of al-Shabaab declared allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2012 (2022-12-06, 2). Similarly, the report from the US CRS notes that "a formal affiliation" between the two groups was announced in 2012 and that while al-Shabaab operates "independently," its leaders "broadly share" al-Qaeda's "transnational agenda" and have ties with their affiliates, including al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) (US 2020-01-16). An article from the *Washington Post* defines al-Shabaab as "one of al-Qaeda's wealthiest and strongest global affiliates" (2022-12-14).

In an interview with the Research Directorate, a senior analyst with International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) noted that al-Shabaab is "secretive" and does not want its leaders publicly identified (Senior Analyst 2023-01-25). Similarly, Bacon notes that there are "established" leadership structures, but it is "not clear" how decisions are "currently" being made (2022-03, 25). Sources note that the overall *emir* (leader) is Ahmed Diriye, also known as Abu Ubaidah, who took over after the previous leader was killed in 2014 (US 2020-01-16; CFR 2022-12-16). Sources note that the leadership bodies are an executive council (CFR 2022-12-16) and a broader *shura* [council] (Senior Analyst 2023-01-25; Bacon 2022-03, 24). Citing her interview with a former Somali government official, Bacon further notes that it is debated whether the executive council still manages the group or if decisions are made at a lower level (2022-03, 25–26). According to the Senior Analyst, each of the main regions has a *wali* who operates as a governor of that region, and shadow district officials are appointed as well, but it is unclear how individuals receive these roles (2023-01-25). The same source also stated that the leader is chosen by the shura and it is "likely" that "a lot" of appointments are made by the leader through consultation with advisors (Senior Analyst 2023-01-25). The Crisis Group Senior Analyst noted that, although "not always" the case, the group prefers that

regional appointments go to individuals who are not from the area, who would not have local ties (Senior Analyst 2023-01-25). A Crisis Group report further indicates that, when al-Shabaab takes over an area, they replace elders from local institutions who have fled or who "resist collaborating" and appoint their own elders to work on their behalf; however, the appointees "often struggle" to be viewed as legitimate (2022-06-21, 8). The same source also notes that al-Shabaab has "internal coherence" and a "unifying Salafi-jihadist ideology" (Crisis Group 2022-06-21, 5). Similarly, Bacon notes that the executive council is "unified, operating well, and experiencing limited internal tensions" (2022-03, 25-26).

According to sources, a goal of al-Shabaab is to establish an Islamic state (Bacon 2022-03, 97; US 2020-01-16; CFR 2022-12-16). Bacon states that the group believes that Sharia law is needed for governance and that they are the "only" ones able to achieve this; citing interviews with academic and media sources, Bacon further states that the group sees the government as "un-Islamic," having "fail[ed]" to implement Sharia law (2022-03, 39). Felbab-Brown states that al-Shabaab's version of sharia is "considered extreme," with its interpretation largely rejected by Somalis as it includes "beheadings, stoning, amputations and widespread repression against women" (Felbab-Brown 2020-04-14, 117). The report from the CRS states that al-Shabaab leaders have "repeatedly expressed their commitment to global jihad" (US 2020-01-16). Sources note a goal of uniting ethnic Somali-inhabited areas in East Africa under an Islamist government (US 2020-01-16) or Islamic state (CFR 2022-12-16). Bacon states that "above all," al-Shabaab "seeks an Islamic state under its version of Sharia law in Somalia" and that while they have a regional perspective, they prioritize Somalia (2022-03, 39, emphasis omitted).

Bacon also notes, citing her interview with a retired US official, that a "core interest" for the group's leaders is gaining power and, Bacon states, religion is used as a "tool" to do so (2022-03, 84). Sources note

that an objective is to oust the government (Bacon 2022-03, 97; Felbab-Brown 2020-04-14, 117; US 2021-03-30, 6), which the group sees as "[W]estern-backed" (US 2021-03-30, 6). Felbab-Brown also notes that "despite its brutality" "al-Shabaab's rule" has allowed municipal administrations to "function," "basic security" to be enforced, and local economic activity to be "sustain[ed]" (2020-04-14, 117).

2.1 Recruitment

According to Felbab-Brown, recruitment messaging for international audiences focuses on a "sense of belonging, global jihad and the protection of Somalia against 'infidel' invaders," and the messaging for local youth focuses on "injustice and the abuse of power" (2020-04-14, 120). Felbab-Brown further notes that recruitment is "complex" and "varies based on location, the individual, and the needs of al-Shabaab at a particular time" (2020-04-14, 121).

Sources note that al-Shabaab forcibly recruits children (Crisis Group 2022-06-21, 8; Bacon 2022-03, 93; Felbab-Brown 2020-04-14, 120). According to Crisis Group, citing interviews with people who "lived under the Al-Shabaab administration," "typical[ly]," the group demands local clans and families provide "one of every two to three boys younger than 13 per family" (2022-06-21, 8). Bacon states that the requirement for clans to send "a certain number" of children to indoctrination institutes was described by interviewees, including a think tank analyst and a former government official, as a "principal" recruitment method (2022-03, 93). The UNSC panel of experts report notes that interviews with "displaced community leaders" in May 2021 indicated that al-Shabaab "demanded" that rural villages in the Hudur [Xuddur], Bakool region volunteer children aged 12 to 15 (UN 2021-10-06, para. 123). The same source further states that reports indicate that al-Shabaab also abducts children from Islamic schools, noting that 35 boys were abducted from

schools in the Hiraan and Bay regions (UN 2021-10-06, para. 124). The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights for 2021* provides the following information:

Children in al-Shabaab training camps were subjected to grueling physical training, weapons training, inadequate diet, physical punishment, and forced religious training in line with al-Shabaab's ideology. The training also included forcing children to punish and execute other children. Al-Shabaab used children in direct hostilities, including placing them in front of other fighters to serve as human shields and suicide bombers. The organization sometimes used children to plant roadside bombs and other explosive devices. In addition, al-Shabaab used children in support roles, such as carrying ammunition, water, and food; removing injured and dead militants; gathering intelligence; and serving as guards. The country's press frequently reported accounts of al-Shabaab indoctrinating children according to the insurgency's extremist ideology at schools and forcibly recruiting them into its ranks. (US 2022-04-12, 17)

3. Areas of Operation and Activities

The UNSC panel of experts report notes that as of September 2021, areas under direct control of al-Shabaab included "most towns in Jamame District, Lower Juba; Jilib, Bu'ale and Sakow in Middle Juba; parts of Baardheere in Gedo; towns located in southern Dinsor and Burhakaba Districts in Bay Region; Adale and Adan Yabal in Middle Shabelle; and El Dher, El Bur and Harardhere in Galmudug" (UN 2021-10-06, para. 11). The Senior Analyst noted that it is difficult to say with certainty which areas al-Shabaab controls, due to the fact that the situation is consistently changing as the government focuses on pushing them out (2023-01-25). However, the source noted that the area in which al-Shabaab has the "strongest" control is southern Somalia, in Jubaland [Jubbaland], with the region of middle Juba "completely" controlled, with presence in rural parts of lower Juba and the northern region (Senior

Analyst 2023-01-25). CFR notes that al-Shabaab continues to launch lethal attacks in the south of the country (2022-12-16). According to Crisis Group, the activities of al-Shabaab "diminish in intensity" further from the south-central region (2022-06-21, 21). However, the same source also notes that al-Shabaab "increasingly" enters urban areas that are under government and security forces' control using an intelligence wing which "reportedly" has "infiltrated the government and security institutions" (Crisis Group 2022-06-21, 9). According to the US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2021*, government and African Union (AU) security forces hold "most urban centers," while al-Shabaab has "control or influence over land areas"; citing the UN and noting that al-Shabaab's territorial control was "fluid," the same source notes that the group has "recovered" area in the Lower Shabelle region and in the Galmudug area, and "retained" their capacity for attacks in Mogadishu (US 2022-06-02, 5–6). The Senior Analyst further stated that central Somalia is "the most fluid right now," particularly Hirshabelle and Galmudug; that in the South West, Lower Shabelle, Bay and Bakool there is an al-Shabaab presence in rural areas and encircling "most" urban areas; and that there is a "limited guerrilla type of control" in the north, in Puntland, outside the port town of Bosaso (2023-01-25). According to *Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI) 2022*, which "assesses the transformation toward democracy and a market economy as well as the quality of governance in 137 countries," al-Shabaab controls "large parts" of the South-West state, Jubaland and Hirshabelle, and al-Shabaab is active in Puntland, but the state is run by the government (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022, 2, 13). US *Country Reports 2021* notes that in Puntland and Galmudug states, the Lower Shabelle, Middle Shabelle, Lower Juba, Baidoa, and Hiiraan regions, "clashes" between al-Shabaab and clan-based forces resulted in deaths (US 2022-04-12, 15).

Sources note that territories in the states of Hirshabelle and Galmudug were recaptured from al-Shabaab by security forces (AFP 2023-01-20; Crisis Group 2022-12). Crisis Group notes that the South-West state was "precarious" with the government taking back Daynuunay village and Goofgaduud town (Bay region), but al-Shabaab once again occupied Goofgaduud on 28 December 2022 (2022-12). Radio France internationale (RFI) stated that the town of Harardhere, in Galmudug, had been retaken after ten years of al-Shabaab control (2023-01-17). According to Al Jazeera, the "stronghold" port town of Harardhere and the nearby town of Galcad were taken by government forces (2023-01-16).

Sources note, however, that al-Shabaab has responded to efforts by the government and security forces to recapture territory by carrying out [translation] "retaliatory" (AFP 2023-01-20) or "high-profile" attacks (Al Jazeera 2023-01-16). According to CFR, after an area is recaptured from al-Shabaab, forces do not have the capacity to hold the area and al-Shabaab returns (2022-12-16).

According to the UNSC panel of experts report, al-Shabaab uses "violent extremist tactics," including "hit-and-run attacks" on regions with security forces, the exploitation of clan competition, and the blocking of supply routes and prevention of resources from reaching villages, in order to "control the population, influence political outcomes and perpetuate a climate of fear across central and southern Somalia" (UN 2021-10-06, para. 6). CFR notes that in regions it controls, al-Shabaab "enforces its own harsh interpretation of sharia" which includes prohibiting the sale of khat (a narcotic plant), the shaving of beards, and some types of movies and music, and carrying out stoning and amputations against those "suspected" of adultery and theft (2022-12-16). According to the US *Trafficking in Persons Report for 2021*, al-Shabaab "exploit[s]" local populations through "illegal taxes, indiscriminate attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure," and human trafficking (US 2021-07-01). Felbab-Brown states that if

individuals cannot pay taxes to al-Shabaab "in the form of children," and "onerous" financial or livestock payments, they face death or forced displacement (2020-04-14, 124). The US *Trafficking in Persons Report for 2021* further notes that

[a]necdotal evidence indicates al-Shabaab continues to facilitate human trafficking crimes, using deception, infiltration of *madrassas* and mosques, coercion or harassment of clan elders or family members, school raids, and abductions to recruit and subsequently force victims—including children hailing mostly from south-central Somalia and Kenya—into sexual slavery, military support roles, direct combat, and marriages to al-Shabaab militants. ... Al-Shabaab continued to enslave an indeterminate number of young girls and exploited them in forced marriage and sexual servitude during the reporting period [of April 2020 to March 2021]. (US 2021-07-01, italics in original)

Felbab-Brown states that children are used for terrorist actions and suicide attacks and that al-Shabaab are "regular perpetrators" of rape (2020-04-14, 124).

Crisis Group notes that al-Shabaab avoids direct military combat and "rarely" engages in "large" battles but uses "smaller" ambushes at locations of their choosing in order to determine the pace of the conflict (2022-06-21, 6). Similarly, the UNSC panel of experts report notes that in regions not under al-Shabaab's direct control, the group conducts operations on supply routes or punishes local leaders in an effort to make the leaders support al-Shabaab against security forces (UN 2021-10-06, para. 12). Sources note that in some areas over which they do not have direct control, al-Shabaab enforces taxation (Felbab-Brown 2020-04-14, 121; Crisis Group 2022-06-21, 9). Crisis Group notes that in cities, al-Shabaab has operatives who facilitate "elaborate extortion rackets" which undermine government authority (2022-06-21, i). The same source further notes that in rural areas under its control, al-Shabaab provides "basic" services which provide revenue through taxation and assist in

recruitment; the group and its services hold "some appeal" and al-Shabaab has "roots in society" (Crisis Group 2022-06-21, i). Felbab-Brown similarly notes that al-Shabaab performs better than other actors and has a "reputation" for providing justice and dispute resolution by delivering "swift, effective, and – crucially – noncorrupt rulings to disputes, based on sharia," which results in people even from government-controlled regions using al-Shabaab for dispute resolution (2020-04-14, 124). Felbab-Brown further notes that the rulings offer no "formal safeguards," are "underpinned by the ruthless use of force," and can result in punishments such as stoning and cutting of limbs or, if a ruling is disobeyed, execution (2020-04-14, 124).

3.1 Financing

According to CFR, al-Shabaab has built "an extensive racketeering operation that includes checkpoint tolls; taxes on imported goods; and zakat, an annual religious tax" (2022-12-16). Similarly, Bacon notes that al-Shabaab has an "efficient and effective extortion racket" which is portrayed as taxation, but which makes "demands" which "outstrip" the [limited] services it provides (2022-03, 85). According to Bacon, the services provided include "protection from the group"; those who do not pay taxes face threats, kidnapping, or being killed (2022-03, 85). *BTI 2022* states that al-Shabaab has a "centralized," "organized," and "monitored" taxation system which operates in areas under its control, as well as areas controlled by the state, through which they collect fees "on agriculture, vehicle registration, transport, and livestock sales" and according to which they provide "protection" to the communities they control, by relying "heavily on violence and intimidation" (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022, 10). Crisis Group notes that in government-held areas, al-Shabaab extorts businesses through practices such as taxes on shipping containers and annual payments based their calculations of the businesses' profits (2022-06-21, 10). The Crisis Group Senior Analyst further stated that in urban areas,

businesses pay them taxes or face threats of violence; in rural areas, al-Shabaab's biggest source of finances are "probably" checkpoints on supply routes, with a lesser source being taxes on businesses (Senior Analyst 2023-01-25). The UNSC panel of experts report notes that the "most lucrative revenue stream" is taxation, including that collected from the operation of approximately 100 checkpoints on vehicles and goods in transit, but the group also receives funding from zakat, illicit *infaq* ("[v]oluntary financial contribution[s] to support fighters"), and kidnapping ransom charges; thus, al-Shabaab has a domestic revenue system and does not have to "rely" on foreign funding (UN 2021-10-06, para. 49, 54). Felbab-Brown notes that businesses are less inclined to pay government taxes as they pay al-Shabaab taxes to "maintain security" (2020-04-14, 123). According to the Hiraal Institute, a Somalia-based think tank focused on promoting peace and security, there is an "almost universal desire" to pay taxes only to the government, and not to al-Shabaab, but individuals do pay the group out of "credible" fear for their lives (2020-10, i, 1).

The Hiraal Institute states, citing telephone interviews with al-Shabaab "officials," that the monthly tax amounts to "at least" [US]\$15 million, with "more than" half coming from Mogadishu (2020-10, 5). According to a February 2022 UNSC report by the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, al-Shabaab is "capable" of collecting [US]\$2–\$10 million per month (UN 2022-02-03, para. 20). The July 2022 UNSC report by the same team notes that al-Shabaab earns [US]\$50–\$100 million annually and [US]\$24 million is available to be spent on weapons and explosives (UN 2022-07-15, para. 22).

4. Attacks and Targets

US Country Reports on Terrorism 2020 indicates that al-Shabaab spent "much" of its money on operations in 2020 which included Improvised Explosive Device (IED) and "indirect fire attacks, suicide

bombings, complex attacks against government and civilian facilities, targeted assassinations, and ambushes along supply routes" (US 2021-12-16, 37). In a press release, the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) notes that as of November 2021, there had been a 30 percent increase in civilian casualties compared to the previous year, with 613 civilians killed and 948 injured; 315 of the deaths and 686 of the injuries were due to IEDs, with "at least" 94 percent of these attributed to Al-Shabaab (UN 2022-11-14). A UNSC Report of the Secretary General on the situation in Somalia states that there was a 17 percent increase in al-Shabaab's activities from 2020 to 2021 with attacks "primarily" targeting Somali security forces and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) through the use of IEDs (UN 2022-02-08, para. 19). The same source further notes that the regions "most affected" by al-Shabaab activity in 2021 were the Shabelle Hoose, Banaadir and Shabelle Dhexe regions (UN 2022-02-08, para. 19). The UNSC panel of experts report also noted that in 2021, "key" cities and towns such as Mogadishu, Baidoa, Galkayo and Jowhar faced assassinations, mortar attacks or the use of IEDs (UN 2021-10-06, para. 6). According to Somali Peace Line (SPL), a local NGO in Somalia (Peace Insight n.d.), the regions "most affected" by al-Shabaab attacks in 2021 were Banaadir, Lower Shabelle and Middle Shabelle regions and al-Shabaab targets where civilians and security personnel were killed included "security checkpoints, Custodial Corps headquarters, police stations, restaurants, and hotels" (2021-12-31, 4).

According to the UNSC panel of experts report, from 16 December 2020 to 31 August 2021, there were 1,047 attacks on the Somali National Army, federal member state and international forces [attributed to] al-Shabaab, occurring "mainly" in Jubaland, South-West State, Hirshabelle and Galmudug (UN 2021-10-06, para. 17). The same report also notes that person- or vehicle-borne explosive device attacks were the "most effective" at targeting security forces and government

officials and that "most" of these attacks took place in civilian sites and caused a "large number" of civilian casualties (UN 2021-10-06, Annex 2.4).

Sources provide the following examples of attacks attributed to and/or claimed by al-Shabaab from 2021 to January 2023:

- Between 2 and 27 January 2021, attacks in Lower Shabelle, Middle Shabelle, Lower Juba, Gedo and Hiraaan regions left "at least" 44 security personnel, civilians, and officials dead; in Mogadishu, from 5 to 23 January, roadside bombs killed "at least" 15 security personnel, civilians, and officials (Crisis Group 2022-12).
- A 31 January 2021 attack on the Afrik Hotel in Mogadishu killed 5 people, including former defense minister General Mohamed Nur Galaal (CNN 2021-02-01; US 2022-06-02, 5).
- Attacks from 1 to 21 February 2021 in Mudug, Galguduud, Hiraaan, Middle Shabelle and Lower Shabelle regions killed "at least" 26 security personnel and civilians; in Mogadishu, a suicide bombing on 13 February left 1 civilian dead, and the next day 3 civilians were shot by "suspected" Al-Shabaab militants (Crisis Group 2022-12). On 28 February there were two bombings resulting in the death of 1 civilian and "at least" 2 security personnel (Crisis Group 2022-12).
- On 23 February 2021, a suicide vest detonated near a police station in Mogadishu's Hamarweyne district, resulting in 3 people injured; al-Shabaab was "suspected" to be responsible (US 2022-06-02, 5).
- On 5 March 2021, a car bomb went off near a restaurant in Mogadishu, killing "at least" 10 people (US 2022-04-12, 4) or "[a]t least" 20 people (Al Jazeera 2021-03-05; CNN 2021-03-06) and injuring 30 others (Al Jazeera 2021-03-05; CNN 2021-03-06; US 2022-04-12, 4); al-Shabaab was "blamed" for the attack (Al Jazeera 2021-03-05) or claimed responsibility (CNN 2021-03-06).
- In Mogadishu on 3 April 2021, 5 civilians were killed by suicide bombings, and on 28 April, "at least" 7 civilians were killed, with al-Shabaab "suspected" to be behind the attacks; on 21 April, a mortar attack on the presidential palace resulted in the deaths of 3 people (Crisis Group 2022-12).

- Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for an attack on 15 June 2021, in which a suicide bomber killed "at least" 10 and injured 20 inside a military base in Mogadishu (VOA 2021-06-15).
- On 2 July 2021, an IED went off at a restaurant in Mogadishu's Shibis district, killing 12 people and injuring "at least" 7 (US 2022-04-12, 4).
- On 21 July 2021, 2 UN contractors were injured when mortars were fired at the airport in Mogadishu (US 2022-06-02, 5).
- On 25 September 2021, a car bomb exploded near the presidential palace, killing "at least" 7 people and injuring "at least" 8 others; al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack (BBC 2021-09-25). An adviser on women and human rights affairs in the prime minister's office was among those killed (Amnesty International 2022-03-29, 330).
- On 11 November 2021, an AMISOM convey was attacked by a suicide bomber, resulting in the deaths of 3 civilians (UN 2022-02-08, para. 20; US 2022-06-02, 5).
- On 20 November 2021, the Director of Radio Mogadishu and the Director of the Somali National Television were targeted by an IED (UN 2022-02-08, para. 20).
- On 25 November 2021, 8 civilians were killed and 17 (VOA 2021-11-25) or 20 were injured when a convoy for a private company being escorted by a security company contracted by the UN was attacked (UN 2022-02-08, para. 20); al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack (VOA 2021-11-25).
- On 27 November 2021, mortars were launched on an AMISOM-protected area in Baidoa with 5 rounds landing inside; al-Shabaab claimed that "it had targeted the adjacent South-West State presidential palace and the Baidoa airport area to coincide with the initial day of the House of the People elections in Baidoa" (UN 2022-02-08, para. 23).
- On 12 January 2022, a car bomb targeting a foreign security company killed 9 security guards, with al-Shabaab claiming they were targeting "'Western security officers'" (UN 2022-02-08, para. 20-21).
- On 16 January 2022, a bomb injured a spokesperson for the federal government (UN 2022-02-08, para. 22; Crisis Group 2022-12).
- In February 2022, al-Shabaab targeted electoral participants and election venues: on 9 February mortars

interrupted voting in Barawe city; on 10 February in Mogadishu, a suicide bomber targeted election delegates and killed 8 people; on 16 February, coordinated attacks on police stations, security checkpoints, and government officials killed "dozens" of people; and on 19 February a suicide blast in Beledweyne killed "at least" 13 people, including Lower House election candidates (Crisis Group 2022-12).

- On 7 and 15 March 2022, al-Shabaab shot 2 electoral delegates: 1 in the Lower Shabelle region and 1 in Mogadishu (Crisis Group 2022-12).
- On 23 March 2022, "at least" 48 people, including a current MP, were killed in Hirshabelle state's Beledweyne city during attacks on election venues during Lower House elections (VOA 2022-03-27); on the same day, Mogadishu's Halane airport compound was breached, killing "at least" 6 people (Crisis Group 2022-12).
- In Mogadishu, on 14 April 2022, mortar shells were fired at a venue hosting a parliamentary swearing in ceremony (Somali Guardian 2022-04-14; Crisis Group 2022-12), and al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack (Somalia Guardian 2022-04-14); on 18 April they targeted a parliamentary meeting; on 22 April; there was a suicide attack on a restaurant resulting in "at least" 6 deaths (Crisis Group 2022-12).
- On 23 April 2022, in Middle Shabelle region "at least" 10 soldiers were killed in a roadside explosion (Crisis Group 2022-12).
- In early May 2022, al-Shabaab targeted a base of Burundian peacekeepers, resulting in the deaths of "at least" 30 (Crisis Group 2022-12) or "more than" 50 people, including "several dozen" peacekeepers (*The Washington Post* 2022-07-17).
- On 15 May 2022, a mortar attack was launched on a presidential election venue; there were no casualties (Crisis Group 2022-12).
- Overnight from 8 to 9 June 2022, 9 mortars were launched by "suspected Al-Shabaab combatants" on the compound in Mogadishu which would later host the President's inauguration ceremony (Crisis Group 2022-12).
- On 17 July 2022, a car bomb was detonated at a hotel in Jowhar state (Crisis Group 2022-12; AA 2022-07-17). The hotel was holding a meeting of Hirshabelle state officials and there were "up to" 7 deaths as a result of the

bomb (Crisis Group 2022-12) or "at least" 3 deaths and "more than" 14 wounded, including the health minister of Hirshabelle state; al-Shabaab claimed responsibility (AA 2022-07-17).

- An attack on a hotel in Mogadishu on 19 August 2022 led to a 30-hour siege, resulting in the deaths of "at least" 20 or 21 people (DW 2022-08-21; Crisis Group 2022-12).
- On 25 September 2022, a suicide bombing targeting a military facility in Wadajir district of Mogadishu killed "up to" 15 people (Crisis Group 2022-12).
- In Hiraan, government and security forces were targets of bombs on 3 and 19 October 2022, resulting in the deaths of "over" 40 people (Crisis Group 2022-12).
- A hotel in Kismayo city in the Lower Juba region underwent a siege on 23 October 2022 which killed 8 (AP 2022-10-23) or 9 civilians (Crisis Group 2022-12); al-Shabaab claimed responsibility (AP 2022-10-23).
- On 29 October 2022, a double bombing occurred in Mogadishu which left "at least" 120 people dead (Crisis Group 2022-12) or "at least" 121 dead and hundreds of others injured (HRW 2022-11-01; UN 2022-11-14).
- On 27 to 28 November 2022, a hotel near the presidential palace was under siege, resulting in the deaths of "at least" 8 or 9 people (Crisis Group 2022-12; Reuters 2022-11-28).
- On 14 January 2023, a bomb was detonated in Bulobarde town, killing [translation] "at least" 8 (RFI 2023-01-16) or "at least" 11 people (VOA 2023-01-14). On the same day, a bomb exploded in Jalalaqsi town and the attacker was intercepted before reaching their target (VOA 2023-01-14; RFI 2023-01-17). Both towns are important for farming and trading; they have been controlled by al-Shabaab for "more than" 10 years and are currently the focus of efforts to mobilize local populations against al-Shabaab (VOA 2023-01-14).
- On 16 January 2023, in Halgan district, a car bomb was detonated near a military base resulting in the deaths of 3 people, including the local police chief (RFI 2023-01-17).
- On 17 January 2023, 11 soldiers were killed in an attack on a military camp; on 20 January, 7 soldiers were killed in an attack on a military camp; on 22 January, a suicide bomber in Mogadishu killed [translation] "at least" 6 civilians (RFI 2023-01-22).

4.1 Targets

According to the Senior Analyst, there are two "broad" categories of targets: anyone who is associated with, supporting, or working for the government, which includes the following: security forces, low or high ranking officials, and individuals working for an NGO funded by the US; and anyone who has opposed or shown resistance to al-Shabaab, including individuals in communities who have "pushed back," business owners who refuse to pay the taxes, or people who refuse to attend the al-Shabaab courts (2023-01-25). The source further notes that al-Shabaab would "probably have a particular reason" to target a specific person as there are many people that fit into these categories, such as all government employees in Mogadishu (Senior Analyst 2023-01-25). The Senior Analyst stated that the profiles of individuals more likely to be tracked are those who are viewed as "a threat to the organization in some way," such as having social influence or capital; community leaders who could mobilize others; religion scholars or prominent businessmen; or someone who knows a lot about the group, such as a defector (2023-01-25). According to *US Country Reports 2021*, in 2021 al-Shabaab killed "prominent peace activists, community leaders, clan elders, electoral delegates, and their family members" due to their participation in peacebuilding and beheaded individuals they accuse of spying for and "collaborating with" Somali national forces and affiliated militias; the source also indicates that the group targeted civilians associated with the government and attacked humanitarian NGO employees, UN staff, and diplomatic missions (US 2022-04-12, 15–16). *US Country Reports 2021* further notes that al-Shabaab "justifies" their attacks on civilians by claiming that they are "false prophets, enemies of Allah, or aligned with al-Shabaab's enemies" (US 2022-04-12, 16). Amnesty International states that in 2021 al-Shabaab carried out "repeated" attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure such as restaurants and hotels, with, "among others," targeted killings of journalists and individuals with "perceived" connections to the government (2022-03-29, 330). According to Human

Rights Watch (HRW), people face execution for accusations of ties with the government and foreign forces (2023-01-13). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2021* notes that al-Shabaab has executed people suspected of "crimes" of spying for foreign powers and witchcraft (US 2022-06-02, 6). The same source, citing "UN reporting," adds that, [for the year 2021], as of 31 July 2021, al-Shabaab had executed 18 civilians they accused of spying for foreign forces and one they accused of murdering two civilians (US 2022-06-02, 6). Citing "media and security reports," the UNSC panel of experts report states that from 27 to 30 June 2021, al-Shabaab executed 24 people accused of being spies and government collaborators (2021-10-06, para. 120). The same source further notes that civilians face abduction and detention for "defying" orders or to "force allegiance" and that it has documented 13 incidents of abductions involving 155 civilians; interviews with survivors of abduction indicated the use of "torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment against both female and male civilians detained by the group" (UN 2021-10-06, para. 119, 121). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020* states that individuals who did not meet the demands for zakat and resource donations faced "credible threats of violence" and that parents, teachers and communities faced threats when they "failed to adhere to al-Shabaab's precepts" (US 2021-03-30, 6).

Bacon states that officials who run for office or take part in elections are targets (2022-03, 40). The US *International Religious Freedom for 2021* report notes that al-Shabaab has targeted and killed government officials at the federal and local level and their allies, with "many" attacks involving the use of explosive devices on government forces and buildings, as well as hotels and restaurants that are popular in areas of government control (US 2022-06-02, 6). Similarly, the *BTI 2022* states that al-Shabaab targets hotels and restaurants regularly attended by government officials and businesspeople and "intensified targeted killings of members of the federal, regional and district governments, the

state-based security services, and civilians aligned with the government," and also targeted elders at the regional level who serve as delegates in local elections (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2022, 7). According to the UNSC panel of experts report, of the 270 attacks in Banadir districts from 16 December 2020 to 6 September 2021, "mos[t]" targeted security forces and government officials (UN 2021-10-06, Annex 2.4). An article from VOA states that in November 2021 an al-Shabaab critic was killed by a bomber wearing a suicide vest and in January 2022 a former government spokesman and lawmaker survived a "similar" attack (2022-03-27). An article from the *Guardian* describes an attack in which the bomber reportedly embraced an MP and then detonated the bomb, killing "dozens," including the MP, who was an "outspoken" critic of the government and was campaigning in central Somalia before parliamentary elections (2022-03-24). According to Crisis Group, an increase in the number of government critics killed "spurred further allegations" that "elements" of the government and al-Shabaab are "working together" (2022-06-21, 10–11). Bacon states, citing an interview with an academic source, that al-Shabaab "has thoroughly penetrated the Somali government from the intelligence service to the chamber of commerce" (2022-03, 48).

Sources state that on 1 March 2021, a journalist was shot and killed after previously receiving threats from al-Shabaab; al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for his killing (Amnesty International 2022-03-29, 330–331; US 2022-04-12, 20). According to sources, on 6 November 2021, a radio journalist was killed in a targeted attack by al-Shabaab (Amnesty International 2022-03-29, 330–331) or for which al-Shabaab claimed responsibility (US 2022-06-02, 5). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2021* adds that the director of a state-owned tv station and a driver were wounded in the same attack (US 2022-06-02, 5).

The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2021* also states that al-Shabaab characterizes AMISOM peacekeepers as "Christian crusaders" who are trying to occupy the country and that humanitarian organizations indicate that in 2021 al-Shabaab continued to threaten the lives of individuals they suspect converted to Christianity (US 2022-06-02, 6, 7). The US *International Religious Freedom Report for 2020* states that in Somalia, from January to November of 2020, "13 aid workers were killed, 12 were injured, and 23 were abducted" (US 2021-03-30, 7); the same report for 2021 states that violence against aid workers "decreased," with 194 security incidents that "directly affected humanitarian operations, including two aid workers killed, eight injured, 11 detained, and one abducted" (US 2022-06-02, 7).

4.2 Capacity to Track Individuals

According to the Senior Analyst, al-Shabaab is able to track and retaliate against individual targets through a "robust" intelligence wing, particularly in urban centres, and that al-Shabaab "intimidates and assassinates" individuals throughout Mogadishu (2023-01-25). The same source further noted that if an individual lives in an area that is not under control of al-Shabaab, they are not "100 percent safe," as al-Shabaab has conducted attacks in areas where they did not have a strong presence, such as the assassination of a governor "and other individuals they had been tracking" in Puntland, and if an individual remains in Somalia, "there is always a risk" (Senior Analyst 2023-01-25). The Senior Analyst stated that the method for tracking is human intelligence through operatives on the ground and that there is "probably a degree of corruption" with information shared from security services (2023-01-25). In a press statement, the US Secretary of State indicated that al-Shabaab has their own intelligence wing, called the Amniyat, which "plays a key role" in carrying out suicide attacks and assassinations (US 2022-10-17). According to an article written by the BBC World Service's Africa editor, there are different departments within the Amniyat with the

"main" department focused on intelligence and counterintelligence and others focused on assassinations and bombings; the same source notes that defectors from al-Shabaab are "terrified" they will be tracked down by the Amniyat (BBC 2019-05-27). The BBC article quotes a former director of British global counter-terrorism operations who now works in Somalia as defining the Amniyat as "'a Stalinist secret police with extensive powers and operational latitude'," and having a reputation for being "'efficient, ruthless and disciplined'" (2019-05-27). The UNSC panel of experts report notes, according to interviews with truck drivers who transport goods within Somalia, that al-Shabaab operates a "wide network" of checkpoints in the areas it controls, and "Al-Shabaab receipts" indicate that the group maintains a large database of information on the movement of vehicles, goods, and people through areas under Al-Shabaab administration (UN 2021-10-06, para. 55). In their article, the BBC Africa editor notes that when they return to the UK from trips to Somalia, they "often" receive a phone call from al-Shabaab, describing in detail what the reporter had done and where they had gone, stating that while the reporter is not an "important" target, they "could be in 'the wrong place at the wrong time' and suffer the consequences" (2019-05-19).

5. State Response

According to sources, AMISOM operated for 15 years until 2022 when a new agreement was achieved (ISS 2022-03-29; US 2023-01-24). The CIA *World Factbook* states that AMISOM was a peacekeeping mission aiming to assist Somali forces in creating a stable political process and reducing the threat of al-Shabaab (US 2023-01-24). Sources note that the AU, UN and the Somali government replaced AMISOM with the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) (ISS 2022-03-29; CFR 2022). Sources note that an objective of ATMIS is to implement the Somalia Transition Plan which was developed to transfer the responsibility of security to the state security forces (AU

2022-03-08, para. 7; ISS 2022-03-29; US 2023-01-24). Sources state that ATMIS is to have completed the transfer of security duties by the end of 2024 (CFR 2022; ISS 2022-03-29; US 2023-01-24). The AU states that

ATMIS shall have the following mandate:

- a. degrade Al Shabaab and other terrorist groups;
- b. provide security to population centres and open the main supply routes;
- c. develop the capacity of the Somali Security Forces to enable them to take over security responsibilities by the end of the transition period, that is, December 2024;
- d. support peace and reconciliation efforts of the FGS [Federal Government of Somalia]; and
- e. help develop the capacity of the security, justice and local authority institutions of the Federal Government of Somalia and Federal Member States. (AU 2022-03-08, para. 9)

Felbab-Brown states that the Somali forces "lack training, equipment, and discipline, as well as offensive, holding and defensive capacities"; "[i]n some areas" forces are "deeply infiltrated" by al-Shabaab, with "as much as" 30 percent of the police in Mogadishu "believed to be compromised," according to interviews with Somali and international security specialists (2020-04-14, 118, 152). The same source further notes that the national forces "[lack] institutional coherence" and that vetting procedures for recruitment to the forces are not followed, so that among its 23,000–27,000 members, "a far smaller number" are qualified to carry-out operations against al-Shabaab (Felbab-Brown 2020-04-14, 118). Felbab-Brown also states that the army "struggle[s]" to defend their operating bases and cannot defend surrounding territories, with operating bases "regularly" taken over or destroyed by al-Shabaab; citing interviews with AMISOM officials and international military advisors, the source notes that the army is therefore "often forced" to pay al-Shabaab to avoid being attacked (2020-04-14,

118, 152). Sources note that political division and infighting underpin the failure of the security forces (Felbab-Brown 2020-04-14, 123; Crisis Group 2022-06-21, 3). Crisis Group notes that politicians are often engaged in disagreements among themselves, particularly between the federal government and member states, while al-Shabaab has "a greater unity of purpose" (2022-06-21, 3). The same source further notes that under the previous president, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (also known as Farmaajo [Farmajo]) [president from 2017 to May 2022], friction between the federal government and member states worsened, which allowed al-Shabaab to expand, including in the south-central region which had the strongest disagreements between the federal level and member states' leadership (Crisis Group 2022-06-21, 3). In another publication, the same source states that the new president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, aims to fight al-Shabaab "beyond military means"; in line with this, a former top leader of al-Shabaab was appointed as the religion minister (Crisis Group 2022-12). Information on the impact and effectiveness of the new government's strategies against al-Shabaab could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] Bacon conducted an Identity, Mind, Emotions and Perceptions (IMEP) analysis which included a "comprehensive review of relevant academic, think tank, government, United Nations Monitoring Group, and other reports" and interviews with "experts" which were conducted virtually (Bacon 2022-03, 9, 12).

[2] The methodology for this study included a literature review and fieldwork in Mogadishu and Baidoa in January 2020 which included 51 interviews with "current and former officials of the Somali Government and the federal member states, current and former officers of Somalia's national security forces, Somali politicians, business leaders, representatives of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Somali clan elders, United Nations officials, international advisors to the Somali Government and international diplomats" (Felbab-Brown 2020-04-14, 116).

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Security and Cooperation; UK – Home Office; University of Central Arkansas – Department of Political Science; UN – Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund.

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