



# Shabaab al-Mujahideen: Migration and Jihad in the Horn of Africa

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*[The following is a comprehensive NEFA Foundation study of the “Shabaab al-Mujahideen” (“Mujahideen Youth”) Movement in Somalia. This study is based on a complete digital library archived by NEFA investigators of all authentic open source documents, websites, video, and audio recordings published by Shabaab al-Mujahideen over the past three years. Underlying source documents cited in this analysis are available, by request, to interested media outlets and law enforcement agencies.]*

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## Part I: The Early Years - Al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) and “Blackhawk Down”

Since the fall of former dictator Mohamed Siad Barre in January 1991, there has been no effective central government in the east African nation of Somalia. For years following the fall of Barre, Somalia was instead dominated by clan-based violence and heavily-armed warlords who divided up control over the capital Mogadishu—such as the notorious Mohammed Farah Aideed. Indeed, one cannot underestimate how much this prolonged national trauma has shaped the politics of contemporary Somalia. Reflecting back on this period, a propaganda video later produced by the Shabaab al-Mujahideen movement mourned the prevalent “turmoil” and “the torrents of innocent blood” that were spilled “during the unfortunate rise of the warlords... It became a terrifying nightmare.”<sup>1</sup>

Mirroring the development of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Islamic forces also gradually gained strength in Somalia by promising to end the reign of the warlords and a swift return to law and order. One of the first such Islamist paramilitary organizations to emerge was the Al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) (“the Islamic Union”) in southern Somalia near the contested Ethiopian border.<sup>2</sup> AIAI’s military wing was headed by Shaykh Hassan Aweys (a.k.a. “Shaykh Hassan”), a former colonel in the Somali army.<sup>3</sup> Though Aweys had been decorated for bravery during Somalia’s war against Ethiopia in 1977, he later fell out of favor with his superiors in the Somali

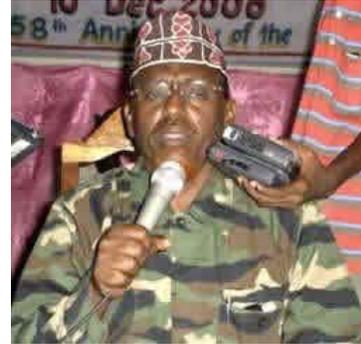
<sup>1</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Trial Transcript. U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden, et al. S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Page 1257.

<sup>3</sup> Trial Transcript. U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden, et al. S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Page 1649.

military, reportedly because of his openly Islamist political perspective.<sup>4</sup> According to Rashid Mohammad Husein, the former spokesman for AIAI's office of external relations, al-Ittihad "is a Dawa and Jihad movement which was established to co-operate with its members on loyalty and piety, and to invite and struggle in the path of Allah."<sup>5</sup>

As Somalia is firmly divided by tribe and clan affiliation, Hassan Aweys quickly encouraged other younger members from his own Hawiye sub-clan, the Habar Gidir Ayr, to join alongside him and serve as his trusted lieutenants within the AIAI. Perhaps the single most important commander recruited by Aweys at this stage was Aden Hashi Farah Ayrow, otherwise known as "Abu Muhsen al-Ansari." Ayrow had grown up in a remote valley of Somalia, where he spent most of his childhood. Later during his youth, Ayrow's father moved the family to the city of Mogadishu, where he enrolled his son in a local school for Quranic studies. Showing promise with his memorization of the Quran, Ayrow went on to study Islamic Shariah and jurisprudence at the Be'er al-Hind mosque in Mogadishu, "taking on the responsibility of spreading the faith among the Somali people, and defending the religion of Islam when the country was under the thumb of the Shiite government of Siad Barre, who was hostile to all Muslims and the Islamic religion."<sup>6</sup> Ayrow also attended basic training courses at the al-Imam al-Shafii military base in Mogadishu and "stood out among his peers, because of his abilities, and the fact he was a fast learner and resourceful—that is why he was appointed to be the commander of his army base."<sup>7</sup> Following the collapse of the Barre government in 1991, Ayrow joined his fellow clansman Hassan Aweys and the nascent "Islamic jihad movement" in Somalia.



**Shaykh Hassan Aweys**

However, rather than stay in Mogadishu amidst "the exhausting war between the tribes," Aden Hashi Ayrow and his comrades traveled to a more stable region of eastern Somalia, where "the mujahideen managed to persuade a larger number of people to adopt the notion of jihad. Fathers wanted their sons to join the mujahideen out of fear they would be recruited into the endless wars between the tribes."<sup>8</sup> According to Somali Islamists, this honeymoon period ended with the release of Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed—the founder of the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) and later president of the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG)—from a prison in neighboring Ethiopia.<sup>9</sup> Despite his five years behind bars, Abdullahi Yusuf was still nonetheless viewed as a tool of Somalia's avowed national enemy, Ethiopia: "all signs indicated that he had been released from jail in order to oppose the organizations of the jihad movement in Somalia. The first thing he did upon his release from jail was to incite the people against the mujahideen and mobilize the army." On the alleged orders of Abdullahi Yusuf, several would-be Somali mujahideen were taken prisoner, including Aden Hashi Ayrow. Ayrow was eventually released after Abdullahi Yusuf's forces were defeated in Bosaso, causing them to retreat to the north central city of Galcaio.<sup>10</sup> According to Shaykh Mukhtar Robow (a.k.a. "Abu Mansour"), it was around this time that Ayrow participated in combat operations "with his brothers in 'Bariir' area...

<sup>4</sup> Winter, Joseph. "Profile: Somalia's Islamist leader." [BBC News](#). June 30, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Husein, Rashid Mohammad. "The Progress of the Jihad Movement in 'Ogadin.'" [Nida'ul Islam](#) (Australia). Issue 12; March - April 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "'Light and Fire': The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow." [Millat Ibrahim](#). Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "'Light and Fire': The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow." [Millat Ibrahim](#). Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "'Light and Fire': The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow." [Millat Ibrahim](#). Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "'Light and Fire': The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow." [Millat Ibrahim](#). Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "'Light and Fire': The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow." [Millat Ibrahim](#). Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

and fought fiercely alongside his martyr brother Abu Jabal Omar Tirri.”<sup>11</sup> Suffering setbacks of their own, mujahideen loyal to the AIAI eventually moved to a more defensible position in the coastal town of Laskoreh, where they “began to implement the Islamic Shariah, in order to make their dream come true—establishing an Islamic State.”<sup>12</sup>

By 1992, the bloody civil conflict in Somalia had attracted global attention and dismay. In his historic March 1991 address, then-President George Bush had admonished the U.S. Congress that it was “time to rise above the parochial and the pork barrel, to do what is necessary, what’s right and what will enable this nation to play the leadership role required of us.” These scenes of bloodshed, sickness, and starvation—reflected back on Western television screens—seemed to stand directly in the face of the high-minded ideals underpinning the so-called “New World Order.” In April 1992, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 751, providing for a 50-man U.N. military peacekeeping force in Somalia (known as UNOSOM) in order to monitor a cease-fire between warring Somali factions. Despite its underwhelming size and capability, the arrival of the UNOSOM soldiers caused “fear and terror to trickle down throughout the leadership of the Al-Ittihad al-Islami movement.” The AIAI convened an emergency high-level meeting in nearby Djibouti, where an effort was mounted by certain factions to disband the group’s armed wing and “send each [fighter] back to his family and his clan.”<sup>13</sup> Hassan Aweys, Aden Hashi Ayrow, and others refused to accept the decision to back down in the face of the United Nations and the United States. Instead, Ayrow and a fellow fighter, Amr Ali al-Tawhil, returned to the capital Mogadishu.<sup>14</sup>



**Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow**

The handful of UN peacekeepers authorized under Resolution 751 did not begin arriving in Somalia until mid-summer 1992, and even then, were mostly unable to maintain order. The tenuous cease-fire brokered by the UN gradually broke down, once again imperiling desperately needed humanitarian supply lines providing food and medical aid to thousands of innocent Somali civilians. In December 1992, President Bush returned to the airwaves to convince Americans of their own moral responsibility to accept “a mission that can ease suffering and save lives... The people of Somalia, especially the children of Somalia, need our help. We’re able to ease their suffering. We must help them live. We must give them hope. America must act.”<sup>15</sup> Though the decision to aid indigent Somalis by providing a temporary security force seemed like a noble cause to many Americans, that sentiment was not shared by everyone in Somalia—particularly, among ideological hardliners from the AIAI. A propaganda video from the Shabaab al-Mujahideen movement summarizes the subsequent events from the perspective of these voices: “America wasn’t satisfied with providing intelligence and logistic support to the warlords alone, so it invaded Somalia with the endorsement of the infidel [United] Nations and the UN Security Council under the cover of helping and protecting humanitarian aid.”<sup>16</sup>

Far beyond the borders of Somalia, others were also carefully watching events, with an eye towards thwarting the perceived U.S. “colonization” of the Horn of Africa—among them, Al-

<sup>11</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “O’ Abu Muhsen! You Gained in the Deal.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=186803>. Released: July 24, 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> President George H.W. Bush. “Address on Somalia” (December 4, 1992). <http://millercenter.org/scripps/archive/speeches/detail/3984>.

<sup>16</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

Qaida leader Shaykh Usama Bin Laden. In December 1991, Islamic militants launched a failed bomb attack at a hotel in Aden, Yemen targeting 100 U.S. soldiers who were staying there en route to peacekeeping duties in nearby Somalia. The bombing in Aden—which ended up killing two Australian tourists—came in response to a “fatwah”, or religious edict, issued on behalf of Al-Qaida in late 1991 condemning the presence of U.S. military peacekeepers as an attempt to colonize the Muslim world. According to a former top member of Al-Qaida, this fatwah was discussed at Al-Qaida terrorist guesthouses in Khartoum, Sudan—and subsequently endorsed by Al-Qaida’s then-chief military commander, Abu Ubaidah Al-Banshiri.<sup>17</sup> At about the same time that President Bush was vowing to the world that America would “answer the call”, Usama Bin Laden presided over meetings of terrorist leaders at Al-Qaida guesthouses in Khartoum, Sudan. Al-Qaida military commander Abu Ubaidah al-Banshiri told other Al-Qaida members that Al-Qaida was eager for the U.S. to embroil itself in the civil war in Somalia so “that we make a big war with them.”<sup>18</sup> In late 1993, Bin Laden announced to a large group of 30-40 Al-Qaida members that “the American army now they came to the Horn of Africa, and we have to stop the head of the snake... the snake is America, and we have to stop them. We have to cut the head and stop them.”<sup>19</sup>

In 1993, AIAI founder Shaykh Hassan Aweys finally made contact with Abu Hafs al-Masri (a.k.a. Mohammed Atef), the Egyptian commander of Al-Qaida’s military wing.<sup>20</sup> Following discussions with Aweys, Abu Hafs sent four Al-Qaida instructors to Somalia in order to “train other Somalis” associated with AIAI in advanced combat tactics and weapons.<sup>21</sup> Among those who joined Abu Hafs on this critical mission were Saudi national Youssef al-Ayyiri (a.k.a. “Abu Maryam”, “Al-Battar”) and Egyptian national Abu al-Hasan al-Masri. According to Al-Qaida’s official propaganda wing, the As-Sahab Media Foundation, these men helped train Somali Islamists “in the tactics of guerilla warfare, in addition to taking part in a number of combat operations against the Americans.” In a magazine printed by Al-Qaida in Saudi Arabia in 2003, the chief editor published a column recalling how Youssef al-Ayyiri had celebrated “the genius of Abu Hafs al-Masri, and the military operations that he used to plan... in regards to Somalia... to strike them according to the military plans of Shaykh Usama and Abu Hafs.” The editor added that al-Ayyiri “had joined the battles raging in Somalia against the American forces, and he had a part in the honor of its expulsion and its defeat, at a time when the youth of the Islamic nation were oblivious to the state and affairs of their community.”<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, featured after his death in an exclusive video recording produced by As-Sahab, Al-Qaida member Abu al-Hasan al-Masri enthusiastically reminisced on how Bin Laden had decided to “quickly dispatch his soldiers and commanders to Somalia” in response to the arrival of the U.S. military, “which sowed corruption in the earth, and was arrogant and tyrannical—their helicopters would even descend to the level of the windows of the houses, peeping in at the women.”<sup>23</sup> Abu al-Hasan boasted of fighting on several different fronts in Somalia, “in Mogadishu, Baidoa, and elsewhere, including Ogaden. Naturally, we were divided there into groups: some of us were in the south, in Ogaden, while others were on the shores of the [Indian] Ocean, in Mogadishu and Baraawe, and so on. There were several fronts, among them Raas-Kaambooni and others. The guys were in most places of Somalia, and our role there—in addition

<sup>17</sup> United States v. Usama bin Laden, et al. S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Trial Transcript, February 6, 2001. Page 268.

<sup>18</sup> United States v. Usama bin Laden, et al. S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Trial Transcript, February 6, 2001. Page 280-285.

<sup>19</sup> United States v. Usama bin Laden, et al. S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Trial Transcript, February 6, 2001. Page 280-285.

<sup>20</sup> United States v. Usama bin Laden, et al. S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Trial Transcript, February 6, 2001. Page 280-285.

<sup>21</sup> Trial Transcript. U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden, et al. S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Pages 1648-1649.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Awshan, Isa. “Lofty Men in the Times of Ignominy: Yousef al-Ayyiri.” Sawt al-Jihad. Vol. 1; Issues 1 and 2. October 2003.

<sup>23</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Commander Abu al-Hasan: Jihad and Martyrdom.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=185183>. Released: July 8, 2008.

to training—was to carry out operations against the Americans.”<sup>24</sup> Upon arriving in the city of Mogadishu, Abu Hafs al-Masri and his various lieutenants teamed up with a local unit of Somali mujahideen run by sixty-year old commander named Shaykh Abdullah Ahmed Sahl, who had gained a quiet reputation for leading “a small group of young people in fighting the Americans and the UNOSOM forces.”<sup>25</sup> Sahl’s unit happened to include, among other fighters, a young Aden Hashi Ayrow. According to a magazine later produced by Shabaab al-Mujahideen, “the collaboration and coordination between the mujahideen was successful... the leader of Al-Qaidat ul-Jihad standing side-by-side with the local force from Somalia led by Shaykh Ahmed Sahl... On the same day Aden [Ayrow] joined Shaykh Sahl and his brothers in fighting the Americans and destroying their forces in Somalia, he killed someone for the first time—under the supervision of Al-Qaida, and with its logistical support and expertise.”<sup>26</sup>

It should be noted that this view of contemporary Somali history is either absent from, or even stands at odds with, many of the accepted accounts that have proliferated in the outside world. The notion that Usama Bin Laden or Al-Qaida played any significant role in the events that took place in Somalia during the mid-1990s is still quite controversial and hotly debated by influential and well-credentialed scholars. For their part, the Somali Islamists seem to acknowledge the basis for that skepticism and have made efforts to address the apparent historical discrepancy. In an article published in their official Arabic-language magazine, the Shabaab al-Mujahideen movement explained, “the war was not known to most people back then. People were aware of the war between General Mohammed Farah Aideed and the American forces... but what was happening behind the scenes was not clear—nor that the war was between America—the chief sponsor of apostasy and corruption—and Al-Qaida, which was carrying the banner of jihad and al-Tawheed. Many people were not able to recognize the true state of affairs at that time, for reasons relating to security—the mujahideen were not advertising their activities then, nor [claiming] the car bombs that they were responsible for.”<sup>27</sup>

In October 1993, the clashes between U.S. peacekeeping forces and Somali militants came to a head when an American special forces raid aimed at capturing top lieutenants of Aideed in central Mogadishu went horribly wrong. Specially-trained Somali fighters armed with Rocket Propelled Grenades shot down two U.S. Blackhawk helicopters, setting off a desperate and chaotic urban battle through the streets of Mogadishu. The incident resulted in the deaths of 18 U.S. servicemen—and was received by a shocked American public. Television networks played footage over and over again of jubilant Somalis abusing the abandoned body of a U.S. soldier. Suddenly, the future of the much-heralded “New World Order” seemed in serious jeopardy. One of the men allegedly responsible for helping spark the “Battle of Mogadishu” was the AIAI’s Aden Hashi Ayrow. Shaykh Mukhtar Robow later recalled Ayrow having “great memories from when Allah humiliated the Americans using his hands. They downed an aircraft, and destroyed an armored vehicle, the wreck of which is still lying there on Adam Odai street next to Bakkarah



**[Clockwise from top left]: Abu Ubaidah al-Banshiri, Abu Hafs al-Masri, Shaykh Yousef al-Ayyiri, and Abu al-Hasan al-Masri.**

<sup>24</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Commander Abu al-Hasan: Jihad and Martyrdom.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=185183>. Released: July 8, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “O’ Abu Muhsen! You Gained in the Deal.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=186803>. Released: July 24, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

Market. And the ruins of defeat and destruction are still apparent until this day.”<sup>28</sup> In his own testimonial video, Abu al-Hasan spoke in glowing terms of the successes achieved as a result of “Blackhawk Down”:

“We can’t forget that incident in which the American soldiers were dragged through the streets, which had a huge impact inside American in particular and which was done by the Somali youth by the grace of Allah, who are people of manliness and jihad, and are men... So the youth besieged the Americans on a street in Mogadishu, and the Americans—I swear by Allah—just lost all composure when they found the young men had surrounded them from all sides. They were besieged with their armored vehicles and with the helicopters in the air, as if the world and all it contained belonged to them. Then the youth dragged them through the streets, and the American soldier started to cry like a woman and run around and knock on the walls, sobbing and with tears on his face as if saying, ‘Hide me, hide me!’ They abandoned their night vision scopes, among the booty which we saw were night vision scopes and other equipment which Allah made use of to us in that period.”<sup>29</sup>

Soon thereafter, Al-Qaida military commander Abu Hafis al-Masri returned to Sudan from Somalia and spoke with other senior Al-Qaida members—boasting, “everything happening in Somalia, it’s our responsibility... the al Qaeda group, our group.”<sup>30</sup> In an interview later published in 1997, an official spokesman from the AIAI known as “Abu Yaser” acknowledged, “Yes, the team of Shaykh Usama Bin Laden had an effective role in repelling the American invaders from Somalia, that is because they participated in that battle with some explosives and in launching attacks against the army of the alliance... There may be some cooperation between him and the mujahideen of the al-Ittihad al-Islami.”<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, whether or not the events of “Blackhawk Down” actually took place in the rather fanciful way recalled by certain Al-Qaida leaders is almost of secondary importance. Those rose-colored memoirs of Somalia have nonetheless come to embody the “founding myths” of the core Al-Qaida methodology. From the narrow perspective of Al-Qaida, the Battle of Mogadishu established one essential principle above all else: that the elite of America’s military could be trapped and rendered vulnerable—even by scattered, lightly-armed insurgents in one of the poorest countries in the world. It was a seminal moment for the greater jihadi ethos. According to Al-Qaida’s As-Sahab Media Foundation, the shootout in Mogadishu represented “a decisive battle in which the soldiers of Islam in Somalia dealt heavy blows to the Americans... In this confrontation, the mujahideen were able to acquaint themselves up close with the abilities of the American soldier and study his psychology in zones of combat, something which will have the greatest of impacts on the drawing up on the long-term strategy for confronting the enemy.”<sup>32</sup> In their own public statements, Bin Laden and Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri immediately zeroed in on the greater significance and lessons to be taken from the “Battle of Mogadishu. In his landmark March 1997 interview with CNN, Bin Laden told journalist Peter Arnett:

“The U.S. government went [to Somalia] with great pride and stayed there for some time with a strong media presence wanting to frighten people that it is the greatest power on earth. It went there with pride and with over 28,000 soldiers, to a poor unarmed people in Somalia. The goal of this was to scare the Muslim world and the whole world saying that it is able to do whatever it desires. As soon as the troops reached the Mogadishu beaches, they found no one but children. The CNN and other media cameras started photographing them (the soldiers) with their camouflage and heavy arms, entering with a parade crawling (on the ground) and showing

<sup>28</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “O’ Abu Muhsen! You Gained in the Deal.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=186803>. Released: July 24, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Commander Abu al-Hasan: Jihad and Martyrdom.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=185183>. Released: July 8, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Trial Transcript. *U.S. v. Usama bin Laden, et al.* S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. February 6, 2001. Page 280-285.

<sup>31</sup> “Nida’ul Islam Interviews the Spokesman for the Islamic Union of the Mujahideen of Ogadin.” *Nida’ul Islam*. Issue 19; July - August 1997.

<sup>32</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Commander Abu al-Hasan: Jihad and Martyrdom.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=185183>. Released: July 8, 2008.

themselves to the world as the 'greatest power on earth.' Resistance started against the American invasion, because Muslims do not believe the U.S. allegations that they came to save the Somalis... With Allah's grace, Muslims over there, cooperated with some Arab mujahideen who were in Afghanistan. They participated with their brothers in Somalia against the American occupation troops and killed large numbers of them. The American administration was aware of that. After a little resistance, the American troops left after achieving nothing... They left after some resistance from powerless, poor, unarmed people whose only weapon is the belief in Almighty Allah, and who do not fear the fabricated American media lies. We learned from those who fought there, that they were surprised to see the low spiritual morale of the American fighters in comparison with the experience they had with the Russian fighters. The Americans ran away from those fighters who fought and killed them, while the latter were still there. If the U.S. still thinks and brags that it still has this kind of power even after all these successive defeats in Vietnam, Beirut, Aden, and Somalia, then let them go back to those who are awaiting its return."<sup>33</sup>

Again, during his follow-up television interview in 1998 with journalist John Miller broadcast on ABC News, Bin Laden insisted on harping over the critical significance of Somalia and the "defeat" of the U.S. military in Mogadishu:

"After our victory in Afghanistan and the defeat of the oppressors who had killed millions of Muslims, the legend about the invincibility of the superpowers vanished. Our boys no longer viewed America as a superpower. So, when they left Afghanistan, they went to Somalia and prepared themselves carefully for a long war... They were stunned when they discovered how low was the morale of the American soldier. America had entered with 30,000 soldiers in addition to thousands of soldiers from different countries in the world. ... As I said, our boys were shocked by the low morale of the American soldier and they realized that the American soldier was just a paper tiger. He was unable to endure the strikes that were dealt to his army, so he fled, and America had to stop all its bragging and all that noise it was making in the press after the Gulf War... America assumed the titles of world leader and master of the new world order. After a few blows, it forgot all about those titles and rushed out of Somalia in shame and disgrace, dragging the bodies of its soldiers. America stopped calling itself world leader and master of the new world order, and its politicians realized that those titles were too big for them and that they were unworthy of them."<sup>34</sup>

These sentiments and themes have likewise been echoed throughout Al-Qaida's own propaganda. The first official Al-Qaida video recording produced by the As-Sahab Media Foundation in 2001, "The Destruction of the U.S.S. Cole", features footage of Bin Laden explaining, "We believe that America is even more fragile than Russia. And from what our brothers who participated in Jihad in Somalia told us, they found that which is ever astonishing of the weakness, feebleness, and fear of the American soldier. For after merely eighty of them being killed, they fled under the cover of darkness, after the clamor which filled the world about the New World Order."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Al-Qaida's chief propaganda video documenting the planning behind the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States—titled "Knowledge is For Acting Upon"—includes Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri commenting on the critical role of Somalia: "The battles in which the Mujahideen of al-Qaida participated, especially those in Mogadishu, had a direct impact on the collapse of the Americans' morale in Somalia and their decision to flee from it. And Operation Restore Hope turned into Operation Sowing Despair in the hearts of the Americans, who had had enticing dreams of occupying East Africa and besieging the Sudan from the south."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Arnett, Peter. "Transcript of Osama Bin Ladin Interview." CNN. Broadcast May 10, 1997.  
<http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefaublarnettcnninvu.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Miller John. "Talking with Terror's Banker: An Exclusive Interview with Osama Bin Ladin." ABC News. Broadcast: May 28, 1998.  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/binladen/who/interview.html>

<sup>35</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. "State of the Ummah." (a.k.a. "The Destruction of the U.S.S. Cole.") Released: 2001.

<sup>36</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. "Knowledge is for Acting Upon."  
<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=84585>. Released: September 10, 2006.

## Part II: Ethiopia and the Ogaden War (1993-1997)

With remaining U.S. and U.N. forces withdrawing from Somalia in the wake of the Battle of Mogadishu, local mujahideen affiliated with the AIAI turned their attention to a new “crusader” enemy: Ethiopia. Between 1990-1992, the Ethiopian military was blamed for launching several cross border strikes on Islamic religious institutions in the disputed Gedo/Ogaden border region of western Somalia.<sup>37</sup> The AIAI then accused of Ethiopia of ramping up the confrontation in June 1994 by enlisting the help of the United States: “this stage saw the American jets take off from the Indian Ocean and bombard the mujahideen positions for hours at a time.”<sup>38</sup> According to AIAI spokesman Rashid Husein, “on October 15, 1995, the battles began afresh between the mujahideen of al-Ittihad al-Islami and the Christian Ethiopian government following the collapse of negotiations for extending the cease fire... These confrontations reached 20 during the period October 25 and December 13, 1995, during which seventeen mujahideen were martyred and six were wounded—while 145 of the enemy soldiers were killed, two military trucks, and one government factory were destroyed.”<sup>39</sup>

Fresh from his combat tour amidst the Battle of Mogadishu, commander Aden Hashi Ayrow joined other mujahideen affiliated with the AIAI at a former Somali military base in the Gedo region, in a bid to “establish an Islamic regime, governed by the Allah’s law and his book.”<sup>40</sup> According to Shaykh Mukhtar Robow, Ayrow “went to Gedo territory, which was an arena to confront the Ethiopians, and he participated in several battles. One of the most well-known battles he participated in was the battle of Halawein in Dolow city, during which about 56 or 57 mujahideen were martyred.”<sup>41</sup> Unwilling to accept defeat, Ayrow gathered “the handful of remaining brothers” and “founded a new army... this time, inside Ethiopian-occupied territory” headed by Shaykh Ahmed Abdullah Sahl (who had gained notoriety leading anti-U.S. operations in Mogadishu).<sup>42</sup>

The destabilizing impact of the quasi-jihadi conflict in Gedo and Ogaden began to be felt elsewhere across Ethiopia proper. On January 18, 1995, six people were killed and at least twenty others injured in a bomb attack at the state-owned Ghion Hotel in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. The wounded at the Ghion included British, Indian, and French nationals. Later that spring, in mid-May, alleged AIAI operatives tossed a hand grenade into a busy marketplace in the eastern Ethiopian town of Dire Dawa. The AIAI terrorist campaign inside Ethiopia escalated once again in the summer of 1996. On July 8, al-Ittihad operatives launched “an assassination attempt targeting the anti-Islam criminal, Abdul Majeed Hassan, the person in charge of the Ogaden Jihad case, and the transport minister in the Ethiopian government... Two people opened fire on him near his office in the capital Addis Ababa. He was then rushed to the hospital suffering serious injuries. Two of his bodyguards were killed in the operation.”<sup>43</sup> Less than one month later, on August 5, 1996, yet another state-owned hotel in Addis Ababa—the Wabe Shabelle—was rocked by a blast killing two and wounding eleven others—and, once again, the AIAI issued a communiqué claiming credit for the bombing.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Husein, Rashid Mohammad. “The Progress of the Jihad Movement in ‘Ogadin.’” Nida’ul Islam (Australia). Issue 12; March - April 1996.

<sup>38</sup> Husein, Rashid Mohammad. “The Progress of the Jihad Movement in ‘Ogadin.’” Nida’ul Islam (Australia). Issue 12; March - April 1996.

<sup>39</sup> Husein, Rashid Mohammad. “The Progress of the Jihad Movement in ‘Ogadin.’” Nida’ul Islam (Australia). Issue 12; March - April 1996.

<sup>40</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” Millat Ibrahim. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “O’ Abu Muhsen! You Gained in the Deal.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=186803>. Released: July 24, 2008.

<sup>42</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” Millat Ibrahim. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> “Global Muslim News.” Nida’ul Islam. Issue 14; July-September 1996.

<sup>44</sup> McKinley, Jr., James C. “Ethiopian Army Attacks 3 Towns in Border Region of Somalia.” New York Times. August 10, 1996.

As a result, on the evening of August 9, the Ethiopians began a major retaliatory operation targeting AIAI militants based in Ogaden and the adjacent Gedo province in Somalia. Backed by tanks, rockets, and helicopter gunships, Ethiopian troops launched raids into three Somali towns—Dolow, Lugh, and Beled Hawo—reportedly killing dozens of people.<sup>45</sup> According to the U.S. Defense Department, at least one of the towns in question, Lugh, had served as the home of an AIAI paramilitary training camp.<sup>46</sup> In a statement distributed in Nairobi, Kenya, AIAI founder Shaykh Hassan Aweys condemned the retaliatory strikes and swore revenge on the Ethiopians: “We declare a holy war against the Ethiopians... The invasion just shows the longtime desire of Ethiopia to occupy part of Somalia.”<sup>47</sup> Though most of the al-Ittihad casualties in Ogaden and Gedo were of Somali origin, the Ethiopians were rather astonished to also discover amongst the dead the bodies of foreign mujahideen fighters. In fact, the lopsided campaign in the summer of '96 had seen the participation of Saudis, Egyptians, Algerians, Africans, Turks, and at least one European national. According to a handwritten jihadi news report faxed in September to mujahideen supporters in the U.S. and seized as evidence in U.S. v. Jose Padilla et al., “Ethiopian forces attacked, supported by tanks, so the mujahideen forces repelled them in Ogaden and inflicted heavy losses on them, not less than 1,000 deaths and the destruction of a number of tanks and the downing of a helicopter... 12 Arab mujahideen were killed: Abu al-Fadl al-Saudi, Muhebullah al-Jazairi, Ali al-Fransi, Mohammed al-Gambi, Abu Musab al-Turki, Abdallah al-Turki, Abu Zurr al-Turki, Rasul al-Turki, Abu Ahmad al-Masri, Abu Adnan al-Masri, Abu Sulaiman al-Masri, and Abu Abdelrahman al-Masri.”<sup>48</sup>

Among the AIAI fighters captured by the Ethiopian military was a young Saudi extremist who had already participated in similar combat operations in Algeria and Bosnia-Herzegovina, Abdelaziz al-Muqrin (a.k.a. “Abu Hajer al-Najdi”).<sup>49</sup> In his subsequent memoirs published in an Al-Qaida magazine, al-Muqrin discussed traveling “from Yemen to Somalia and Ogaden, a region of the Somali land occupied by the Ethiopian Crusader state that is acting to convert the Somali Muslims to Christianity. I saw with my own eyes the churches in this region, although 100 percent of the Somalis are Muslims subject to cruel attack... I joined my brothers in al-Ittihad al-Islami in Somalia, and that began a lengthy affair that ended in my imprisonment for a period of two years and seven months.”<sup>50</sup> Another fellow jihadi offered further detail on Muqrin’s capture by the Ethiopians: “In the aftermath of a big battle between the soldiers [of Allah] and the soldiers of the Ethiopian Satan, three of the Arab mujahideen became lost amidst the chaos, and among them was [Muqrin]. They were found by some Bedouins and taken into custody... The Bedouins wanted to send them back and return them to Somalia, but suddenly on the road, they were arrested by the crusader enemy... The Bedouins were released, and they took the Arab mujahideen brothers to the town of Gode... [Muqrin] was asked by one of the crusader soldiers, ‘Where did you come from... and why?’ He replied, ‘we came here to fight you until you leave this Islamic country



**Abdelaziz al-Muqrin  
(a.k.a. “Abu Hajer”)**

<sup>45</sup> McKinley, Jr., James C. “Ethiopian Army Attacks 3 Towns in Border Region of Somalia.” New York Times. August 10, 1996.

<sup>46</sup> “Verbatim Transcript of Combatant Status Review Tribunal Hearing for ISN 10023.” Combatant Status Review Tribunals (CSRT); Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.  
[http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Transcript\\_ISN10023.PDF](http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Transcript_ISN10023.PDF). Page 4.

<sup>47</sup> McKinley, Jr., James C. “Ethiopian Army Attacks 3 Towns in Border Region of Somalia.” New York Times. August 10, 1996.

<sup>48</sup> Intercepted Fax Transmission received on September 20, 1996. Exhibit FFX-0058. HFV960920-136.wpd. Case File; 3 15N-MM-99887. U.S. v. Jose Padilla et al. U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida. Case # 04-60001-CR-COOKE.

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.inn4news.net/inn/showthread.php?t=30828>. April 2, 2005. See also: Sawt al-Jihad. Vol. 1; Issue 1. October 2003. <http://www.cybcity.com/suondmag/mag-w.zip>.

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.inn4news.net/inn/showthread.php?t=30828>. April 2, 2005. See also: Sawt al-Jihad. Vol. 1; Issue 1. October 2003. <http://www.cybcity.com/suondmag/mag-w.zip>.

whose territory you have occupied and whose wealth you have stolen.”<sup>51</sup> The Saudi was eventually brought to the capital Addis Ababa and handed over to his own embassy to continue serving out his punishment back home in the Arabian Peninsula. Upon his release from a Saudi prison, al-Muqrin traveled on to Afghanistan, and joined Al-Qaida’s local outfit in Saudi Arabia. It was the same Abdelaziz al-Muqrin who—in June 2004—masterminded the abduction of American engineer Paul Johnson in the Saudi capital Riyadh, and who later personally beheaded Johnson in a video distributed over the Internet.

The cause of the AIAI in Gedo and Ogaden—which was slowly being promoted and advertised in mujahideen propaganda—even attracted the interest of Americans, albeit of Somali origin. In approximately March 1993, Columbus, Ohio resident Nuradin Abdi traveled from Sudan to the town of Lascanod, Somalia—where he had dinner with an AIAI commander named Ali Warsame. One of the subjects covered during conversations at that dinner was the existence of AIAI training camps in Ogaden. Abdi later told agents from the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) that the camp was funded by “people [who] would collect money in UAE for the Ogaden fighters... He looked them up on their web site which noted the group had a training camp in Ogaden, Ethiopia.”<sup>52</sup> According to notes from a 2004 FBI interview with Abdi, in the aftermath of his meeting with Ali Warsame:

“ABDI met with some individuals who also wanted to go to a training camp in Ethiopia. This group of people traveled to Ethiopia in order to attend the camp. While hiking to Ethiopia and resting along the roadside, one of the individuals accidentally fired his rifle. This shot alerted a nearby Ethiopian military troop. A fire fight resulted and eight of the people from ABDI’S group were killed. ABDI along with the remaining survivors escaped back to Somalia. ABDI stayed in Somalia for another two months with this group of individuals waiting to attend a training camp in[side] Ethiopia. Periodically, attempts were made by the group to see if it was clear to travel back into Ethiopia. ABDI eventually left the group and went to a relative’s house to stay in Somalia.”<sup>53</sup>

The subject of the AIAI’s training camps and their accessibility to would-be American mujahideen came up again upon Nuradin Abdi’s return home to the U.S. In mid-1999, Abdi and other local extremists in Columbus began discussing their shared interest in attending a jihad training camp and possibly an active frontline. The first plan—to join the Saudi mujahideen commander Ibn-ul-Khattab in Chechnya—was nixed when the men discovered that winter weather conditions had rendered most entry points impassable. Instead, Abdi suggested the alternative of attending the AIAI’s training camps hidden inside Ogaden. Following up on this plan, on January 15, 2000, Abdi flew from Columbus to Kampala, Uganda, with the intent of “smuggl[ing] himself “from there into Nairobi and then get into Ogaden from there.”<sup>54</sup> He brought along \$1,500 of his own money for general expenses, and an additional \$3,000 contributed by other jihad supporters in the U.S. to help purchase “gear” and for travel costs.<sup>55</sup>

Abdi told FBI agents that “the true story of what happened” was that the smuggler who brought him to Nairobi from Uganda suggested that he speak with a local Muslim cleric in Nairobi who “was a knowledgeable man in Islam who used to be a member of Al-Ittihad Al-Islamiya (AIAI).”<sup>56</sup> In turn, the cleric introduced Abdi to one of the worshippers at his mosque, “Abdel Samed”, who agreed to meet with Abdi and evaluate his suitability to join the AIAI in Ogaden:

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<sup>51</sup> <http://www.inn4news.net/inn/showthread.php?t=30828>. April 2, 2005.

<sup>52</sup> FBI Interview with Nuradin M. Abdi on December 5, 2003 at the Kenton County Detention Center (KCDC), 303 Court St., Covington, Kentucky.

<sup>53</sup> FBI Interview with Nuradin M. Abdi on January 6, 2004 at the Pickaway County Jail, Circleville, Ohio.

<sup>54</sup> FBI Interview with Nuradin M. Abdi on December 5, 2003 at the Kenton County Detention Center (KCDC), 303 Court St., Covington, Kentucky.

<sup>55</sup> FBI Interview with Nuradin M. Abdi on December 5, 2003 at the Kenton County Detention Center (KCDC), 303 Court St., Covington, Kentucky.

<sup>56</sup> FBI Interview with Nuradin M. Abdi on December 5, 2003 at the Kenton County Detention Center (KCDC), 303 Court St., Covington, Kentucky.

“Abdel Samed explained Abdi would have to travel through Mogadishu, Somalia, to get into Ogaden. Abdi would have to leave his gear he brought in Mogadishu... Everything was different in Ogaden and there was no longer a training camp. Abdi asked if the Arabs were still there. Samed replied they left in 1997. Abdi asked how it was now. Samed replied that he would go with a group and fight with them and that there was no camp. The groups travel, sometimes walking 24 hours straight, until they engage someone and fight them. Abdi asked what they do if you have no military training. Samed replied they do not accept any such people and that they would not take him. Abdi decided then he did not want to go.”<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, by the time of the departure of the “Arabs” in 1997, the AIAI was floundering in its efforts to confront the Ethiopian invaders. Worse still, the AIAI appeared stricken by internal rifts pitting more moderate Islamists—those who saw the AIAI as a legitimate Somali political party—against hardliners like Aden Hashi Ayrow who envisioned the group primarily as a jihadi fighting force whose purpose was to confront the Ethiopians and other meddling “crusaders.” In their own propaganda, Islamic Union representatives tried to remain upbeat about their prospects, and continued to report on their “victories” against the “occupying Ethiopian forces, causing heavy loss of life and equipment.” The Somali group claimed credit for a May 13, 1997 artillery attack on an Ethiopian base in the village of Tanna; an IED blast destroying an Ethiopian military truck in Butanu; and various clashes and ambushes on Ethiopian soldiers in Qiri Dahry, Danood, and Dolow: “In new developments indicating the extent of reduced enemy morale, 22 enemy troops surrendered to the mujahideen in the border city of Dolow on May 31, 1997. The surrendering troops also surrendered their arms, ammunition, and supplies, and provided the mujahideen with important military information.”<sup>58</sup>

In an interview during the summer of 1997, an AIAI spokesman known as “Abu Yaser” defended the party’s somewhat mixed record:

“Our level of organization and our military capacity have reached a very good level. Most of this is witnessed through our jihad and rise to face the enemies who have been preying on Ogaden like rabid dogs for five years. The mujahideen continue to progress in this jihad whilst the enemy has been unable to cut through our ranks. The mujahideen have not been fooled by the enemies’ various cunning ploys despite the tremendous aid which is being poured into their militias and even despite the alliances and subsidies received from America and Israel who have themselves participated in a number of battles.”<sup>59</sup>

Abu Yaser went on to explain that “the plan for the next stage... is to be prepared for a major battle at any time, and to strike the major economic targets at the heart of the enemy, and also to direct a call to our brother Muslims throughout the world to share in this Jihad with us, and to help their brothers in this mission.”<sup>60</sup>

At about the same time that Abu Yaser was speaking of “sharing in jihad” with other non-Somali Muslims around the world, AIAI founder Shaykh Hassan Aweys traveled to Afghanistan for personal consultations with Al-Qaida leader Usama Bin Laden, ultimately returning home (via Kenya) in late July 1998.<sup>61</sup> Aweys was not alone in taking on this unusual mission. According to Shaykh Mukhtar Robow, when the jihad came to a halt in Gedo in 1997, Aden Hashi Ayrow also “became determined to leave the country, looking for companions to continue jihad with. So, he

<sup>57</sup> FBI Interview with Nuradin M. Abdi on December 5, 2003 at the Kenton County Detention Center (KCDC), 303 Court St., Covington, Kentucky.

<sup>58</sup> “Global Muslim News.” *Nida’ul Islam*. Issue 19; July - August 1997.

<sup>59</sup> “Nida’ul Islam Interviews the Spokesman for the Islamic Union of the Mujahideen of Ogadin.” *Nida’ul Islam*. Issue 19; July - August 1997.

<sup>60</sup> “Nida’ul Islam Interviews the Spokesman for the Islamic Union of the Mujahideen of Ogadin.” *Nida’ul Islam*. Issue 19; July - August 1997.

<sup>61</sup> Trial Transcript. *U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden, et al.* S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Page 1673.

went to Afghanistan, as Allah granted him success, as there were many intensive training courses being supervised by some of the leaders of jihad.”<sup>62</sup>

The draw of Afghanistan in the mindset of Somali Islamists was obvious: under the Taliban, that nation had become “the school of global jihad and the source of its leadership... Al-Qaida had big training bases in Afghanistan, and young men from all directions were going there. [Ayro] joined in, to increase his military knowledge.” In a propaganda video produced by Shabaab al-Mujahideen, Shaykh Mukhtar Robow later recalled of Ayro:

“He remained [in Afghanistan] at the camps for a long period of time, where he mastered various arts of fighting and its skills. As the brothers who were with him in the camp said, ‘the brother wasn’t sleeping that much, rather he was writing down the military sciences and he was benefiting from everyone with experience in that field, until he was able to transfer the military sciences and its sources to Somalia’... to train them on how to use the weapons and teach them the art of fighting... He had high energy, he wanted to save Somalia from the situation it was in. When he was in the Khalden training camp, the American bombing campaign took place targeting Somalia and Afghanistan. By the grace of Allah, he wasn’t wounded or killed.”<sup>63</sup>

Other Shabaab al-Mujahideen materials reported that Ayrow “was fond of the way Al-Qaida worked and admired its doctrine, its strategy to change the Islamic world, and its call for jihad against the Christians. [Ayro] met many mujahideen brothers in various positions within the organization, and he also met Shaykh Usama Bin Laden, may Allah preserve him.”<sup>64</sup> By the time his first tour of Afghanistan was over, Ayrow had become “a military encyclopedia—he was unparalleled in the Horn of Africa region... He took Shaykh Usama’s advice, and returned to Somalia in order to spread the idea of global jihad and the path of Al-Qaida—confronting the Christian world.”<sup>65</sup>

It is nearly impossible to discuss the interactions between Somali Islamists and senior Al-Qaida leaders during the mid and late 1990s without at least mentioning the August 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania carried out by Al-Qaida. Though the bombings themselves will not be addressed at great length here, it is worth noting the strong connection between those attacks and the conflict in Somalia—so much so that Abu al-Hasan al-Masri actually labeled the bombings as part of Al-Qaida’s “second stage in Somalia.”<sup>66</sup> By 1998, Kenya had gained the unfortunate distinction for serving equally as the key hub for U.S. diplomacy and intelligence across all of east Africa—and as the primary logistical base for Islamic militants seeking to enter neighboring Somalia. Long before the bombings in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, a member of Al-Qaida’s East African cell penned a confidential report advising his superiors, “America knows well that the youth who work in Somalia and who are followers of the sheikh are the ones who have carried out operations to hit the Americans in Somalia... The main gateway for those people is Kenya. Therefore, there must be a center for them in Kenya.”<sup>67</sup> In his own public remarks broadcast by As-Sahab, Mogadishu veteran Abu al-Hasan al-Masri likewise commented, “Of course, you mustn’t forget that Kenya was a way station for Somalia. The largest part [in the 98 bombings] was played by Shaykh Ibrahim [Abd al-Rahman] al-Muhajir and some

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<sup>62</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “O’ Abu Muhsen! You Gained in the Deal.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=186803>. Released: July 24, 2008.

<sup>63</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “O’ Abu Muhsen! You Gained in the Deal.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=186803>. Released: July 24, 2008.

<sup>64</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>65</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>66</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Commander Abu al-Hasan: Jihad and Martyrdom.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=185183>. Released: July 8, 2008.

<sup>67</sup> Government Exhibit GX-300A. *U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden, et al.* S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. 2001.

other brothers, but perhaps from the point of view of security, it is best that I not talk about [my own role in] it.”<sup>68</sup>

### Part III: The Islamic Courts Union (ICU)

By approximately 1999, the AIAI movement founded by Shaykh Hassan Aweys was near bankruptcy. The conflict in Gedo and Ogaden was on the wane, and key AIAI functionaries, such as Aden Ayrow and Aweys himself, had left Somalia in search of redemption in Afghanistan. Perhaps the final death knell for the AIAI came on September 23, 2001, when the U.S. government blacklisted the group as a Designated Foreign Terrorist Organization under Executive Order 13224, which blocks the assets of organizations and individuals linked to terrorism. While the AIAI may not have had terribly significant resources tied up in American finance or real estate, the FTO designation meant that the group faced rather dim prospects at ever achieving political legitimacy or international recognition as the rightful government in Somalia. This result was predictable—and it may have been perfectly acceptable to the extreme end of the party (represented by Aden Ayrow)—but it clearly was otherwise a major disaster.

Prior to its near collapse in 1997, the AIAI’s leadership managed to establish a new judicial system in place across several major Somali regions based upon Shariah, or Islamic law—including the key urban centers of Kismayo and Mogadishu.<sup>69</sup> These “Islamic Courts” loosely mirrored the development of the Taliban in Afghanistan by offering much needed law and order through the rigid enforcement of puritanical religious interpretations. The various courts formed a confederation in 2000 known as the “Islamic Courts Union” (ICU), which gradually consolidated influence over southern Somalia and the capital Mogadishu. According to Shabaab al-Mujahideen chief spokesman Shaykh Mukhtar Robow, “in 1995, the Islamic Courts started from the areas of Karaam and Soq Baad and Sanaa in the capital Mogadishu, and then spread its control in the important places of the provinces neighboring the capital from the north.”<sup>70</sup> Perhaps it is no surprise that the ICU was heavily dominated by veterans of the AIAI, including both Shaykh Hassan Aweys and Aden Ayrow. The ICU was headed by a Shura (Advisory) Council—itsself headed by Shaykh Hassan Aweys. According to Shaykh Mukhtar Robow, Ayrow was responsible for “training some of the figures” involved in the ICU “until he became one of its leaders, and his determination never ceased in searching for young people to teach and inspire to revive the duty of jihad... Our brother was the general leader and emir of the [ICU] military wing.”<sup>71</sup> The ICU leadership also included Shaykh Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki, who—like Hassan Aweys—is a former AIAI commander. On June 3, 2004, the U.S. State Department named Shaykh Hassan al-Turki a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) under Executive Order 13224 for being a leader of the banned AIAI who personally “has been associated with al-Qaida and [who] has provided support for acts of terrorism.”<sup>72</sup>

Yet, it should be emphasized here that not all of the “leading lights” behind the ICU adopted the same hardline, transnational approach to their activities. Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmad served as chairman of the “Supreme Islamic Court” in Somalia and was, at one



**Shaykh Sharif Ahmed**

<sup>68</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Commander Abu al-Hasan: Jihad and Martyrdom.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=185183>. Released: July 8, 2008.

<sup>69</sup> Trial Transcript. U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden, et al. S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. Page 4518.

<sup>70</sup> Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). “An Interview With the Commander Abi Mansoor (Mukhtaar Ali Robo), the Spokesman of the Youth Islamic Movement in Somalia.” Sada al-Jihad. Issue 25; May 2008. <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=179163>.

<sup>71</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “O’ Abu Muhsen! You Gained in the Deal.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=186803>. Released: July 24, 2008.

<sup>72</sup> “Designation of Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki under Executive Order 13224.” Press Statement by Deputy Spokesman Adam Ereli. June 3, 2004. <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2004/33128.htm>.

time, the most prominent public spokesman for the ICU. Though he arguably enjoyed far less political or military influence than Hassan Aweys or Aden Ayrow, Shaykh Sharif also proved himself to be ideologically far more moderate. He has repeatedly denied any ties between the ICU and Al-Qaida, insisting “there is no terrorism in Somalia. We have no connection to terrorism. Somalishave the right to choose what they want and run their country... The Islamic Courts are nothing more but popular organizations which were formed for special missions.”<sup>73</sup> Despite his confident assurances to the contrary, Shaykh Sharif would soon face widespread backlash from among his own ICU comrades for his failure to enthusiastically endorse the merits of jihad, the mujahideen, and military confrontation with “the enemies of Islam.” Meanwhile, for his part, Aden Ayrow was still eager to introduce his friends and other ICU recruits back in Somalia to the glory of the jihadi battlefields in Afghanistan. Shaykh Mukhtar Robow later narrated the subsequent events: “[In 2000, Ayro] went back with the company of his brother, Shaykh Omar Terri (Abu Jabbal)... back to Afghanistan. The Islamic Emirate of the Taliban was strong at that time for many years. They arrived there and met the leaders of jihad, among them our brother Shaykh Usama Bin Laden, may Allah protect him, and the other commanders who were working with him. Then he returned to Somalia to send groups of young people to train them.” Robow continued:

“I was one of those whom he summoned after he came back from Afghanistan and persuaded me to go there. I won’t ever forget the day when I went to his house and he expressed his desire that I would travel to Afghanistan with the others. I was very pleased, so I went to get some stuff from the closest block. Afterwards, he asked me to obtain a passport. I was so elated that I discovered I had overshot the required place by more than four blocks... I didn’t sleep at all that night, I was so happy. I prepared myself for the trip, and brother ‘Elias’ Abu Usama, may Allah have mercy on his soul, was with me, who gained martyrdom in Kandahar. Myself and brother Elias traveled on one plane to Afghanistan, with success from Allah... After a short period of time, the American invasion of Afghanistan began. Shortly thereafter, brother Abu Usama, may Allah have mercy on him, was martyred in Kandahar. On Ramadan on a Thursday night, Allah took his soul in that place. After I returned to Somalia, Abu Muhsen was the first to receive me in the airport, and he was driving a minibus. He began to hug me, although I was taller than him. He... tried to lift me up, he welcomed me heartily.”<sup>74</sup>



**Shaykh Mukhtar Robow**

Upon his own return to Somalia from Afghanistan in 2002, Shaykh Mukhtar Robow was eventually appointed to be the deputy “head of security” for the ICU and the “acting chairman of the Islamic Courts national security department.”<sup>75</sup> He began working side-by-side with his beloved mentor Aden Ayrow “to revive the seed of the jihadi project, and it continues still in Somalia even now.”<sup>76</sup> During this phase, Ayrow was reportedly insistent upon training as many Somali youth as possible in the philosophy and tactics of jihad, “giving of himself to the cause in terms of both money and weapons... He even trained separate individuals in their houses. He used to say, ‘Who is ready to go out on Friday for shooting practice?’ Then he would take them to a ranch, after asking permission from the owner, and conduct target practice... Each week, he used to take 10 people to that place in his own car, and most of the weapons used for shooting were his.”<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> “Somalia unrest worries Bush.” *Al-Jazeera*. June 8, 2006.

<sup>74</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “O’ Abu Muhsen! You Gained in the Deal.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=186803>. Released: July 24, 2008.

<sup>75</sup> “An Ethiopian battlewagon is blown up in southern Somalia.” *Shabelle Media Network*. November 4, 2006. <http://www.shabelle.net/news/ne1657.htm>.

<sup>76</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “O’ Abu Muhsen! You Gained in the Deal.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=186803>. Released: July 24, 2008.

<sup>77</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “O’ Abu Muhsen! You Gained in the Deal.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=186803>. Released: July 24, 2008.

## Part IV: Rise of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement

Despite his healthy enthusiasm for continued training in Somalia and his “faith” in the battle with the “crusaders”, commander Aden Hashi Ayrow was nonetheless disappointed in the wake of 9/11 upon learning of the rapid collapse of the Taliban government “and the fact that Al-Qaida had to shut down its training camps in Afghanistan.”<sup>78</sup> He became even more disenchanted when he failed to convince several respected colleagues from within the ICU to support a more aggressive policy in dealing with Somalia’s non-Muslim enemies—most importantly, Shaykh Sharif Ahmed. According to a Shabaab al-Mujahideen propaganda magazine, “Shaykh Sharif, former chairman of the Executive Committee of the Islamic Courts, had a different opinion about Ethiopia and its war, and about America and its aggressiveness. Rather, he is nothing more than a Somali nationalist, pure and simple. The global jihad means nothing to him—he just wants Somalia to be a democratic Muslim state.”<sup>79</sup>

In contrast, by all accounts, Aden Hashi Ayrow felt invigorated by the idea of a wide-ranging armed confrontation with the Western world, and decided that threats from then-U.S. President George W. Bush to launch military strikes on Somalia “had created a good opportunity... to convince the Somali people that America had declared war on the Islamic faith, and that America wanted to destroy any sign of Islamic identity in the land of Somalia.”<sup>80</sup> Pleading with his fellow Somali Islamists, Ayrow focused his attention on the unpopular U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and insisted that Somalia would inevitably come to face the same treatment. He “gathered around him every Muslim who wanted to join and resist this filthy attack. He began training this force, which would fight at the battlefield, by himself... This organization is known today as the Shabaab al-Mujahideen (‘Mujahideen Youth’) Movement... [Ayro] had a big part in building this organization. Furthermore, we are not exaggerating when we say that [he] was the movement’s founder.”<sup>81</sup>

The growing influence of the nascent Shabaab militia, along with other hardline ICU splinter factions, was cause for concern among many Western governments. More worrisome, however, was the practice by those Islamist hardliners of offering shelter and safe haven to most wanted Al-Qaida terrorist suspects. There was good reason for this concern. Aside from the still-vivid legacy of the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings, on November 28, 2002, three suicide attackers crashed a vehicle packed with explosives into the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa, Kenya, killing 3 Israeli tourists and 10 Kenyans. Almost simultaneously, another team of Al-Qaida operatives launched a failed attack with an SA-7 surface-to-air missile launcher on an Israeli airliner taking off from the airport in Mombasa.<sup>82</sup> In a statement issued days later on December 2, Al-Qaida officially claimed responsibility for the twin strikes in Mombasa—offering their “congratulations and blessings” for “the two operations of Mombasa against the Israeli interests”:

“In the same place where the crusader-Jewish alliance was attacked 4 years previously, the mujahideen of Al-Qaida have returned to deal a heavy blow to this treacherous alliance—this time against the Jews. They have carried out [this attack] in order to send out a message... Your women for our women, your elderly for ours, your monuments and important buildings for our homes... Allah willing, we will chase you on land, in the air, and at sea... The two operations of Mombasa, Kenya, against Israeli targets were carried out... in order to destroy all the schemes of the crusader-Jewish alliance aimed at securing their strategic interests in the region. These [operations] also

<sup>78</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>79</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>80</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>81</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>82</sup> Gittleman, Jeffrey and Eric Schmitt. “U.S. Forces Fire Missiles Into Somalia at a Kenyan.” *New York Times*. March 4, 2008.

underscore the failure of the U.S. and its allies, which mobilized their fleets to encircle and besiege the Horn of Africa in a bid to chase the mujahideen out of the region, denying them access to it or receiving supplies from it—and assuring that such operations as those which took place four years ago are never again to be repeated... These two operations were launched in order to demonstrate that the Islamic nation, rank and file, is one unified front against this enemy and its stated campaign against the Muslims. We hereby call upon our black brothers in this continent, who suffered the most from colonization—which robbed them of their customs, plundered their wealth, and denied them even basic human rights—to follow in the footsteps of the heroes of the two operations of Mombasa in order to spark a holocaust for the Jews and the crusaders.”<sup>83</sup>

In order to buttress their initial claim of responsibility, Al-Qaida also released an audio recording of senior Kuwaiti Al-Qaida commander Sulaiman Abu Ghaith, who explained:

“I would like to reconfirm what the politburo of the Al-Qaidat ul-Jihad Organization has stated concerning the two attacks in Mombasa, Kenya against the Jewish interests... Hunting our enemies from the crusader-Jewish alliance using the weapon of terrorism... is an effective strategy which must be used against the enemy by expanding the front lines and carrying out focused and lightning operations targeting his body, spread over a large area in this world so that he feels threatened, insecure, and unstable on the land, sea and in the air... It is a mistake to reduce the jihad to one limited organization.”<sup>84</sup>

The U.S. State Department has singled out four particular Al-Qaida terrorist suspects who were thought to be hiding out in Somalia under the protection of sympathetic ICU benefactors:<sup>85</sup>

- **Fazul Abdullah Mohammed** (a.k.a. Haroun al-Kamari)
  - Originally from the Comoros Islands, described by the U.S. government as a “senior Al-Qaida operative in East Africa... indicted for his alleged involvement in the bombings of the United States Embassies in [Kenya and] Tanzania.”<sup>86</sup>
  - In letters seized by the FBI, Mohammed requested Al-Qaida leaders “to keep in touch wit[h] us through the Internet from Pakistan, as we get a lot of information now about the Shaykh [Bin Laden] from that network.”<sup>87</sup>
  
- **Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan** (a.k.a. Abu Yousef al-Kini)
  - Originally from Kenya, described by the U.S. government as a “senior al-Qaida operative in East Africa; wanted for questioning with the 2002 attacks against a hotel and an Israeli airliner in Mombasa.”<sup>88</sup>
  - Police officials in Kenya allege that suspect that Nabhan bought the vehicle used in the 2002 Mombasa hotel bombing—and that he was involved in the August 1998 embassy bombings.<sup>89</sup>



<sup>83</sup> Political Bureau of Al-Qaida. “A Statement by the Al-Qaida Organization on the Two Operations in Mombasa Against the Jews.” Dated: December 2, 2002. <http://www.cambuur.net/cocI/printcb2b.html>.

<sup>84</sup> <http://www.cambuur.net/cocI/Eed.ra>. December 2002.

<sup>85</sup> Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. “Country Reports on Terrorism: Africa Overview.” U.S. State Department. April 30, 2007. <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/crt/2006/82730.htm>.

<sup>86</sup> “State Department Outlines Terrorist Threat in Somalia.” U.S. State Department Press Release. January 24, 2007.

<sup>87</sup> Government Exhibit GX-300A. U.S. v. Usama Bin Laden, et al. S(7) 98 Cr. 1023 (LBS). United States District Court, Southern District of New York. 2001.

<sup>88</sup> “State Department Outlines Terrorist Threat in Somalia.” U.S. State Department Press Release. January 24, 2007.

<sup>89</sup> Gettleman, Jeffrey and Eric Schmitt. “U.S. Forces Fire Missiles Into Somalia at a Kenyan.” New York Times. March 4, 2008.

- **Tariq Abdullah** (a.k.a. Abu Talha al-Sudani)
  - Originally from Sudan, described by the U.S. government as a “senior al-Qaida figure in East Africa since early 1990s; implicated in the 1998 bombings of the United States Embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Nairobi, Kenya; skilled with mortar weapons, planned a trip to Somalia in 1993 with other al-Qaeda figures to oppose U.S. forces there; cased the U.S. military base in Djibouti in 2003 in preparation for possible attacks.”<sup>90</sup>
- **Issa Osman Issa** (a.k.a. Abdullah al-Sudani)
  - Originally from Kenya, described by the U.S. government as an “Al-Qaida operative implicated in the 2002 attacks in Mombasa, Kenya; maintained contact with radical al Shabaab organization affiliated with the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) and commanded CIC militia near the interim capital of Baidoa.”<sup>91</sup>
  - According to the U.S. Treasury Department, Issa “was one of the operatives who fired the surface-to-air missiles used in the failed 2002 attempt to shoot down an Israeli airliner in Mombasa, Kenya.”<sup>92</sup>

In order to undermine the growing influence of militant forces within the ICU and to curb what had developed into a free sanctuary for Al-Qaida members in Somalia, in early 2006, the U.S. government engaged in negotiations with a group of secular Somali warlords with a mutual interest in stemming the Islamist tide. The eventual group of nine included Abdi Nure Siyad, Muhammad Qanyare Afrah, Muse Sudi Yalahow, Omar Finnish, Bashir Raghe, and Abdirashid Shire Ilqeyte.<sup>93</sup> This warlord coalition became known as the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT). According to Shabaab al-Mujahideen:

“America managed to recruit these mercenaries in order to fight the mujahideen who belonged to the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement and its supporters, in the capital Mogadishu. They began imprisoning the mujahideen and others who were named on a ‘terrorist watchlist’ and handed them over to the Americans. Those who were not taken prisoner were murdered and wiped out. They collected a payment from each imprisoned man, and this is how the war began. Shaykh Aden [Ayrow] survived several attempts of that nature; one of them was a break-in at his house. [Ayrow] was not at his home while that happened, and two other brothers that stayed there were arrested.”<sup>94</sup>

Rather than chasing remaining Al-Qaida cells out of Somalia, the efforts by the warlords led to the most violent clashes in years in Mogadishu—and only exposed the startling weakness and ineptitude of the warlords themselves. Within days, Islamist fighters were able to turn the tables, and forced the warlords to flee from large sections of Mogadishu: “the brothers staged a major attack against those mercenaries, which hindered them and prevented from accomplishing their plans in the area. The brothers had gone on the offense, instead of the defense... The movement’s reputation spread among the local people of Mogadishu, especially after they had learned about the glorious victory and the resistance against the warlords.”<sup>95</sup>

<sup>90</sup> “State Department Outlines Terrorist Threat in Somalia.” U.S. State Department Press Release. January 24, 2007.

<sup>91</sup> “State Department Outlines Terrorist Threat in Somalia.” U.S. State Department Press Release. January 24, 2007.

<sup>92</sup> “Treasury Targets Somali Terrorists.” U.S. Treasury Department Press Release (HP-1283). November 20, 2008. <https://treas.gov/press/releases/hp1283.htm>.

<sup>93</sup> “Somalia: Fifteen killed as militias clash in Mogadishu.” *IRIN News*. February 20, 2006.

<sup>94</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>95</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

Much of the initial fighting in Mogadishu took place in the port district, critical to local commerce. Ayrow and his mujahideen comrades forged relationships with wealthy businessmen and tribal officials, offering them protection against further extortion by the notoriously rapacious warlords.<sup>96</sup> These arrangements—matched with an aggressive military strategy—saw the developing Shabaab movement and other ICU-affiliated Islamists extend their control over more than half the territory of Somalia, including large swaths of the southern and central regions of the country. With the prospect of final victory over the warlords looming on the horizon, Ayrow and other mujahideen commanders “began organizing the forces, and tried to build a new core for an Islamic country in the model of the Taliban, but rotten nationalism and greed began consuming the principle members and leaders of the Islamic Courts. The Shaykh was pre-occupied with organizing the soldiers, opening training camps, and preparing the army. He was able to respond to any kind of aggressiveness shown towards the Islamic government in the Somali territories.”<sup>97</sup>

Initially, as the Islamists consolidated their territorial control over Somalia in 2006, there was a hope among some Somalis that a strict social regime in the form of Shariah (Islamic law) would lead to a new era of regional peace and reconciliation: “Allah gave the mujahideen control over huge swaths of land in Somalia, and the Somali people lived under the mighty reign of Allah.”<sup>98</sup> However, within short order, it became clear that the erratic interpretations of Shariah and their uneven enforcement by armed Islamist factions often ran directly contrary to an objective understanding of law and order. In June 2006, ICU spokesmen acknowledged claims by residents of the Somali capital Mogadishu that ICU-affiliated fighters on patrol had attempted “to close down cinemas whose proprietors had arranged to show satellite television pictures of World Cup matches taking place in Germany.” According to a representative of angry local residents, the movie theaters were being targeted because they also showed Western and Indian movies that ICU hardliners viewed as “corrupting” and contrary to the requirements of Shariah law.<sup>99</sup> Only days later—and despite the vague assurances from the ICU—a group of Islamist militiamen surrounded a movie theater in the Somali town of Dhusa Mareb where a crowd had gathered to watch the World Cup semi-final match. When members of the audience protested attempts by the gunmen to forcibly shut down the theater, they fired their weapons directly into the crowd of demonstrators, killing two people—the cinema owner and a young girl.<sup>100</sup>

The U.S.-influenced formation of the warlord-backed ARPCT had horribly backfired. Instead of being confined to limited areas of Mogadishu and southern Somalia, Al-Qaida’s base of operations in Somalia was active and flourishing. Clearly, if a military solution were to dislodge the Islamic Courts and their military wing, it would not come from among the corrupt warlords. Yet, it was not merely the U.S. and the ARPCT warlords alone who feared the rise of radical Islam in Somalia. Across the Gedo/Ogaden border, the government of Ethiopia looked with increasing concern upon the stunning victories of their old enemies from the AIAI, now reconstituted as the armed enforcement wing of the ICU. The prospect of individuals such as Shaykh Hassan Aweys effectively seizing the reins of power in Mogadishu was too much for the Ethiopians to swallow. In the early summer of 2006, Ethiopian military forces began massing along the Somali border, in apparent preparation for a renewed invasion. This activity caught the attention of Aweys, Ayro, and others working in the ICU and the nascent Shabaab al-Mujahideen organization. In its own propaganda, Shabaab has squarely placed blame on the U.S. and its Western allies for encouraging Somalia’s neighbors to take punitive action against it: “the world’s crusader forces

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<sup>96</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>97</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>98</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

<sup>99</sup> “World Cup ban in Mogadishu denied.” *BBC News*. June 13, 2006.

<sup>100</sup> “Somali World Cup viewers killed.” *BBC News*. July 5, 2006.

were mobilized. They held councils and meetings, at which they decided to move their forces rapidly into Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda.”<sup>101</sup>

The desperate struggle of the Somali Islamists against their “apostate” enemies soon attracted the attention of international jihadist movements around the world, including Al-Qaida. On July 1, 2006, Usama Bin Laden made a rare appearance in a new audiotape dealing with the subjects of Iraq and Somalia. The recording was distributed to television news agencies and by Al-Qaida’s As-Sahab Media Foundation over the Internet. In his audio message, Bin Laden accused Western nations of interfering in Somalia as part of their new “crusade”:

“...They are preparing to send military forces to Somalia at the suggestion of America, claiming it is to help and extended their security. And they lie and say that Somalia has suffered from tribal fighting since the defeat of America there ten years earlier. Is it intelligent to believe that they just discovered the tragedy today? Or is the real reason because the Shariah Courts have seized the capital and extended their influence over the most important regions, and is seeking to establish an Islamic state... We promise almighty Allah that we will fight [crusader] soldiers on the land of Somalia with His Help and Power. We also reserve the right to punish them on their own land and in any available place at any time or in any way which is convenient for us. I also urge the Muslim youths and their merchants to sacrifice everything valuable and to provide for all the needs of the mujahideen through trusted people, especially in Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Sudan.”<sup>102</sup>

Given the context and timing of Bin Laden’s previous public statements, this new release was considered by many—including Al-Qaida recruits in the West—as a direct endorsement for foreign mujahideen recruits to travel to Somalia and fight alongside the ICU as part of a legitimate jihad. Indeed, Al-Qaida’s strong interest in becoming involved in the Somali conflict became a consistent theme throughout the latter part of 2006. On December 9, the Al-Qaida-led “Islamic State of Iraq” issued a statement noting its “delight” and “joy” upon “hearing the good news from the jihad land in Somalia... we ask Allah to enable the brothers there to defeat the apostates and their allies, and to establish an Islamic State in the land of Somalia which Allah founded from jihad.”<sup>103</sup> Participants on radical Internet chat forums celebrated Bin Laden’s renewed dedication to the “vital mission” of jihad in Somalia and discussed the “very, very top priority” of forming an official “Al-Qaida Brigade in the Horn of Africa.”<sup>104</sup>

On July 20, 2006, the Ethiopian army finally moved into action, crossing into Somalia and seizing control over the town of Baidoa at the invitation of the internationally-recognized Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed—who was still regarded by many Somalis as a thinly-veiled proxy for Ethiopia, despite his stint in an Ethiopian prison. Over the following six months, clashes occurred on an increasingly frequent basis between Somali Islamist insurgents and Ethiopian troops occupying Baidoa and other nearby strategic positions. By December 2006, it became clear that a major showdown between the Islamists and the TFG-backed Ethiopian expeditionary force was virtually inevitable. On December 11, an alleged ICU representative identifying himself as Mohamed Ibrahim Bilaal advised the Associated Press via telephone, “Our fighters, with a large number of battle wagons, are now advancing on Tiyejlow... We will go to all border towns in our country to deprive our enemy of a route to enter into our country. Also we don’t want the enemy inside Somalia to get an exit route to flee from it when the jihad starts.”<sup>105</sup>

The much-anticipated battle finally got underway on December 20, 2006. Yet, after all the tough talk and posturing by Aden Ayrow and other Islamist militants, the Ethiopian military

<sup>101</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>102</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Shaykh Usama Bin Laden: ‘To the Islamic Nation Generally and the Mujahideen of Iraq and Somalia in Particular.’” <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=72219>. Released: July 1, 2006.

<sup>103</sup> <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=99848>. December 9, 2006.

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=73909>. July 10, 2006.

<sup>105</sup> “Islamic officials in Somalia say militiamen advancing to key town near Ethiopian border.” *Associated Press*. December 11, 2006.

once again proved too powerful an adversary for the Somalis to fight from fixed territorial positions. In less than two weeks of intense combat, the ICU and its gaggle of associated militiamen were pushed out of the capital Mogadishu, and quickly down into the far southern reaches of Somalia near the Kenyan border. In retrospect, Shabaab al-Mujahideen has blamed its relatively poor performance during this phase of the conflict on an unequal balance of power forged by the U.S.: “America wasn’t pleased with the stability in Somalia, so it unleashed its ‘hunting dogs’ in Ethiopia and Kenya, and this became an attack of the unjust on three fronts, which Allah revealed [to us]. Some of those who were not from among the ranks of the mujahideen surrendered—while those who stayed loyal remained patient amidst their hardships.”<sup>106</sup> As the ICU unexpectedly began to crumble in the face of a withering Ethiopian military offensive, their cause attracted the attention of other jihadi movements grappling with “crusader” enemies. Less than a week into the one-sided battle in December 2006—Al-Qaida’s “Islamic State of Iraq” desperately attempted to rally the ranks of “Allah’s soldiers in the Muslim land of Somalia” in their time of “painful distress.” The group urgently demanded in a follow-up message for “all the Muslims to stand with their brothers in Somalia, to support them with money, weapons, and men, and to pray for them that Allah may grant them victory over their enemies.”<sup>107</sup>

In the wake of the apparent Ethiopian victory over the ICU, the U.S. State Department was careful to distance itself from the initial decision to invade, and from the controversial conduct of that invasion. When questioned on the role America had played in encouraging the Ethiopians to take firm action against the ICU, U.S. diplomatic envoy to Kenya, Michael E. Ranneberger, insisted:

“The Ethiopians went in to Somalia to oust the Islamic Courts because it was in the Ethiopians’ interest to do so. Since the outset of the current crisis, we have emphasized U.S. support to bring security and stability to Somalia. In order to do that, we are supporting efforts to achieve inclusive national reconciliation, we are supporting the sending of [African peacekeeping] forces, and we are providing humanitarian and development assistance... I recognize that the Islamic Courts did manage to establish a degree of order in Mogadishu. However, the Islamic Courts never had broad support among the Somali people and, importantly, the Islamic Courts were moving in a very radical direction, which would not have been to the benefit of the Somali people... I want to emphasize our commitment to an inclusive process that truly brings together all Somalis who reject violence and extremism. This is the only way forward for Somalis to achieve lasting stability and security.”<sup>108</sup>

Yet, not everyone from the U.S. government was so tactful in their approach. In early January, U.S. Senator Sam Brownback visited Addis Ababa to personally “congratulate” Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi on his victory in Somalia: “I want to thank Ethiopia for its operations in defeat of the Islamic Courts. It is a victory for Ethiopia, a victory for the people of Somalia and a victory for all countries who stand against terrorism... Ethiopia has given Somalia and the Horn of Africa region a chance for peace and stability.”<sup>109</sup> Shabaab has pointed to examples such as this, commenting, “this American behavior shows the close alliance between the crusaders everywhere—and that they will spare no effort to extinguish the fire of Allah... Here they are now—rushing to eliminate our nation, wipe out our enterprises, and to undermine our position. We fight the Ethiopian crusaders on the ground in Somalia as American spy planes patrol above in the Somali skies, and their warships bombard our villages without any moral qualms.”<sup>110</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

<sup>107</sup> <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=102556>. December 27, 2006.

<sup>108</sup> “Webchat transcript: Ask the Ambassador: U.S.-Somalia Relations with Ambassador to Kenya.” Guest: Michael Ranneberger. May 23, 2007; 8 a.m. EDT. U.S. State Department; Bureau of International Information. <http://somalia.usvpp.gov/webchat05232007.html>.

<sup>109</sup> “Brownback Visits Ethiopia.” Press Release from the Office of U.S. Senator Sam Brownback. Dated: January 13, 2007. <http://brownback.senate.gov/pressapp/record.cfm?id=267550>.

<sup>110</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Declaration of a New ‘Praiseworthy Terrorism’ Campaign in Response to the Tyrant America.” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=175036>. April 5, 2008.

At almost the exact same time as Brownback's visit to Ethiopia, Al-Qaida's As-Sahab Media Foundation released another audio recording on the topic of Somalia—this time from Al-Qaida's deputy commander Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri. In his message, titled "Help your brothers in Somalia!", Zawahiri declared:

"I call upon Muslims in Somalia to be steadfast in this new battlefield and in the face of this new crusade campaign waged by the United States, its allies and the United Nations on Islam and Muslims... Resort to mines, ambushes, incursions and martyrdom attacks. By employing these methods, you will overwhelm their forces, erode their morals and eventually defeat them like a prey consumed alive by a lion... I also call upon Muslim brethren everywhere to answer for the call of Jihad in Somalia and to fulfill its need; I call upon the lions of Islam in Yemen, the land of faith and wisdom; I call upon my brothers, the lions of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, the cradle of early conquests; I call up on my brothers, the lions of Islam in Egypt, Sudan and the Arabic Occident and all regions of the Islamic world to rush aid to their Muslim brothers in Somalia by means of fighters, money, opinion and expertise in defiance of the servants of America who are being sacrificed for its safety."<sup>111</sup>

Following the apparent success of the Ethiopian conquest of southern Somalia, Aden Hashi Ayrow secretly returned to the capital Mogadishu "in order to organize the people and to carry out a guerrilla war against the crusader's forces. This idea was one of his concerns after he estimated the situation and derived the usefulness from his former military experience."<sup>112</sup>

The beginning of the Ethiopian occupation also marked the end of the uneasy relationship between the Shabaab militia versus Shaykh Sharif Ahmed and other more progressive forces within the ICU. When Shaykh Sharif and Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys announced that they would participate in a conference of opposition leaders in nearby Eritrea in September 2007 under the banner of the "Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia" (ARS), their patience finally ran out. At the conference in Asmara, Hassan Aweys strongly denied any connections to Al-Qaida, insisting, "I am a Somali nationalist fighting for a free and united Somalia."<sup>113</sup> Shabaab blamed Shaykh Sharif and Aweys for offering secular Somali opposition figures "a series of concessions on issues of Islamic beliefs and principles": "The brothers were surprised that Shaykh Sharif himself had been persuaded by the Americans... and distanced themselves from Shaykh Sharif. The pioneer of this group was Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow... [He] was appointed as the administrator for the party issues, and he was the first deputy commander under Shaykh Mukhtar Abu al-Zubair, emir of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement."<sup>114</sup> With Shaykh Mukhtar (a.k.a. Ahmed Abdi Aw-Mohamed) as emir and Ayrow at his side, the Shabaab movement had fully emerged from the political womb.<sup>115</sup>

In December 2007, amid some confusion in the jihadi community over the precise differences between the ICU and Shabaab al-Mujahideen, supporters of Shabaab attempted to



**Aden Hashi Ayrow, shown preparing a batch of explosives**

<sup>111</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. "Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri: 'Help Your Brothers in Somalia!'" <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=103842>. Released: January 4, 2007.

<sup>112</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "'Light and Fire': The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow." *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>113</sup> "New Somali alliance threatens war." *BBC News*. September 12, 2007.

<sup>114</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "'Light and Fire': The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow." *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>115</sup> "Treasury Targets Somali Terrorists." U.S. Treasury Department Press Release (HP-1283). November 20, 2008. <https://treas.gov/press/releases/hp1283.htm>.

offer clarification. The “ideals and principles of the Islamic Courts (otherwise known as the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia): a belief in peaceful co-existence, mutual respect and cooperation with the nations of the free world, and especially its neighbors... respect for international treaties, and working to improve relations with all international and regional organizations... a belief in the sanctity of human rights... an interest in gathering together all Somalis, regardless of whether they are secular, democratic, parliamentary, [or] apostates... [and] avoiding adopting the cause of jihad in delivering their political message.” By contrast, Shabaab al-Mujahideen is “seeking to establish an Islamic state along the lines of the Taliban ruled by the law of Allah in the land of Somalia; regards the rulers of the Muslim world today as branches of the international conspiracy against Islam, and thus they are to be regarded as infidels and overthrown; [and] seeks to expand the jihad to Somalia’s Christian neighbors, with the intent of driving the infidels out of the Horn of Africa, along the same lines as Al-Qaida has been striving to do under the slogan, ‘expelling the infidels out of the Arabian Peninsula.’”<sup>116</sup> In a letter later published by Shabaab al-Mujahideen in 2008, Abu Mansoor al-Amriki—an American jihadi fighting alongside the Somali Islamists—scoffed at the image that was “presented to the world of the ‘moderate’ picture of the [Islamic] Courts [Union]... Despite these facts even the Kuffaar could see something else behind the scenes. They publicized that there is an ‘extremist’ group (according to their description) lurking within the government of the Courts. They were right on about most of this except for mistakenly believing that the leader of this extremist group was Hassan Dahir Aweys.”<sup>117</sup>

In fact, by January 2007, the real leaders of the Shabaab militia were already squarely in the sights of both the Ethiopians and the United States. On January 7, U.S. AC-130 gunships launched a failed airstrike targeting Aden Hashi Ayrow in a remote mangrove forest in southern Somalia. According to Shabaab al-Mujahideen:

“[Ayro] was moving through the depths of the jungles in southern Somalia. The air raids on him and his brothers in the jungles were intense. [Ayro]... possessed an international two-way radio called a Thuraya. When he discovered that he could be identified when he used this radio, he got rid of it. As a result, the airstrikes on him diminished. The Shaykh’s shoulder was injured in one of these attacks. The media announced that Shaykh Aden Ayrow was killed. The Americans thought that they had killed him, because they found the Shaykh’s clothing, in which they found the Thuraya two-way radio... and a copy of [his] passport in the jacket pocket.”<sup>118</sup>

Shaykh Mukhtar Robow has also offered his own take on these events:

“When the Islamic Courts retreated to Juba [southern Somalia], the jets of the American enemy targeted him, at which time some men gained martyrdom—including some of his bodyguards. He was slightly injured, and he was healed by the grace of Allah. The brother entered Ethiopia again, leading one of the mujahideen fronts. He tried to communicate through the wireless device. So, the jets of the American enemy started to hover around and he sensed that. So, he put the device inside one of the caves and left the place. Then, the aircraft that had been observing his movements all day long returned and poured its lava on that mountain, but Allah saved him. After that, the Americans kept tracing his movements, intending to target him in an airstrike.”<sup>119</sup>

On May 1, 2007, the efforts of the U.S. military to track Aden Ayrow finally came to fruition. At the time, Ayrow and other Shabaab al-Mujahideen commanders were hiding in a house in the town of Dhusa Mareb: “[he] was there along with one of his outstanding brothers from the movement, Shaykh Muhiyadeen [Omar] and other brothers... when bombs that were fired from 4 airplanes originating from the American base in Djibouti wounded him, and as a

<sup>116</sup> <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=156555>. December 9, 2007.

<sup>117</sup> Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). “Abu Mansoor al-Amriki: ‘A Message to The Mujaahideen in Particular and Muslims in General.’” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=165965>. Dated: January 8, 2008.

<sup>118</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>119</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “O’ Abu Muhsen! You Gained in the Deal.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=186803>. Released: July 24, 2008.

result, he and several of his brothers from the movement became martyrs, bless their memory.”<sup>120</sup> Nor was Ayrow the only one with reason to fear—other U.S. airstrikes targeted suspected Al-Qaida members and high-ranking Shabaab leaders in Ras Kamboni, Mogadishu, and beyond. Shabaab even accused the U.S. military of intervening in straightforward combat situations involving local Somali forces loyal to the TFG: “on June 1, [2007], an armed clash took place between a unit of Shabaab al-Mujahideen and the Task Force of the Army of Puntland in eastern Somalia, which led to the wounding of approximately 11 soldiers from Puntland, 4 of whom were seriously injured. After that, American aircraft randomly bombed the location, without causing any harm to the mujahideen there.”<sup>121</sup>

Those who managed to survive the campaign of U.S. airstrikes nonetheless remained defiant to the last. Only weeks after the violent death of Aden Hashi Ayrow, most wanted Kenyan Al-Qaida operative Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan was recorded by Shabaab cameraman vowing to never abandon the cause of jihad:

“They don’t realize that the blood of a martyr is the minaret of our lives, and the match for the fuse of our determination—and with it, the generation finds enlightenment and the jihad is continued on... So whether you bomb a commander or kill another, the flame of the jihad will only increase in its sparks and conflagration, and it will only increase our persistence and endurance. Let me give you an example to clarify what I am saying to you: a month ago, the brave brother Abu Muhsen al-Ansari, Aden Hashi Ayrow, was martyred in bombing attacks by your fighter planes. Did that cause the jihad in Somalia to stop? No, by Allah, instead we renewed our oath to seek the [same] death as the noble martyrs... Before [Ayro], more than a year ago, our commander was martyred, the emir of the mujahideen in Somalia, Abu Talha al-Sudani, while he was leading one of the mujahideen brigades. This is the first time that we have made that fact public.”<sup>122</sup>

Nabhan was joined by the emir of Shabaab, Shaykh Mukhtar Abu az-Zubair, in expressing these sentiments. For his part, az-Zubair declared “to the infidels led by America [and] the crusaders... if you thought that targeting some of the mujahideen would interrupt the march of jihad, or stop it, then we announce to you the failure of this method. For, shedding blood and the killing of mujahideen as martyrs in this cause only reassures us of the truth and justice of our path. Instead, this will only... bring new generations to the jihad, those who were unaware of the battlefields before being enlightened by the blood of the martyrs.”<sup>123</sup>

Likewise, in their hour of despair, Shabaab found a steady source of support from Al-Qaida’s senior leadership in Afghanistan. In March 2007, the As-Sahab Media Foundation released a video of Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Liby

“Crying and sobbing has no place in a battle in which the infidels have combined all their powers, recruited all their troops, and called out to each other... So, O’ lions of Somalia and champions of the deserts and jungles... this is merely a distress which will vanish and a darkness which will pass, to be followed by nothing less than certain victory, pure consolidation and good outcomes... The Abyssinian rabble didn’t enter your land and occupy your country through conferences, negotiations, accords or talks. No, they declared a blatant war against you, for which they readied armies and came together to wage it and sought help in it from partners... So make it blood for blood, and destruction for destruction... Fight a guerrilla war, for it is the most durable of battles and the least in losses, most crushing, and most appropriate for the weak and few. Carry out against them raid after raid, lay ambushes for them, shake the earth beneath them with bombs and mines, destroy their bases and fortresses with martyrdom operations and car bombs, cut their supply routes, frighten with them those behind them, disturb their security, and make their life miserable, for the blood of one of them is the blood of a dog. Light a fire and make a volcano erupt

<sup>120</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>121</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “A Statement on the American Bombardment of a Mujahideen Position.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=132561>. June 2, 2007.

<sup>122</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “A Video-Recorded Address: Commander Shaykh Abu Yusuf Saleh al-Nabhan.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=190276>. Released: August 30, 2008.

<sup>123</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “O’ Abu Muhsen! You Gained in the Deal.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=186803>. Released: July 24, 2008.

under the feet of the invading occupiers regardless of their creed and their cover, and whether they invaded your country on the back of tanks and with the power of iron and fire, as Nazarene Ethiopia did, or came to you under the cloak of international legitimacy, Security Council resolutions, peacekeeping forces, or the African Union.”<sup>124</sup>

Months later, Shaykh Mukhtar Abu az-Zubair released an audio recording specifically thanking Abu Yahya al-Liby for helping to “mobilize the Army of Distress—your words have had a more powerful impact than a thousand courageous mujahideen in the battle of your brothers against the global crusade. May Allah bless [Abu Yahya] for what he has done on our behalf, and for Islam. His words still inspire your brothers, and supported them at a time when the mujahideen had been abandoned by everyone else other than almighty Allah.”<sup>125</sup>

Endowed with a nationalist cause popular among many Somalis—resisting the incursion of hostile invaders from Ethiopia—the Shabaab movement quickly gained traction, with or without Aden Hashi Ayrow and Abu Talha al-Sudani. Following several months of mounting insurgent operations, Shabaab al-Mujahideen issued a statement “assuring the Islamic Nation that control of the battle is back in the hands of mujahideen—thanks to Allah—because the defeated crusader enemy mostly depends on his [superior] equipment and numbers, but... the enemy’s jets, bulldozers, and tanks aren’t suited to dealing with gang wars in urban streets and forests, praise be to Allah. The landmines and explosive devices are awaiting them, and aside from that, the martyrdom lions. The mujahideen have transferred the battle into the hearts of the homes of their [enemies].”<sup>126</sup> Shaykh Mukhtar Abu az-Zubair himself confirmed that Shabaab had shifted its battlefield methodology, along the lines endorsed by Usama Bin Laden, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Abu Yahya al-Liby. According to Commander az-Zubair, “Ethiopian military tactics depend on two factors: deploying large numbers of troops, and the use of airborne bombardments with rockets and artillery. Your mujahideen brothers have adapted to this superiority by adopting a guerilla-style of warfare that has rendered most of the weapons of our enemies ineffective—except in the commission of heinous crimes against innocent people and destroying towns and villages. Their superior numbers have become a liability for the Ethiopian army, because the mujahideen are now hunting their soldiers everywhere. The morale of their army has collapsed, they have lost their balance... its supply routes have been cut, and signs of attrition have begun to arise amongst their forces.”<sup>127</sup>

As part of their new Iraq-inspired insurgent strategy against the Ethiopian and other “crusader” invaders, Shabaab al-Mujahideen began recruiting young men for a new type of operation that, heretofore, was quite alien to Somalia: suicide bombings. By April 2007, Shabaab and various other ICU splinter factions had begun posting relatively-stylized “martyrdom” videos, along the model established by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Iraq. Though the videos were initially recorded in native Somali, they were quickly geared to a primarily Arabic and English-speaking audience. The bombers were mostly young Somali men—some, as in the case of “Abu Bakr Said Khairee” in June 2007, even childlike. Their martyrdom wills demonstrate a basic familiarity with the Salafi-jihadi methodology, and an understanding of how Somalia fits into the context of a larger “crusader” war on Islam. In one video, a young Somali man who had returned from living abroad to join Shabaab explained, “O’ my people, know that I am doing this martyrdom operation only for the sake of Allah and his religion... not... for nationalism, tribe, and money or

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<sup>124</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Liby: To the Army of Distress in Somalia.” March 25, 2007. (Dated: February 2007)

<sup>125</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Shaykh Mujahid Mukhtar Abu az-Zubair: ‘Our Jihad Until There is No More Tumult or Oppression, and There Prevails Justice and Faith.’” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=181838>. Released: June 1, 2008.

<sup>126</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Battle is Back in the Hands of the Mujahideen.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=127389>. May 11, 2007.

<sup>127</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Shaykh Mujahid Mukhtar Abu az-Zubair: ‘Our Jihad Until There is No More Tumult or Oppression, and There Prevails Justice and Faith.’” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=181838>. Released: June 1, 2008.

fame.”<sup>128</sup> He implored directly to other would-be “martyrs”, “O’ mujahid, the only weapon that your enemy cannot resist is your [faith] and the martyrdom operations... O’ brothers who are seeking the pleasure of Allah, go forth for the martyrdom operations. It is the best [testament to your faith], and it will inflict the heaviest casualties among the enemies of Islam.”<sup>129</sup>

One of the errant youth recruited by Shabaab for this mission was Somali national Mursal Abdinur Mohamed Ali, who, in 2009, drove a car packed with explosives into a former university compound housing African Union peacekeepers from Burundi. In his early twenties, he had previously been enrolled in an Islamic madrassa in the Hamar Jabjabo district of Mogadishu. According to a former friend “Saed” who later was interviewed by BBC News, “Shabab recruited [Abdinur] in 2006 when they established the Salahudeen training camp in Mogadishu... He was a normal young man who lived with his parents. He liked football and was sociable but when he joined al-Shabab, he became very quiet, and completely changed... He started dressing like Pakistani or Afghan people. I had never known him dress like that before. He sometimes used to wear military camouflage.”<sup>130</sup>

Shabaab’s escalation of violence into the realm of suicide bombings was matched by a declaration of war on African Union (AU) peacekeepers who began arriving in Mogadishu in early March 2007. The 3,400-man force—comprised of troops contributed by nearby Burundi and Uganda—would help alleviate the burden on the Ethiopian military, and provide much-needed political stability without provoking the same essential nationalist animosities among ordinary Somalis.<sup>131</sup> Unfortunately, while this logic may have held sway among Western governments and other principals, the hardline Somali Islamists from Shabaab hardly shared that view. As early as 2005, even those spurned by Shabaab as “too moderate”—such as Shaykh Hassan Dahir Aweys—warned that any foreign peacekeepers arriving in Somalia would be treated as an illegitimate occupying force: “We will fight fiercely to the death any intervention force that arrives in Somalia.”<sup>132</sup> Even more fanatical sentiments have been expressed by Shabaab; according to one of the group’s “field commanders” Abu Saleem al-Somali:

“These people are blind to the reality that sending these [AU] forces will not actually change anything... It is to be assured that our jihad does not target a specific nationality from amongst the crusaders more than any other—rather, it targets any crusader occupier wherever they can be found... The mujahideen understand that there isn’t any difference between fighting the Habashis [Ethiopians], the Ugandans, or the Burundians, who came under the pretext of a so-called peacekeeping force... The departure of the occupying Ethiopian forces, and replacing them with another force—whether it belongs to the African Union, the United Nations, or any other national and international organization, and regardless of whatever slogan they brand themselves with, such as ‘peacekeeping forces’—doesn’t change a thing... All these plots, names, and symbols are nothing more than a scheme to replace one occupation with another.”<sup>133</sup>

Within only days of their arrival, AU soldiers reported coming under fire from insurgents in Mogadishu.<sup>134</sup> A string of roadside bombings, mortar bombardments, and sniper attacks eventually culminated in an official statement from Shabaab al-Mujahideen on the subject. On October 24, 2007, Shabaab offered one of its first claims of responsibility for an attack on AU peacekeepers—to wit, a mortar attack on the port in Mogadishu. The statement accused Ugandan army chief Paddy Ankunda of scheming “to take control of the central prison, which is

<sup>128</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Will of Abu Ayyub al-Muhajir.”

<http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=170168>. Released: March 1, 2008.

<sup>129</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Will of Abu Ayyub al-Muhajir.”

<http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=170168>. Released: March 1, 2008.

<sup>130</sup> Mohamed, Mohamed. “Somalia’s text message insurgency.” BBC News. March 16, 2009.

<sup>131</sup> “First African Union Peacekeepers Arrive in Somalia.” Voice of America (VOA) News. March 1, 2007.

<sup>132</sup> “Somali ‘jihad’ on foreign troops.” BBC News. March 25, 2005.

<sup>133</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

<sup>134</sup> “Somali Insurgents Attack Newly-Arrived AU Peacekeepers.” Voice of America (VOA) News. March 7, 2007.

reeling with the screams of the Muslim clergy and mujahideen held there, along with several martyr widows... Thus, the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement has declared war on the Ugandan army and—Allah willing—we we will make them taste the same destruction as their fellow Ethiopian and apostate marauders.”<sup>135</sup> This was followed up weeks later with a lengthy dissertation issued by Shabaab on the punishment that “African mercenary armies” should expect as a result of their involvement in Somalia. According to that document:

“If the Somali capital Mogadishu... is subject to heavy bombardment and destruction at the hands of the Ugandan-Ethiopian-Burundian alliance, then it is only the balance of justice for the capitals of Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, Kampala in Uganda, and Bujumbura in Burundi to experience the same pain and bitterness... The participating states [in the AMISOM mission] have become soldiers in the occupation of our country as part of the crusader alliance led by the criminal Bush and the global war waged against all Muslims. Thus, they have become the target of those who are launching strikes in order to defend the Muslims and their religion.”<sup>136</sup>

The leadership of Shabaab has sharply defended the group’s unrelenting hostility towards the African Union and United Nations. In a propaganda recording produced by Shabaab, field commander Abu Saleem al-Somali demanded, “Is it reasonable for us to stand cross-armed like this, while the United Nations is making plans to bring more crusade forces here to occupy our homes and change our religion? Wasn’t it the UN which established Abdullahi Yusuf’s government to begin with... and who gave a green line for the Christians to occupy our lands? ...They considered these [AU] forces less harmful than the Ethiopians, and so... the biggest atheist organization on this planet, notorious for its malevolence towards Islam and Muslims, sent its troops into this Muslim country in order... to twist the Islamic roots away from the lives of Muslims.”<sup>137</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen has also repeated its threat to “punish” Uganda, Burundi, and Ethiopia—within their own borders, if necessary—on more than one occasion. According to Shabaab’s chief spokesman Shaykh Mukhtar Robow, “we will retaliate against these countries and their people, in their own lands, in a just punishment—yes, in their very own lands, just like they did [to us], and Allah is fulfilling his promise, but most people are unaware.”<sup>138</sup> Shabaab propaganda has boasted, “the wager made on the Ethiopians, Ugandans, and Burundians in Somalia was a failure, and history has proven it. Allah willing, we will attack them, roam [through their ranks], cut off every path they will take, chase away those who follow them, and fight them as insects and wolves. [We] will give them a taste of the heat of flame, and throw them into hell.”<sup>139</sup>

Even Shabaab al-Mujahideen suicide bombers targeting AU forces seem to understand the relatively controversial nature of their operations. In his final video-recorded will, one bomber acknowledged, “certainly, many amongst you will have doubts about the legitimacy of the operations against the so-called African Union peacekeepers in Somalia.” Nonetheless, he was quick to address those “doubts”: “the lion of Islam, Shaykh Usama Bin Laden, may Allah preserve him, has warned them clearly... and we, the Shabaab al-Mujahideen, have warned them in our statements that they will never, by the will of Allah, be safe inside Somalia, or in their own countries.” The young Somali militant scoffed, “the only language they understand is the language of fire, sword, and bombs. Let the other countries who are in Somalia and those who have pledged to send troops and the UN take lessons, for this is what will [happen]... to every enemy, to every army that will set foot in Somalia... We will not accept any peacekeeping army,

<sup>135</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen. “A Declaration of War on the Ugandan Forces.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=150343>. October 23, 2007.

<sup>136</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen. “A Letter to the Condemned African Mercenary Nations.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=160613>. Released: January 3, 2008.

<sup>137</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

<sup>138</sup> Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). “An Interview With the Commander Abi Mansoor (Mukhtaar Ali Robo), the Spokesman of the Youth Islamic Movement in Somalia.” *Sada al-Jihad*. Issue 25; May 2008. <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=179163>.

<sup>139</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Declaration of a New ‘Praiseworthy Terrorism’ Campaign in Response to the Tyrant America.” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=175036>. April 5, 2008.

whether from the AU, the UN, the Arab League, or any other entity... There are lots of martyrdom seekers who are ready to follow my path and send your soldiers back to you in coffins.”<sup>140</sup>

Similarly, Shabaab has adopted a defiant approach to its specific designation as a “terrorist organization” by the U.S. government. On February 26, 2008, the U.S. State Department announced that Shabaab al-Mujahideen would be blacklisted as a recognized Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) pursuant to Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act.<sup>141</sup> The designation made it unlawful for anyone in the United States to provide material support to Shabaab, froze material resources linked to Shabaab and held in custody by U.S. financial institutions, and allowed the expulsion of any Shabaab members or representatives living in the United States. In a statement issued shortly thereafter, Shabaab al-Mujahideen scoffed that “this decision should not come as a surprise to anyone, but is merely a confirmation of previous events... As we are a part of the Salafi-Jihadi Islamic trend which opposes the dominance of the crusaders and the aggression led by America, we do not find it unlikely that America would add us to the names of these other honorable men, for whom we are honored to join, at the bottom of their list. We know full well that we are not being targeted because we are Somali, but because we are advocating the concept of jihad in its broadest sense—which does not recognize fanciful boundaries or so-called ‘international legitimacy.’”<sup>142</sup> The group also issued an appeal directed to “all the other mujahideen included in the American terrorist list: O’ mujahideen brothers! By Allah, you are in a condition which is to be envied. May you be successful in your jihad and may you frustrate the enemies... We call upon you to round up and join forces under one leadership and a uniform flag in order to frustrate the enemies of Allah and execute his command.”<sup>143</sup>

## Part V: The Current Status of Shabaab and its Islamist Rivals

Given the historical precedent from the Ogaden war—and the succession of early victories enjoyed by the Ethiopians in 2006—hopes ran high in early 2007 that the world had seen the last of the ICU fringe faction, which would soon disappear into the same obscurity as its ideological precursor Al-Ittihad al-Islami. Instead, “after two years of continuous jihad, and great sacrifices, Allah graced the mujahideen from this Islamic nation to defeat the crusaders and their allies in the government.”<sup>144</sup> Even while defending their military intervention as a “mission accomplished”, the Ethiopians nonetheless conceded that “chaos [is] prevailing” in Somalia and that “durable peace is still the call of the people of Somalia which is yet to be answered.”<sup>145</sup> By the end of January 2008, the last of the Ethiopian soldiers had withdrawn from their forward positions, even from the TFG-stronghold of Baidoa. Not surprisingly, neither the signing of an accord in Djibouti in July 2008 detailing the terms of the Ethiopian departure—nor their departure itself—did anything to convince Shabaab to lay down its arms.

To the contrary, the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces has been taken by many Somali Islamists as a symbol of their victory, and they have moved to consolidate their power and influence. According to Shabaab al-Mujahideen, in this “third year of jihad”, “Allah has granted his supporters control back over most of the territory of southern Somalia. And, they have

<sup>140</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Will of the Martyr Abdul Aziz Saad, May Allah Accept Him.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=197107>. October 30, 2008.

<sup>141</sup> Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. “Designation of al-Shabaab as a Foreign Terrorist Organization.” Dated February 26, 2008; Published in the Federal Register of March 18, 2008 (Vol. 73, No. 53). U.S. State Department. <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/other/08/102446.htm>.

<sup>142</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Declaration of a New ‘Praiseworthy Terrorism’ Campaign in Response to the Tyrant America.” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=175036>. April 5, 2008.

<sup>143</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Declaration of a New ‘Praiseworthy Terrorism’ Campaign in Response to the Tyrant America.” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=175036>. April 5, 2008.

<sup>144</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

<sup>145</sup> “Press Statement: Mission Accomplished – Ethiopian National Defence Forces Start to Pull Out of Somalia.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. January 4, 2009.

announced the birth of new Islamic regimes, which are responsible for addressing local issues and have become havens for the mujahideen, the supporters, and the muhajireen [foreign fighters]... On the other hand, disease and defeat continue to follow in the footsteps of the crusade occupiers, and they have virtually no presence left except in Baidoa, the headquarters for the new government; in some neighborhoods of Mogadishu; and, at one base in the town of Afgooye, located on the road between Mogadishu and Baidoa.<sup>146</sup> Meanwhile, Shabaab fighters have been forced to concede nothing from their extreme and unyielding political platform. According to an American mujahid fighting with Shabaab known as “Abu Mansoor al-Amriki”, “we see that they are focused upon the pure [methodology] which is adopted by the Mujaahideen in the rest of the blessed lands of Jihaad. It is the same [methodology] repeatedly heard from the mouth of the mujaahid shaykh Usaamah bin Laden (may Allaah preserve him). It is the same manhaj heard in the addresses of the lion, the genius, the doctor Ayman ath-Thawaahiri (may Allaah preserve him) and the one heard in the advices of the shaheed (in shaa’ Allaah), the hero, Abu Mus’ab az-Zarqaawi (may Allaah have mercy on him).”<sup>147</sup>

Since 2006, Shabaab has also managed to diversify its principle sources of financing. In addition to the usual charitable benefactors based in the Arabian Peninsula and networks of sympathetic Somali exiles living abroad, the Islamists have also aggressively forged relationships with key local merchants and businessmen who are in need of protection. By allowing Shabaab to assume control over their security needs, the merchants become critically dependent upon Shabaab and the relative sense of stability the group can provide. Militants have also broadened their unregulated involvement in commercial activities by actively re-selling seized war booty in order to finance future jihadi operations. Following their conquest of the town of Dinsor (near Baidoa) in February 2008, “the mujahideen opened a market to sell some of the seized booty, such as clothing, shoes, and other items with marketable value... The revenue from this trade will be lumped together with the rest of booty, and will, Allah-willing, be split in accordance with Shariah law.”<sup>148</sup> When two young Somali men were captured by Shabaab importing commercial goods into Dinsor on behalf of the Transitional Federal Government, “they were released because the mujahideen only kill the crusaders and their apostate agents—not like what has been alleged about the mujahideen killing innocent people and targeting civilian cars.”<sup>149</sup>

As suggested above, with the Ethiopians gone, expectations are presently running high that Shabaab is preparing to declare the formation of an official Islamic State in Somalia. In a private question-and-answer session with jihadi supporters in late December 2008, a Shabaab al-Mujahideen “field commander” known as “Abu Abdelrahman al-Somali” assured, “Praise be to Allah, the mujahideen have already agreed on this issue—that they will announce the establishment of an Islamic Emirate in this country, in the Horn of Africa region. We have decided that, with the help of Allah, we will soon announce this Islamic Emirate.”<sup>150</sup> The proposed “Islamic Emirate” would cover not only those directly loyal to Shabaab, but also other sympathetic factions that have emerged from the ashes of the former Islamic Courts Union. The American jihadi “Abu Mansoor al-Amriki, among others, has taken pains to point out that “there has not ceased to be sincere people amongst the Islaamic Courts. I see them to be sincere... not... all of them want to

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<sup>146</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

<sup>147</sup> Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). “Abu Mansoor al-Amriki: ‘A Message to The Mujaahideen in Particular and Muslims in General.’” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=165965>. Dated: January 8, 2008.

<sup>148</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen. “The Blessed Conquest of Dinsor.” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=180320>. Released: May 17, 2008.

<sup>149</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen. “The Blessed Conquest of Dinsor.” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=180320>. Released: May 17, 2008.

<sup>150</sup> Ansar al-Mujahideen. “Exclusive: Ansar al-Mujahideen Hosts an Audio Interview with one of the Field Commanders of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement.” <http://www.ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=1881>. December 22, 2008.

destroy the religion and betray the Somali Jihaad.”<sup>151</sup> Shabaab field commander “Abu Abdelrahman” confirmed, “this information is true. They [remaining ICU militiamen] have joined their brothers, and have combined forces now, praise be to Allah. The mujahideen have agreed now to fight together against their enemy.”<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, according to Abu Abdelrahman:

“Praise be to Allah, most of the cities in southern Somalia are in the control of the mujahideen... There are no traces of the enemy or any other apostates like them anywhere, other than a few spots inside the capital and in the city of Baidoa. As far as other areas in the south are concerned, they are also in the hands of the mujahideen... The Shariah Courts are open, and there are no other courts besides the Shariah and the Islamic courts. There are no other courts, praise be to Allah. The book of Allah is the ruling authority amongst the people. It is also well-known that any tape with songs [on it] is forbidden and music is not allowed. You cannot hear even one sound which is not approved by almighty Allah... Moreover, most recently, during the month of Dhul Hijjah [December 2008], following holiday prayers, our mujahideen completed the destruction of tombs and graves that were being worshipped instead of almighty Allah. They destroyed more than 150 temples. I do not refer to them as ‘cemeteries’, but rather ‘temples’, which are being worshipped instead of almighty Allah... whose messenger, may peace be upon him, ordered this—for us to destroy the tombs and the graves... You do not see any woman on the streets who is not wearing a legal hijab, and you cannot see any part of the female body... Praise be to Allah, we have such a life here, that I doubt there is a better one to be found anywhere on earth.”<sup>153</sup>



**Shabaab fighters enforce the Shariah penalty for adultery in Mogadishu, March '09**

Clearly, the greatest existential threat to Shabaab al-Mujahideen today comes not in the form of any military opponent per se, but rather from well-credentialed former Islamist allies-turned political rivals—such as the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia and the larger, coalition umbrella party known as “Hizbul Islam.” Even Shabaab has taken note of this threat, and freely concedes the critical danger it represents. According to Shabaab, the proliferation of dissident Islamist factions (and even the democratic election of Shaykh Sharif Ahmed in January 2009 as President of Somalia) is part of a complex “American plot” to destroy Islam in Somalia: “This strategy depended on the so-called ‘moderate Muslims’, in the terminology of the Americans... A plot was conceived by America and the infidel countries on one hand, and the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia—which is American-backed—on the other. Their efforts were concentrated on immediately killing off the obligation of jihad, and giving an honorable image to the Ethiopian retreat, following the defeats they suffered and continue to suffer at the hands of the honest mujahideen.”<sup>154</sup> For his part, Shaykh Sharif defended the decision of the ARS to join in U.S.-backed power-sharing negotiations: “some people might think that there’s been a change in our platform, but there’s no change in our platform, and we are on a continuous search for a solution.”<sup>155</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). “Abu Mansoor al-Amriki: ‘A Message to The Mujaahideen in Particular and Muslims in General.’” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=165965>. Dated: January 8, 2008.

<sup>152</sup> Ansar al-Mujahideen. “Exclusive: Ansar al-Mujahideen Hosts an Audio Interview with one of the Field Commanders of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement.” <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=1881>. December 22, 2008.

<sup>153</sup> Ansar al-Mujahideen. “Exclusive: Ansar al-Mujahideen Hosts an Audio Interview with one of the Field Commanders of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement.” <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=1881>. December 22, 2008.

<sup>154</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

<sup>155</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

Nonetheless, the apparent backpedaling of Shaykh Sharif and Shaykh Hassan Aweys has won only derision from hardline Islamists. Shabaab al-Mujahideen has accused Sharif of “creating disunity” by accepting the decisions of “infidel conferences”: “the modern infidel democratic method has been accepted by those who used to claim until recently that they are leaders of the mujahideen... America financed this party, just as they did in Iraq, in order to put pressure on the tribal leaders who are still hosting the mujahideen.”<sup>156</sup> Shabaab has also angrily denied accusations by Shaykh Sharif and others affiliated with the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) that they are responsible for committing human rights atrocities and other illegal actions. They have countered these allegations with charges of their own, blaming the ARS leadership for “disgracing the image of the mujahideen inside and out, through lies and rumors... describing the mujahideen as unjust and hegemonic.”<sup>157</sup> In one particular speech cited by Shabaab, a senior ARS spokesman identified as Abdelrahman Janqoa was quoted lamenting, “the Shabaab are killing innocent people, and they are frightening and murdering merchants... And for your information, the executions taking place now, they are responsible for them and are their doing.”<sup>158</sup> Shabaab field commander Abu Saleem al-Somali openly addressed Shaykh Sharif and his ARS colleagues, demanding, “how can you permit the crusaders to invade our homes, manipulate our beliefs, and rape our families? And if you still are in agreement with this, then why did you take up arms against the Habashis from Uganda and elsewhere?”<sup>159</sup>

In the first edition of its Arabic-language propaganda magazine *Millat Ibrahim*, Shabaab published a detailed comparative analysis breaking down the essential differences between Shabaab and Shaykh Sharif’s ARS. According to that analysis, the ARS is comprised of “several defeatist elements from the Islamic Courts... a mixture of well-known politicians and secular activists” whose authority and methodology is based on “democracy, tribalism, international law, the school of secularism, Somali nationalism, [and] parts of the Muslim Shariah. The opinion of the majority is the determinative factor, and decisions are made accordingly.”<sup>160</sup> The Shabaab magazine suggests that the ARS has “abandoned violent struggle” as a tool of party policy in exchange for “the constant concession of its principles [during] negotiations and conferences.” Based in “hotels, U.S. military bases, Christian countries, and the palaces of apostate governments”, the ARS is labeled as having strayed from the righteous path, “rejecting the slogan of ‘terrorism’ and renouncing the mujahideen who threaten the enemies of Allah.”<sup>161</sup>

Conversely, the membership of Shabaab is described simply as made up of “mujahideen in the path of Allah” including “supporters of Somali mujahideen” and “the muhajireen—the mujahideen originating from all over the world.” Their goal is to “establish an Islamic caliphate”, and they endorse waging “jihad against the international crusaders, liberating the three [holy] sanctuaries, and... they are loyal to Allah, his messenger, and their brothers—the mujahideen fighting in the cause of Allah all over the world—namely, Al-Qaida and Shaykh Usama Bin Laden.” The Shabaab corps is portrayed as men of action, to be found “in the ditches... on the killing fields, at the battlefronts, and in the jungles and mountains... They are a threat to the infidels and apostates [through] terrorist attacks... They use fear as a weapon.”<sup>162</sup> This may seem a strange set of values to gleefully advertise (from a Western perspective), but it is exactly the agenda that Shabaab and its leadership appear intent upon pursuing, no matter what the cost. Furthermore,

<sup>156</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

<sup>157</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

<sup>158</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

<sup>159</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “No Peace Without Islam.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=39809>. Released: December 28, 2008.

<sup>160</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Judging Between the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement and the Alliance for the Liberation of Somalia.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>161</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Judging Between the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement and the Alliance for the Liberation of Somalia.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>162</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Judging Between the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement and the Alliance for the Liberation of Somalia.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

it should be noted that by touting such a peculiar ideological agenda, Shabaab al-Mujahideen focuses its appeal on a niche audience that—while perhaps narrow—nonetheless includes a small wealth of generous financial benefactors and highly-motivated recruits.

Al-Qaida's leadership in Pakistan and Afghanistan have also kept up their public pressure on Shabaab to avoid adopting the "path of surrender" chosen by Shaykh Sharif and others. On June 22, 2008, the As-Sahab Media Foundation released a new video recording of Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Liby titled "No Peace Without Islam."<sup>163</sup> In the video, Abu Yahya implored his Somali counterparts to refuse "anything less than an independent Islamic State that does not recognize 'international legitimacy', nor man-made legislation... I decided I needed to say something after the recent endorsement of peace agreements between the opposition factions and the government in Mogadishu. The mujahideen do not recognize these agreements and will not adhere to them because they offer help to criminals and combine the truth with falsehood." Abu Yahya further accused the U.S. government of engineering the peace accord with moderate Islamists from the ARS in order to divert "the indignation of oppressed and wronged Muslim peoples" and "to uproot jihad and the mujahideen in all hot areas, including beloved Somalia, by portraying the mujahideen... as an obstacle in the way of achieving peace, stability, and reconciliation." The Libyan Al-Qaida commander insisted, "You must fight and not accept anything but an Islamic state... This is the path that you have to hold up to, and sacrifice whatever it takes to keep it as your leaders sacrificed."<sup>164</sup>

## Part VI: The Role of Foreign Fighters

Though until recently, Somalia was perhaps a relative backwater in the realm of international jihadi causes, as the examples of Saudi national Abdelaziz al-Muqrin and Somali-American Nuradin Abdi prove, the Horn of Africa has a long history as an "alternative jihadi frontline" for would-be mujahideen who are unable to reach more classic combat zones (such as Afghanistan, Chechnya, or Iraq). With the arrival of the ICU and eventually Shabaab al-Mujahideen, the Somali theater gained significant added notoriety and admiration inside the community of Islamic extremists. In December 2006, at the climax of the initial battle between the ICU and the Ethiopian military, the notorious U.K. organization Ahlus Sunnah wa`al Jamaah (ASWJ)—a splinter faction of the former Al-Muhajiroun movement—issued a statement from its leader Anjem Choudary to Muslims in Great Britain:

"Today the zeal of Islam is being reverberated all over the world and our courageous brothers and sisters in Somalia have asked the Muslims all over the world to support them and Allah (swt) has made it an obligation upon us to support them... The Ethiopians with full international support (from the Christian crusader regimes) and directly backed by illegitimate Israel (zionists) have violated the blood of the Muslims in Somalia. By committing such an act of terrorism the Muslims in Somalia and nearby lands have responded to the divine call of Jihad. The obligation of supporting the Jihad all over the world (including Somalia) is Fard Ayn (an individual obligation). You can fulfill this duty financially, physically and verbally. This honourable act must be carried out according to your own capabilities... no Muslim (man or woman) has an excuse of doing nothing at all."<sup>165</sup>

Even before the jihad in Somalia was officially sanctioned by Usama Bin Laden or anyone else, the conflict over the ICU had already drawn the intensive interest of aspiring mujahideen recruits living in Western countries. One such individual was Houston, Texas resident Daniel Maldonado (a.k.a. "Daniel al-Jughafi"), a convert to Islam who had been living abroad in Egypt since November 2005. Maldonado was an avid web surfer, and frequently posted material online for other English-speaking Muslims to review. In June 2006, Maldonado posted several Western media articles about the ICU in Somalia, including a piece from the BBC suggesting possible "Al-

<sup>163</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. "Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Liby: 'Somalia – No Peace Without Islam.'" <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=183896>. Released: June 22, 2008.

<sup>164</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. "Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Liby: 'Somalia – No Peace Without Islam.'" <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=183896>. Released: June 22, 2008.

<sup>165</sup> <http://muntadaa.aswj.net/index.php?showtopic=4800>. December 28, 2006.

Qaeda links.” In response, Maldonado commented, “There is a pic[ture] on the link wherein there are two veiled sisters holding up the Quran that speaks volum[sic] of what one hopes is happening[sic]. I felt like crying. Make Dua’ [prayers] people!”<sup>166</sup>

Less than six months later, Maldonado traveled with his family to Mogadishu, Somalia “in search of a country where he could practice true Islam” and “because he believed that he was fighting for a legitimate Islamic government.”<sup>167</sup> Following his eventual capture by Kenyan army soldiers in early 2007, Maldonado was interviewed by agents of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and—after being advised of his Miranda rights—still agreed to describe his experiences with the ICU in Somalia.<sup>168</sup> According to an FBI affidavit filed in a criminal case against him, Maldonado was met by a handler at the airport in Mogadishu, who took him to a house and gave him an ammunition belt and an AK-47 assault rifle. Subsequently, Maldonado was provided with combat instruction from a variety of individuals associated with Shabaab:

“MALDONADO admitted participating in military training in Mogadishu. He described a program that included weapons, explosives, and physical fitness training. He was told that after he completed major physical training, and firearms training, he would be able to go to the ‘front line’ to fight, a desire which he had previously expressed. MALDONADO stated that while in Mogadishu, he went to a house where young mujahadin fighters were provided with military camouflage uniforms, combat boots, ammunition, weapons and rocket propelled grenade launchers. MALDONADO stated that since he already had an AK-47 assault rifle, he only accepted a military uniform and combat boots. After receiving their equipment, MALDONADO and the other mujahadin fighters were transported by land to Kismaayo...



**Daniel Maldonado**

During the travel to Kismaayo, and while stopped at a training camp in Jilib, Somalia, each fighter was asked to provide his name and that of an emergency contact person... MALDONADO advised that while he was in Kismaayo, mujahadin fighters continued to engage in physical and firearms training. MALDONADO stated that, while in Kismaayo, he did not shoot any firearms but did participate in physical training, which included running and swimming... MALDONADO admitted that while training at camps in Kismaayo and Jilib, he consorted with an individual who assembled, produced and tested IEDs. He watched and learned as this individual, (hereinafter ‘bomb maker’), manufactured small explosive devices. The ‘bomb maker’ detonated explosives on the side of a wall to ensure that the various explosive mixtures detonated as designed... In Kismaayo, MALDONADO watched the ‘bomb maker’ prepare explosive mixtures at a house where young mujahadin gathered. The ‘bomb maker’ created a mixture of TNT which he put into plastic tubes. The ‘bomb maker’ also cut the tips off matches, grinding them into a powder on an orange plate, which he explained to MALDONADO was going to be used as initiators for other explosive devices. The ‘bomb maker’ also had one bottle of ‘nitro’ and another bottle which he said contained nitrates. The ‘bomb maker’ always carried the brown bottles and a torn pink explosives manual. He told MALDONADO he would never be able to get through an airport because of the explosives he had handled. MALDONADO opined that the ‘bomb maker’ was not the young mujahadin’s designated explosives instructor. The designated explosives instructor was another man who had two missing fingers on his left hand who would often talk about Usama bin Laden.”<sup>169</sup>

<sup>166</sup> <http://talk.islamicnetwork.com/showthread.php?t=9323>. June 6, 2006.

<sup>167</sup> Affidavit from FBI Special Agent Jeremiah A. George. Filed as part of Superseding Criminal Complaint in United States v. Daniel Maldonado. United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas. Case #: H-07-125M. February 13, 2007.

<http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S. v Maldonado Complaint.pdf>.

<sup>168</sup> Affidavit from FBI Special Agent Jeremiah A. George. Filed as part of Superseding Criminal Complaint in United States v. Daniel Maldonado. United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas. Case #: H-07-125M. February 13, 2007.

<http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S. v Maldonado Complaint.pdf>.

<sup>169</sup> Affidavit from FBI Special Agent Jeremiah A. George. Filed as part of Superseding Criminal Complaint in United States v. Daniel Maldonado. United States District Court for the Southern District of

In his interviews with FBI agents in Kenya, Maldonado also suggested that it was no secret among even junior mujahideen recruits that the ICU fighters had close ties to Al-Qaida and Usama Bin Laden:

“MALDONADO stated that while residing with the young mujahadin in Mogadishu, he became aware that al Qaeda members were residing and training in the same compound. A Yemeni who personally knew bin Laden, and MALDONADO, participated in nightly gatherings during which stories of bin Laden were told by the Yemeni. MALDONADO identified certain members at the camp as being al Qaeda, although he did not know for sure who all of the al Qaeda members were. MALDONADO opined that al Qaeda fighters were given much more respect than members of the ICU. During discussions with the young mujahadin, they spoke about conquering Somalia, Ethiopia, and Egypt and making them Islamic states. MALDONADO learned about a major al Qaeda operative fighting in the southern part of Somalia whom he did not meet.”<sup>170</sup>

While admittedly rather odd, Maldonado’s story was buttressed by scenes from early video recordings that surfaced during the summer of 2006 featuring sneak peeks of ICU jihad training camps and foreign Islamists fighting in Somalia alongside Shabaab military commanders.<sup>171</sup> In one of the most infamous of these videos—“The Battle of Badr in Somalia”—the influence of Al-Qaida is plainly seen among the Somali Islamic militants. In one section, a commander orders his men to make their enemies among the warlords and Somali government “suffer, and if they don’t suffer, confront them with the steel sword of [Abu Musab] al-Zarqawi. Our steel of Zarqawi awaits them.” The speech continues, “If we hadn’t helped those two [Bin Laden and Zarqawi], we wouldn’t be in this situation. I swear by Allah, if you men become like Zarqawi now, the [enemy] units will begin to flee—I swear by Allah, the [enemy] units will begin to flee!”<sup>172</sup>

It should be noted that the issue of foreign fighters being recruited and trained in Somalia also became one of the most contentious points of disagreement with Shaykh Sharif Ahmed and other relative moderates from the Islamic Courts Union. Shabaab has personally accused Shaykh Sharif of attempting to “exile non-Somali immigrating fighters when he encountered them by surprise at Mogadishu airport, far away from the eyes of the brothers from the Shabaab Movement, who had invited the mujahideen, immigrating for the cause of Allah. After Shaykh Aden [Hashi Ayrow] realized what was going on, he put the whole airport in the hands of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement, so that they would be able to accept a large number of immigrating fighters. He explained, ‘The Jihad has no point or meaning without migration.’”<sup>173</sup> Similarly, according to the American mujahid fighting with Shabaab, Abu Mansoor al-Amriki, arriving foreign fighters were initially “welcomed at the airport by the Islaamic Courts with terrible statements like: ‘We don’t need the Muhaajireen,’ and they tried to send them back. If it were not for a few of the Shabaab (like Shaykh Fuaad and Abu Talhah as-Sudaani) who saved many of these Muhaajireen at the airport and tended to their affairs.”<sup>174</sup> The American added, “the Muhaajireen (who came to Somalia after the capture of Mogadishu in stages)... wrote a word of advice to some of those in charge of the Courts... Then, after learning that the [ICU] will continue

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Texas. Case #: H-07-125M. February 13, 2007.

<http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S. v Maldonado Complaint.pdf>.

<sup>170</sup> Affidavit from FBI Special Agent Jeremiah A. George. Filed as part of Superseding Criminal Complaint in United States v. Daniel Maldonado. United States District Court for the Southern District of Texas. Case #: H-07-125M. February 13, 2007.

<http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S. v Maldonado Complaint.pdf>.

<sup>171</sup> Tomlinson, Chris. “Video shows Arabs fighting in Somalia.” Associated Press. July 5, 2006.

<sup>172</sup> “New video of the mujahideen in Somalia: ‘Badr al-Somal.’”

<http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=98517>. November 30, 2006.

<sup>173</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “‘Light and Fire’: The Biography of the Martyred Shaykh Aden Hashi Ayrow.” Millat Ibrahim. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>174</sup> Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). “Abu Mansoor al-Amriki: ‘A Message to The Mujaahideen in Particular and Muslims in General.’” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=165965>. Dated: January 8, 2008.

upon this dangerous path, the Muhaajireen declared their innocence from the Courts alongside their brothers from the Shabaab.<sup>175</sup>

Indeed, the senior leadership of Shabaab al-Mujahideen—including Shaykh Mukhtar Abu az-Zubair, Abu Mansour Mukhtar Robow, and others—have all clearly and publicly endorsed the idea of foreign fighters “migrating” to Somalia in order to seek specialized terrorist training and battlefield experience fighting the “crusaders.” In September 2006, Somali media sources cited a public declaration made by former AIAI-turned Shabaab commander Shaykh Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki in the capital Mogadishu: “Brothers in Islam, we came from Mogadishu and we have thousands of fighters, some are Somalis and others are from the Muslim world... If Christian-led America brought its infidels, we now call to our Muslim holy fighters to come join us.”<sup>176</sup> Support for the recruitment and training of foreign fighters has reached all the way up through the ranks of Shabaab, to the emir of the organization, Shaykh Mukhtar Abu az-Zubair. In an audio recording released on June 1, 2008, Shaykh Mukhtar boasted of how “the Muslim people of Somalia have merged with the most elite fighters from the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement... Allah willing, international jihadi units will be launched from the Land of the Two Migrations [the Horn of Africa] to haunt and destroy the infidels and their interests around the world... We are an integral part of the vanguard of the global jihad.”<sup>177</sup> For his part, Mukhtar Robow actually complained in May 2008 interview that—despite the lofty aspirations of Shabaab “to awaken the spirit of jihad among Muslims and unite their ranks... by coordinating between the global jihad and the jihad in Somalia”—there “are not enough non-Somali brothers, and we feel a great need for a Zarqawi of Somalia, or an Ibn-ul-Khattab of Somalia, or an Abu Laith [al-Liby] of Somalia. So, until when shall you make us wait, O’ champions?”<sup>178</sup>

Starting with the statements received from Usama Bin Laden and Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri in late 2006, Al-Qaida has also done its best to promote the mujahideen frontline in Somalia as a palatable alternative for those seeking a jihadi safari tour of training and combat. Some of these statements have been remarkably blunt and specific on the issue. In an *As-Sahab* video recording titled, “No Peace Without Islam”, Al-Qaida commander Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Liby called upon Muslims around the world “to stand with” Shabaab al-Mujahideen and “go forth to fight at their side... So for whoever Afghanistan was too far away, or had the way to Iraq closed for him, or the doors to Algeria locked in front of him, or was unable to reach the land of Chechnya or had the path to Palestine shut in his face—behold, here is Somalia, just beginning with an enemy occupier, so let him show Allah what He loves to see in him, and let him demonstrate the truth of his loyalty to Allah, his Messenger and the believers, and hurry there with the lightness of a bird, without making excuses or procrastinating.”<sup>179</sup>

In addition to rebroadcasting these Al-Qaida messages in their own propaganda and media, Shabaab al-Mujahideen has created video recordings designed to advertise training camps and courses available to foreign recruits—along with accompanying endorsements by senior local Al-Qaida figures. During the summer and fall of 2008, Shabaab released several video clips of most wanted Kenyan Al-Qaida terror suspect Saleh Ali Saleh al-Nabhan leading the instruction at

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<sup>175</sup> Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). “Abu Mansoor al-Amriki: ‘A Message to The Mujaahideen in Particular and Muslims in General.’” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=165965>. Dated: January 8, 2008.

<sup>176</sup> “Somalia Islamists confirm they have foreign fighters.” Garowe Online News. [http://www.garoweonline.com/stories/publish/article\\_5211.shtml](http://www.garoweonline.com/stories/publish/article_5211.shtml). September 27, 2006.

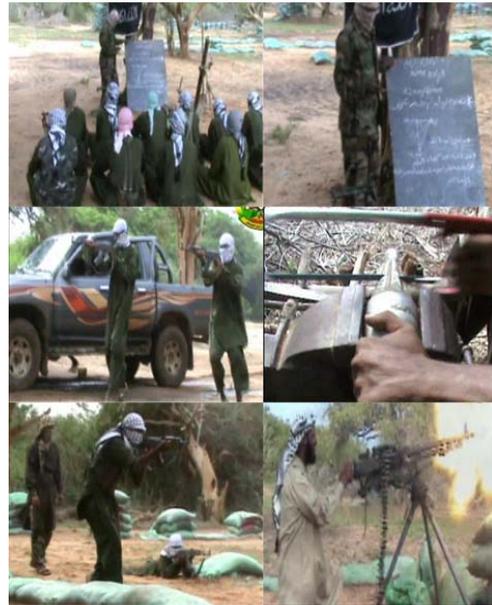
<sup>177</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Shaykh Mujahid Mukhtar Abu az-Zubair: ‘Our Jihad Until There is No More Tumult or Oppression, and There Prevails Justice and Faith.’” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=181838>. Released: June 1, 2008.

<sup>178</sup> Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). “An Interview With the Commander Abi Mansoor (Mukhtaar Ali Robo), the Spokesman of the Youth Islamic Movement in Somalia.” *Sada al-Jihad*. Issue 25; May 2008. <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=179163>.

<sup>179</sup> *As-Sahab* Media Foundation. “Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Liby: To the Army of Distress in Somalia.” March 25, 2007. (Dated: February 2007)

one such camp, alongside chief Shabaab spokesman Mukhtar Robow.<sup>180</sup> The courses shown being given at the camp included basic calisthenics, hand-to-hand combat, automatic weapons, sniper tactics, rocket and mortars, explosives training, drive-by shootings, assassination, and urban warfare. Al-Nabhan addressed the camera and offered his greetings “to the courageous commander and my honorable leader: Shaykh Usama Bin Laden... Allah knows how much we long for your meeting and the delight of your gentle voice.”<sup>181</sup> The Kenyan continued on:

“Here are the training camps in Somalia and elsewhere... that have opened their doors so that you can join them. So be truthful with Allah and answer the call of jihad and prefer the lasting over the perishing, and the next life over the present life... O’ Muslim youth everywhere, don’t forget the calls of your brothers in Somalia—as if [one could]—they are repeating all the time. O’ immigrants! O’ immigrants! Will anyone respond? What are you waiting for, if you do not wage jihad now... when will you wage jihad? ...So likewise I say, O’ people of Kenya and Tanzania, and Nigeria and Uganda and Chad! Will you not take your share of the jihad? Will you not rush to the help of your brothers in the Army of Distress? And we are waiting for the reinforcements from Sudan and Yemen of wisdom and faith.”<sup>182</sup>



Scenes from a Shabaab al-Mujahideen Training Camp in Somalia

The videos released by both Shabaab and Al-Qaida on the subject of Somalia would come to capture the attention of many young men and women with sympathetic views. As the videos themselves were largely being traded over Internet discussion forums, it made sense for those moved by the videos into action to seek further guidance there, as well. In late 2008, a user on the now-defunct Al-Hesbah Network posted a message plainly asking others, “Is there a way to reach Somalia, dear brothers? For any person, or as a merchant, a businessman, or otherwise? Is the airport open and is it functioning—for example, do those passing through require a visa? In the event that the airports are closed, is there another way?” While several Al-Hesbah members wrote back and insisted that such talk should take place only in private channels, others agreed to provide some initial “very brief” responses. According to one contributor, “if my brother enters Kenya headed for Somalia and reaches the battleground, there is considerable sympathy among the inhabitants of northern Kenya for the mujahideen, and also they have ties to the clans and tribal leaders of Somalia... Kenya is somewhat stable, and you can travel there as a tourist, merchant, or a cameraman.” Another suggested that anyone traveling through Kenyan airports should take care as “they may be seized and handed over to the Americans.” Still another Al-Hesbah member opined, “I understand that—under the pretext of gold investments in Kenya or as a merchant—an individual and his family might be able to join the mujahideen after a period of time.” However, the same respondent indicated that he would be wary about traveling to Kenya “with a beard or a veiled wife—perhaps if the whole family went together, it would reduce the risk?”<sup>183</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “A Video-Recorded Address: Commander Shaykh Abu Yusuf Saleh al-Nabhan.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=190276>. Released: August 30, 2008; and, 2008-09-30.alhesbah.net.Shabab al-Muj presents No Peace Without Islam - 193734.mpg

<sup>181</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “A Video-Recorded Address: Commander Shaykh Abu Yusuf Saleh al-Nabhan.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=190276>. Released: August 30, 2008.

<sup>182</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “A Video-Recorded Address: Commander Shaykh Abu Yusuf Saleh al-Nabhan.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=190276>. Released: August 30, 2008.

<sup>183</sup> <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=199013>. November 14, 2008.

Behind the scenes on such online jihadi discussion forums, users were pooling their own homegrown mujahideen contacts in order to come up with potential travel routes into Somalia. In private messages exchanged over the “Ansar al-Mujahideen” discussion forum in late 2008, user “Abu Aisha” wrote to user “Nasruddin al-Tamimi”, “Recently, a brother in the [Arabian] Gulf informed me that he is going to Somalia with one of the brothers from outside, but I am still unsure whether this news is true, and is there really a way in?” Al-Tamimi replied:

“My dear brother, I used to think you were from Somalia—I beg you to contact the brother and make sure about the migration... Do you know this brother well? I can arrange with one of the brothers but I don’t know this brother well, and I don’t want to throw away what I have built without some reassurance and confidence. I am by nature very careful in dealing with the issue of security, and I don’t speak about these subjects until I am certain... Brother, just as a reminder, I know one of the Somali brothers who I met abroad, and this brother resides in the city of Medina [in Saudi Arabia]—he can transport the brothers to Somalia! And since you are a resident of Medina, I’ll send you the brother’s name and his description so you can ask him for his phone number, and so I can call him, and Allah willing, he will assist us.”<sup>184</sup>

Upon receiving the message from Nasruddin al-Tamimi, Abu Ayesha wrote back, “My brother, I am in contact with that person, but until now, there has been only talk... Brother, please know that I wouldn’t dare go and speak with you about this subject—but because my heart is so filled with sorrow, the pain of being away from Somalia is killing me, and my feelings of warmth toward you—I have chosen to speak with you about it. And I give you another piece of information that I am from the Maghreb, meaning from [North] Africa, and the distance between me and Somalia isn’t easy. I made preparations once before with one of the other brothers, but Allah chose a different fate for us.”<sup>185</sup>

At first, the lion share of foreign fighters traveling to the Shabaab al-Mujahideen training camps were Somali exiles who had lived for long periods of time in Western Europe and North America. As much as they were “migrating” back to Somalia, some of them still had close ties to their homeland, or were even from the same Habar Gidir Ayr sub-clan of Shabaab titan Aden Hashi Ayrow. In March 2008, the group released a “martyrdom” video of a British suicide bomber of Somali origin known as “Abu Ayyub al-Muhajir” (“Abu Ayyub the Immigrant”). In reading his will and addressing the camera, Abu Ayyub did something that had been never before seen in Shabaab propaganda: he spoke in quite fluent English. Scoffing at the “so-called war on terror” and the American “pretext of fighting terrorism and Al-Qaida”, Abu Ayyub demanded, “What does American want from Somalia? Do they want to bring peace and development? No, rather, they want to perpetrate kill[ing] in Somalia, in order to steal its oil and resources... America, who is leading the war against Islam, has suffered a humiliating defeat in Somalia in 1992 by the hand of the mujahideen—not by the hands of Aideed’s men.” He thereupon offered a direct recruitment pitch aimed at “the Somalis living abroad”:<sup>186</sup>

“Are you happy in your comfort while your religion and your people are being attacked and humiliated? What honor is that? ...Is it that you have been deceived by this temporary life and you have fallen into the traps of the disbelievers? The only reason that they opened their lands to you, and grant you free education, income support, free houses, etc., is to make you become one of them, and make you forsake your religion... And I advise you to return to your religion by living for it and dying for it, instead of living and dying for the pursuit of money and fame. I advise you to migrate to Somalia and wage jihad against your enemies... In this time and situation, hijrah [migration] and jihad is an individual obligation upon everyone of you who has the ability to do it... As for those of you who are not able to migrate and fight, then it is still obligatory upon you to support the jihad with your wealth... Know that Allah multiplies the reward of spending for his

<sup>184</sup> “Private Message” recovered exclusively by NEFA Foundation investigators from <http://www.ansar.com>.

<sup>185</sup> “Private Message” recovered exclusively by NEFA Foundation investigators from <http://www.ansar.com>.

<sup>186</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Will of Abu Ayyub al-Muhajir.” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=170168>. Released: March 1, 2008.

sake in jihad 700 times over... So do not waste your money in seeking the luxury of this world, give it instead as a good loan to Allah.”<sup>187</sup>

Gesturing around him, Abu Ayyub exclaimed, “Here are your sons, the Shabaab, the Shabaab of Somalia—from different tribes and nations united under the banner of Islam, and sacrificing themselves for this religion and its people.”<sup>188</sup>

This disturbing trend was ratcheted up a notch in October 2008 with the release of another “martyrdom” video by Shabaab—this time of suicide bomber “Abdul Aziz Saad.” Like Abu Ayyub, Saad appeared to be of Somali origin, but spoke both fluent Somali and English. Grinning at the camera, he triumphantly declared in English, “My name is Saad, and I’m a terrorist. I want to go and hit some kuffar, you know, inshallah.”<sup>189</sup> The young Somali exile had clearly been impacted by the widespread furor over cartoons by a Danish writer which many viewed as insulting or blasphemous to the Muslim prophet Mohammed. Saad angrily ranted on camera about how “today, [there are] some dirty kuffars [who] are hurting us, and drawing cartoons... and they are stealing the scene. Think about that.” With a hint of swagger, Saad proceeded to pick up and brandish a handgun that had been lying in front of him. He continued, “But me, I’ll tell you one thing. I’ll put a bullet in the heads of the kuffar. And I’m ready to do it.” He coldly threatened, “We will bomb ourselves, Allah willing, each and every place we find you... You, Denmark, the government of Denmark, you’ll take [responsibility] for the person who is drawing the cartoons because you have refused to stop the cartoonist who is drawing this stuff. You’ll take responsibility, in the name of Allah. For sure, Allah willing... O’ kuffar. They will slaughter you.”<sup>190</sup> As an afterthought, he added: “And I’m telling the kuffars, the English people, the Americans, and also their comrades, that we are coming for them, inshallah.”<sup>191</sup>

Later in the video, the “martyr” Abdul Aziz Saad offered a specific “Message to Those Who Stay Behind” from the battlefield:

“All I can say to those people who are still sitting at home, relaxing, having good food, good sleep... All I can tell them is that [with] too much of watching with no action... these things will just become like comics, and jihad will be just something of talk around coffee tables... Jihad is real. There is no way you can understand the sweetness of jihad until you come to jihad. And if you don’t come to jihad, Allah will ask you why you didn’t come to jihad. And you have all the [requirements]. You have eyes, you have strong arms, you can carry an AK[-47], for God’s sake... We are muhajireens. We have come to the land of jihad and, praise be to Allah, we are doing OK. You guys also can do the same way. You can make hijrah to this land. Fight the kuffar, inshallah. Get shahada [martyrdom]... So, I would just tell you to make hijrah... There are some people who say that there are no muhajireen who are fighting in Somalia. I would like to say that there are muhajireens. We are muhajireens... We are here, inshallah, so all I can say is just I invite you to Islam and jihad.”<sup>192</sup>

During the same recording, Saad was also joined by another masked foreign mujahid, evidently of Pakistani origin, who spoke in both English and in Urdu. Likewise addressing “those who stay behind”, the Pakistani demanded, “How can you sit at home, while the brothers and sisters are getting murdered in our land, how dare you sit at home and look on the TV, see people getting killed—Muslims getting killed... And those who are in Europe and America, get out of those countries. You should make hijrah... Just be sincere with Allah, and Allah will bring you here. If

<sup>187</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Will of Abu Ayyub al-Muhajir.” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=170168>. Released: March 1, 2008.

<sup>188</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Will of Abu Ayyub al-Muhajir.” <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=170168>. Released: March 1, 2008.

<sup>189</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Will of the Martyr Abdul Aziz Saad, May Allah Accept Him.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=197107>. October 30, 2008.

<sup>190</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Will of the Martyr Abdul Aziz Saad, May Allah Accept Him.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=197107>. October 30, 2008.

<sup>191</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Will of the Martyr Abdul Aziz Saad, May Allah Accept Him.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=197107>. October 30, 2008.

<sup>192</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Will of the Martyr Abdul Aziz Saad, May Allah Accept Him.” <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=197107>. October 30, 2008.

you want to come, then come. Don't sit over there. You'll be guided, inshallah. That's my message to you."<sup>193</sup> As for the United States, Ethiopia, and the other "enemies of Islam", he swore emphatically, "We're going to exterminate you all, inshallah."<sup>194</sup>

In the fall of 2008, as part of its video recruitment campaign advertising training camps in Somalia, Shabaab al-Mujahideen also released other footage of foreign fighters speaking in Arabic, English, Somali, and Urdu—beseeching their comrades around the world to come and join them in the Horn of Africa. One of the men, masked and cradling an automatic weapon, boasted in American-accented English, "These ansars and muhajirs that came together to make the word of Allah most high. So, we're not fighting for tribe, or for dunya [material wealth]. We're simply fighting for the sake of Allah and we're defending the religion of Allah. We have a global mission, that's why America puts us number 41 in the terrorists' list... So once again, I sincerely advise my beloved brothers and sisters to make hijrah and come join us and defend the religion of Allah."<sup>195</sup> A Pakistani mujahid—evidently the same individual featured in the "martyrdom" will of "Abdul Aziz Saad"—spoke in Urdu and urged Muslims to "come here and do your duty... I tell you, my brothers, we in Shabaab al-Mujahideen movement announce that we welcome any immigrant mujahid regardless of whether he is white or black."<sup>196</sup>

Rather remarkably, during these video segments, the subject of the Danish cartoons surfaced once again. Another Shebaab recruit, sitting in front of an anti-tank missile, directed a menacing call (in English) "to the filthy dogs of Denmark, may Allah break their hands for what they have drawn. We will never forget their mockery of the best of mankind and the last Messenger. So, sleep with the thoughts of our swords dripping with your blood... I'm calling on all Muslims in the world to stand up and avenge for their religion, their books, their prophet. Stand up, and resist the oppression of the kuffar. Put your trust in Allah and fight the kuffar and their apostate puppets. O' Muslim brothers, migrate to the lands of jihad and fight alongside your brothers."<sup>197</sup>

Yet, by far, the single foreign fighter who has garnered most attention through the propaganda released by Shabaab al-Mujahideen is the previously-mentioned American jihadi known as "Abu Mansoor al-Amriki." While Abu Mansoor may have only recently come into public prominence, there are indications suggesting that he has been around and fighting in Somalia for some time. In an open letter written by Abu Mansoor and published by Shabaab in February 2008, the American acknowledged having been shown on the Al-Jazeera television network receiving instruction at a training camp during the ICU-era in approximately 2006.<sup>198</sup> He finally emerged from the shadows, unmasked and clearly identified, in a Shabaab al-Mujahideen propaganda video released in March



**"Abu Mansoor" the American  
(featured at bottom with  
Shaykh Mukhtar Robow)**

<sup>193</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "The Will of the Martyr Abdul Aziz Saad, May Allah Accept Him." <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=197107>. October 30, 2008.

<sup>194</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "The Will of the Martyr Abdul Aziz Saad, May Allah Accept Him." <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=197107>. October 30, 2008.

<sup>195</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "No Peace Without Islam." <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=193734>. Released: September 30, 2008.

<sup>196</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "No Peace Without Islam." <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=193734>. Released: September 30, 2008.

<sup>197</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "No Peace Without Islam." <http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=193734>. Released: September 30, 2008.

<sup>198</sup> Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). "Abu Mansoor al-Amriki: 'A Message to The Mujaahideen in Particular and Muslims in General.'" <http://www.myhesbah.com/v/showthread.php?t=165965>. Dated: January 8, 2008.

2009. The footage appeared to depict Abu Mansoor leading a unit of Somali mujahideen in an ambush targeting an Ethiopian convoy on July 15, 2008, approximately 60 kilometers west of Baidoa. The video noticeably emphasized the leadership role that Abu Mansoor was playing, including scenes of the American holding planning meetings with Shabaab spokesman Shaykh Mukhtar Robow and issuing a “tactical order to retreat.”<sup>199</sup> Lecturing the Somali fighters under his command, Abu Mansoor explained, “The only reason we are staying here, away from our families, away from the cities, away from ice, candy bars, all these other things, is because we are waiting to meet with the enemy. So, inshallah, we are from the [guardians of the frontiers], and we are going to get the reward of the [frontier guarding]. So every one of these days, is better than the [material world] and everything in it.”<sup>200</sup> When asked to discuss the virtues of a fallen Somali “martyr”, the American effused, “we need more like him. So, if you can encourage more of your children and more of your neighbors and anyone around you to send people like him to this jihad, it would be a great asset for us.”<sup>201</sup>

Perhaps the strangest aspect of the Abu Mansoor video are the repeating English-language rap and nasheed lyrics he sings for the background audio track.

“Month by month, year by year, keeping them kafirs livin’ in fear. Night by night, day by day, mujahideen is spreadin’ all over the place... Land by land, war by war, only gonna make our black, black swords. Drip by drip, shot by shot, only gonna give us the death we sought... Blow by blow, crime by crime, only gonna add to my vengeance rhymes. Invasion by invasion, attack by attack, only gonna bring sweet ‘ayna back... Bomb by bomb, blast by blast, only gonna bring back the glorious past. Mortar by mortar, shell by shell, only gonna stop when I send them to hell... Word by word, Bush said it true, you’re with them or you’re with the Muslim group. Muslim pride, Islam is on the rise, Raise Allah’s word against oppression you find. The American dream has fallen. Bush has gone down like Stalin. The economy’s crawlin’. Widows are bawlin’. Your dead, you be haulin’. While our takbirs keep calling.”<sup>202</sup>

The Abu Mansoor video concludes with footage of a purported meeting of other foreign mujahideen in the Bay Bakool region of Somalia. As the men warmly greet each other in an idyllic and peaceful scene beside a river, English-language subtitling appears, explaining, “they left the west to fulfill one obligation: JIHAD, the pinnacle of earth... from afar, they journey, seeking one of 2 things: VICTORY OR MARTYRDOM.”<sup>203</sup> In a segment titled “Join the CARAVAN”, one of the masked, English-speaking fighters remarks:

“Praise be to Allah, some of us never imagined that one day we would carry an AK-47. Not only that, carry it for the sake of Allah—to fight against the kuffars and the murtadeen [apostates], and to raise the banner of Islam. This is blessings as well. My brothers here, we have made hijrah for the sake of Allah, not for dunya, not to gain any worldly material. We are here to live the life of a mujahid and, you know, so many people, when they think of a life of mujahid, they think of you know, living a rough life, being on the hideout, being hungry all the time. It’s not that way. Allah(SWT) blesses the mujahideen. Subhanallah, sometimes, we slaughter two camels, you know, huge, big camels. We’re not able to finish the whole meat sometimes, we have to give it away. We eat goats. Praise be to Allah, camel milk all over the place. This is the way the mujahid lives in the forest. He lives a life where if anyone was to see, they would try to take it away, but praise be to Allah, Allah(SWT) gives this to those who he loves. So inshallah, we are calling all the brothers overseas, all the Shabaab wherever they are, to come and live the life of a mujahid and they will see

<sup>199</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Ambush at Bardale.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=54142>. Released: March 31, 2009.

<sup>200</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Ambush at Bardale.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=54142>. Released: March 31, 2009.

<sup>201</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Ambush at Bardale.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=54142>. Released: March 31, 2009.

<sup>202</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Ambush at Bardale.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=54142>. Released: March 31, 2009.

<sup>203</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Ambush at Bardale.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=54142>. Released: March 31, 2009.

with their own eyes. They will love it, and they will prostrate to Allah(SWT) for the blessings that he gives them, Allahu Akhbar.”<sup>204</sup>

Aside from former Houston, Texas-resident Daniel Maldonado, a host of other would-be mujahideen have been chased—and often caught—by international law enforcement and intelligence agencies while en route to, or from, a terrorist training camp in Somalia run by Shabaab al-Mujahideen. On July 25, 2006, authorities at London’s Heathrow Airport stopped 21-year old Briton Hassan Mutegombwa, traveling on a one-way ticket to Nairobi, Kenya. Upon a search by inspection officers, Mutegombwa’s luggage was found to contain “desert camouflage trousers, desert boots, a hood top with ‘Soldier of Allah’ written on the rear... a camouflage Afghan headscarf... and fingerless black gloves.”<sup>205</sup> Despite his claims that he was merely traveling to Uganda in order to see his father, Mutegombwa was turned back and had his passport seized. Unbeknownst to Mutegombwa, his circle of friends in the U.K.—all aspiring jihadists—had been infiltrated by an undercover agent as part of a police counter-terrorism operation. Two days before his ill-fated visit to Heathrow in the summer of 2006, Mutegombwa approached the undercover agent seeking “£266 to help a brother pay for a one-way flight to Africa so that he could carry out ‘hijra.’” The agent was duly advised that “he would not get his money back as the brother wasn’t returning, and the only time he would see him again, would be on judgement day.”<sup>206</sup> Police seized letters from Mutegombwa’s girlfriend pleading with him, “I know why you are doing what you are, but... I don’t want to lose what I have with you... Alhamdulillah, I have a good husband that wants to do what’s best for his family, but in my heart it hurts.”<sup>207</sup> In November 2007, he was found guilty in London’s Central Criminal Court of “inviting someone to provide money intending that the money should be used, or he had reasonable cause to suspect the money may be used for the purposes of terrorism” and subsequently sentenced to ten years in prison.<sup>208</sup>



**Hassan Mutegombwa**

Foreign fighters have also been killed in frontline combat and recent targeted airstrikes inside Somalia. The epic tale of migration and jihad in the land of Somalia comes in the form of the story of the American Muslim prison convert Ruben Shumpert (a.k.a. “Amir Abdul Muhaimen”). Shumpert’s story is considered so important and powerful to Shabaab that they have published it in both Arabic and Somali, posting it on their official website and re-printing it in both of their official online magazines. He was born into an Christian household—his father an African-American and his mother of Mexican heritage. From the time of his childhood, Shumpert was constantly butting heads with authorities, and was jailed “several times” during his youth. Reputed to have packed a pistol from age 12, the Seattle native “grew up in the company of narcotics rings in the state [of Washington] until he became one of the biggest drug traffickers [in

<sup>204</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “Ambush at Bardale.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=54142>. Released: March 31, 2009.

<sup>205</sup> “OPERATION OVERAMP: Hassan Mutegombwa.” Press Release from the London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Directorate of Public Affairs. April 15, 2008. [http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/MetPolice\\_Mutegombwa.pdf](http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/MetPolice_Mutegombwa.pdf).

<sup>206</sup> “OPERATION OVERAMP: Hassan Mutegombwa.” Press Release from the London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Directorate of Public Affairs. April 15, 2008. [http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/MetPolice\\_Mutegombwa.pdf](http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/MetPolice_Mutegombwa.pdf).

<sup>207</sup> Exhibit MPS/118. “2 Pieces of Paper With Writing Thereon.” Holmes Ref: X3405. Operation Overamp; London Metropolitan Police Service.

<sup>208</sup> “OPERATION OVERAMP: Hassan Mutegombwa.” Press Release from the London Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) Directorate of Public Affairs. April 15, 2008. [http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/MetPolice\\_Mutegombwa.pdf](http://nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/MetPolice_Mutegombwa.pdf).

the region].” He was eventually rounded up in a crackdown on local drug kingpins, and handed a “lengthy prison sentence.”<sup>209</sup>

The time Shumpert spent behind bars would have a critical impact on the direction of his life. He swore off drugs and declared his newfound faith in Islam in August 2002. His interest in becoming a good Muslim opened his eyes to the larger political issues and current events in the Muslim world. Shumpert would later complain in a letter to U.S. District Court Judge Marsha Pechman, “I can’t count how many times I’ve been called ‘Usama bin Laden.’ Or my wife has been told it looks like she’s going to blow up.”<sup>210</sup> According to Shabaab al-Mujahideen, “the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq ignited the light of faith in his heart... He began to search for weapons and jihad.”<sup>211</sup> In his fateful letter to Judge Pechman, Shumpert insisted, “I will not completely dismiss the idea of persons owning weapons, as post 9-11 ignorance has caused continuous backlash on the Muslim community. And out of necessity, members of the community have sought means of protecting themselves.”<sup>212</sup>

In a particularly tough neighborhood in the Rainier Valley of Washington, Shumpert opened a barbershop that “was always busy and prospered thanks to the young people in the neighborhood, both Muslims and infidels, because the barbershop was akin to a missionary center run by [Ruben]... Through the means of our brother, Allah guided many sons of the local Muslim community, most of whom were from the Somali community.”<sup>213</sup> Through his position at the barbershop, Shumpert met veterans of the jihad in Chechnya who had returned to the U.S. and “provided him with some educational and jihadi video recordings.” Reportedly, he was particularly “fond of Shaykh Abu Musab al-Zarqawi... and hoped to join [Zarqawi] in Mesopotamia.”<sup>214</sup> According to a sentencing memorandum filed by the U.S. government:

“Conversations in the defendant’s shop also featured open support for jihad, as well as the desire and duty of Muslims to travel to Iraq, Sudan, and Afghanistan to fight alongside their Muslim brothers... The defendant maintained in his computer in the barber shop several jihad motivational DVDs which he encouraged others to view. If youngsters came in to play video games he would encourage them first to view the motivational DVDs. The subject matter of the DVDs included a glowing tribute to the ‘19 Martyrs,’ referring to the 9-11 terrorists; a ‘Dirty Kafir’ rap song in which the performers urged ‘jihad against the Crusaders’... six Chechen productions, one of which showed the assembly of a roadside bomb and featuring very graphic film of mangled corpses; and other DVDs urging the massacre of ‘unclean unbelievers.’”<sup>215</sup>

As with Hassan Mutegombwa’s circle in the United Kingdom, Shumpert and his thuggish associates from the Seattle barbershop soon attracted the attention of law enforcement and were infiltrated by an undercover informant. Later, Shumpert would angrily describe to Judge Marsha

<sup>209</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Mujahideen Roster: (Abu Huriyya) Amir Abdul Muhaimin.” Millat Ibrahim. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>210</sup> 12-page handwritten letter from Defendant Ruben Shumpert to U.S. District Judge Marsha Pechman. U.S. v. Ruben Luis Leon Shumpert. U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington; Case No. CR04-494MJP; CR04-495MJP. Dated: June 5, 2006. [http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Shumpert\\_LetterJudge.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Shumpert_LetterJudge.pdf).

<sup>211</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Mujahideen Roster: (Abu Huriyya) Amir Abdul Muhaimin.” Millat Ibrahim. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>212</sup> 12-page handwritten letter from Defendant Ruben Shumpert to U.S. District Judge Marsha Pechman. U.S. v. Ruben Luis Leon Shumpert. U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington; Case No. CR04-494MJP; CR04-495MJP. Dated: June 5, 2006. [http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Shumpert\\_LetterJudge.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Shumpert_LetterJudge.pdf).

<sup>213</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Mujahideen Roster: (Abu Huriyya) Amir Abdul Muhaimin.” Millat Ibrahim. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>214</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Mujahideen Roster: (Abu Huriyya) Amir Abdul Muhaimin.” Millat Ibrahim. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>215</sup> “Government’s Sentencing Memorandum.” U.S. v. Ruben Luis Leon Shumpert. No. CR04-494MJP; CR04-495MJP. U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington. July 18, 2006. [http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S.\\_v\\_Shumpert\\_SentencingMemorandum.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v_Shumpert_SentencingMemorandum.pdf).

Pechman how “the F.B.I. paid convicted felons large amounts of money to live amongst us and spy on us... to lie on us. To make outrageous claims of terrorism... false allegations and entrapment.”<sup>216</sup> He strenuously denied suggestions by the informant that “everyone in the barbershop were arming themselves for a standoff with non-Muslims in general, or the government in particular.”<sup>217</sup> Shumpert insisted that, aside from a brief mistaken foray into counterfeiting, “[all] I have done is present the militants’ case, video footage, audio, etc.”<sup>218</sup> In a chance meeting with a local Seattle journalist, Shumpert accused the U.S. government of “trying to frame me... They say I am recruiting children for al-Qaida. I need help. I don’t know any damn thing about this terrorism.”<sup>219</sup> He further blamed his arrest for causing other Muslims living in Seattle to “take the opinions of the radicals... that we (Muslims) are all under attack and we have no place in this country... Since my arrest, many Muslims have left America.”<sup>220</sup>

Though federal prosecutors were never able to gather enough evidence for terrorism charges, Shumpert had nonetheless been blatantly caught in assisting in a currency fraud scheme—and was scheduled to re-appear before a federal judge in late November 2006. But, meanwhile, Shumpert had come into contact with “some Somali brothers who held jihadi beliefs. One of them advised him to pretend to confess until he was able to find a way to escape from America and to join the cause of jihad in Somalia... The latter [brother] convinced him of the idea and the brothers conducted the necessary preparations for the forgery of documents to exit America for Somalia.”<sup>221</sup>



**Ruben Shumpert**

To reach the Horn of Africa, Shumpert transited through the city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. While there, he was briefly stopped by the security services, but “he was able to slip away from the policeman while he was busy... and catch a flight headed for Mogadishu.”<sup>222</sup> According to Shabaab al-Mujahideen:

“In the days of the Islamic Courts Union, the Mogadishu Airport was under the control of the brothers. When he arrived at the airport, there was a group of brothers who received the new immigrants. Upon arrival, you must tell them that you are looking for a camp, or to conduct jihad, or a weapon. You say exactly what you want without fear of the intelligence services. They do not become agitated, and instead, they will take you to the camps or to the immigrant bureau. While in Mogadishu, a new phase of [Ruben]’s life began. Upon his arrival, he only was interested in

<sup>216</sup> 12-page handwritten letter from Defendant Ruben Shumpert to U.S. District Judge Marsha Pechman. U.S. v. Ruben Luis Leon Shumpert. U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington; Case No. CR04-494MJP; CR04-495MJP. Dated: June 5, 2006.

[http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Shumpert\\_LetterJudge.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Shumpert_LetterJudge.pdf).

<sup>217</sup> 12-page handwritten letter from Defendant Ruben Shumpert to U.S. District Judge Marsha Pechman. U.S. v. Ruben Luis Leon Shumpert. U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington; Case No. CR04-494MJP; CR04-495MJP. Dated: June 5, 2006.

[http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Shumpert\\_LetterJudge.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Shumpert_LetterJudge.pdf).

<sup>218</sup> 12-page handwritten letter from Defendant Ruben Shumpert to U.S. District Judge Marsha Pechman. U.S. v. Ruben Luis Leon Shumpert. U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington; Case No. CR04-494MJP; CR04-495MJP. Dated: June 5, 2006.

[http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Shumpert\\_LetterJudge.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Shumpert_LetterJudge.pdf).

<sup>219</sup> Jamieson, Robert L. “Barber on the lam gets no sympathy.” Seattle P.I. November 30, 2006.

<sup>220</sup> 12-page handwritten letter from Defendant Ruben Shumpert to U.S. District Judge Marsha Pechman. U.S. v. Ruben Luis Leon Shumpert. U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington; Case No. CR04-494MJP; CR04-495MJP. Dated: June 5, 2006.

[http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Shumpert\\_LetterJudge.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/Shumpert_LetterJudge.pdf).

<sup>221</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Mujahideen Roster: (Abu Huriyya) Amir Abdul Muhaimin.” Millat Ibrahim. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>222</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Mujahideen Roster: (Abu Huriyya) Amir Abdul Muhaimin.” Millat Ibrahim. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

purchasing an AK-47. Thanks be to Allah, he was able to purchase an AK- 47 and joined the ranks of the mujahideen in the Al-Muhajireen Brigade.”<sup>223</sup>

On November 18, 2006, FBI Special Agent Robert Walby, at the time assigned to the case of Ruben Shumpert, received an odd telephone call from Shumpert himself: “[he] informed [me] that he was in Somalia, that he finally felt free, and that he did not intend to return to the United States. I confirmed through other means that the call had in fact originated from Somalia.”<sup>224</sup> Nine days later, on November 27, Shumpert again called Special Agent Walby “and repeated that he was in Mogadishu, Somalia, and made what I interpreted as veiled threats on my life, saying that he and I were in a battle and that we were sworn enemies from this day forward. He then added that he and his Muslim associates would destroy everything the United States stood for.”<sup>225</sup> According to Walby, as Shumpert declared his intentions over the telephone, a crowd in the background enthusiastically chanted “Allahu Akhbar!”<sup>226</sup>

Shumpert was present for the Ethiopian conquest of Somalia in December 2006, and following the withdrawal of ICU forces from Mogadishu, fled with other foreign fighters to remote, forested regions of southern Somalia near the Kenyan border. In the fall of 2008, Shumpert attempted to leave his hideout in the forest with three other militants “in order to accomplish something that only Allah knows of. One of them, who later turned out to be a spy for the Americans, betrayed them. As soon as the brothers jumped off the small boat they were traveling in, they were immediately targeted with missiles.”<sup>227</sup> Shumpert and the three others were all killed in the attack.

The present state of affairs in this regard was summed up by the Deputy Director of Intelligence at the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) Andrew Liepman during his testimony for a March 2009 hearing before the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee:

“In the last few years, a number of Somali-American young men have traveled to Somalia, possibly to train and fight with al-Shabaab. One of these travelers—Minneapolis-resident Shirwa Ahmed—perpetrated a suicide bombing late last October. Ahmed’s travel overseas to fight and his association with a foreign terrorist organization has reinforced our reluctance to categorize such activity simply as ‘homegrown extremism.’ However, we are concerned that if Somali-American youth can be motivated to engage in such activities overseas, Ahmed’s fellow travelers could return to the US and engage in terrorist activities here. I want to emphasize that we do not have credible reporting to indicate that US persons who have traveled to Somalia are planning to execute attacks in the US, but we cannot rule out that potential given the indoctrination and training they might have received in East Africa. The exact number of young Somali-American men who traveled to Somalia to support al-Shabaab or other Somali factions is unclear, and it is possible that others remain undetected... The Somali-American youth who have traveled abroad to join and fight for al-Shabaab were likely exposed to al-Shabaab’s extremist ideology in the United States, most likely through sustained interaction with extremists—in person and via the Internet—and exposure to jihadist literature and videos circulated on the Internet.”<sup>228</sup>

<sup>223</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Mujahideen Roster: (Abu Huriyya) Amir Abdul Muhaimin.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>224</sup> “Complaint for Violation.” *U.S. v. Ruben Luis Leon Shumpert*. FBI Special Agent Robert Walby. Filed November 29, 2006. U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington. Case No. 06-631M. [http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S.\\_v\\_Shumpert\\_Complaint.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v_Shumpert_Complaint.pdf).

<sup>225</sup> “Complaint for Violation.” *U.S. v. Ruben Luis Leon Shumpert*. FBI Special Agent Robert Walby. Filed November 29, 2006. U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington. Case No. 06-631M. [http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S.\\_v\\_Shumpert\\_Complaint.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/U.S._v_Shumpert_Complaint.pdf).

<sup>226</sup> Meserve, Jeanne and Mike Ahlers. Seattle case raises questions about war on terror.” *CNN*. December 18, 2006.

<sup>227</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “The Mujahideen Roster: (Abu Huriyya) Amir Abdul Muhaimin.” *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

<sup>228</sup> “Violent Islamist Extremism: Al-Shabaab Recruitment in America.” Testimony by National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) Deputy Director of Intelligence Andrew Liepman before the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. March 11, 2009. [http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/shabaab\\_031109Liepman.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/shabaab_031109Liepman.pdf).

Perhaps with individuals such as Daniel Maldonado and Ruben Shumpert in mind, Deputy Director Liepman added, “Since 2006, a number of US citizens who are Muslim converts have also traveled to Somalia, possibly to train in extremist training camps.”<sup>229</sup>

These thoughts were echoed in accompanying testimony before the Senate Homeland Security Committee from the Associate Executive Assistant Director of the FBI’s National Security Branch, Philip Mudd. Mudd indicated that, according to information gathered by the FBI, “in Minneapolis, we believe there has been an active and deliberate attempt to recruit individuals—all of whom are young men, some only in their late teens—to travel to Somalia to fight or train on behalf of al-Shabaab. We assess that for the majority of these individuals, the primary motivation for such travel was to defend their place of birth from the Ethiopian invasion, although an appeal was also made based on their shared Islamic identity. A range of socio-economic conditions—such as violent youth crime and gang subcultures, and tensions over cultural integration—may have also played some role in the recruitment process.”<sup>230</sup>

## Part VII: Shabaab’s Propaganda Strategy and Media Infrastructure

For those who have carefully studied the development of the media and propaganda strategy employed by Shabaab al-Mujahideen, arguably, the first impression is how far that strategy has progressed in only two years of formal existence. To understand how Shabaab uses media to communicate and recruit new members, one must first comprehend the accumulated distrust that jihadi organizations, in general, have for mainstream journalists. Shabaab al-Mujahideen has lamented that it is “unfortunate” how “some of the media outlets in the Arab world have also followed the path of the crusade media that is directed against the Mujahidin.” Particularly, Shabaab has singled out the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera satellite network for strong criticism. Despite a widespread reputation in the West as “Al-Qaida TV”, in fact Al-Jazeera is routinely targeted for “uncalled-for involvement” in jihadi affairs—including “in the Somali jihad.” According to Shabaab, “Al-Jazeera stood side by side with the anti-Islamic media when it covered the battles against the crusade forces. It is clear to others the negative role Al-Jazeera played in spreading the false news about the negotiations between those who surrendered from the Somali Liberation party and the apostate government.” The Somali Islamists have also questioned why what little original material they have actually given to the Al-Jazeera network “was put in Al-Jazeera’s archives” and “completely ignored.”<sup>231</sup>

As such, given their lack of faith in Al-Jazeera or other mainstream media to “objectively” and “completely” report on their activities, jihadi organizations—including both Al-Qaida and, more recently, Shabaab—have actively sought out alternative venues. No single technology has given them greater alternative media access than the Internet. Initially, the Shabaab movement began with a very basic Somali-language website hosted at <http://www.heegan.net> in the winter and early spring of 2007. Heegan.net offered visitors images of Shabaab fighters in battle positions, biographies of “martyred” Shabaab leaders, news updates on Shabaab operations—and a stomach-churning video titled “Jaxiimul Xabasha 1” (“Ethiopian Hell Part 1”) showing the triumphant mutilation and graphic desecration of the bodies of dead Ethiopian soldiers by apparent Shabaab fighters.<sup>232</sup> In fact, the Heegan.net website contained only two other videos for download: footage of a Shabaab militant firing a shoulder-fired surface-to-air missile at a cargo

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<sup>229</sup> “Violent Islamist Extremism: Al-Shabaab Recruitment in America.” Testimony by National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) Deputy Director of Intelligence Andrew Liepman before the U.S. Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. March 11, 2009. [http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/shabaab\\_031109Liepman.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/shabaab_031109Liepman.pdf).

<sup>230</sup> “Statement of Philip Mudd, Associate Executive Assistant Director, National Security Branch, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.” March 11, 2009. [http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/shabaab\\_031109Mudd.pdf](http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/shabaab_031109Mudd.pdf).

<sup>231</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “An Important Clarification Regarding the False News Broadcast by Al-Jazeera.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=36096>. Released: November 24, 2008.

<sup>232</sup> <http://www.heegan.net/jaxiima%20ethiopia.rmvb>.

plane dropping off supplies at Mogadishu airport; and, footage of a suicide bombing attack on an Ethiopian base in Mogadishu.<sup>233</sup>

Presumably as a result of posting the latter series of material, the Heegan.net website was quickly forced to temporarily close, along with another Islamist site with loose connections to Shabaab, Qaadisiya.com. According to the notorious online extremist known as “Inshallahshaheed”, “The brothers from Qaadisiya.com and Heegan.net have become victims of Kuffar superiority in the field of Technology. They have been pulled offline, but by the Will of Allaah more sites will be born in the Name of Jihad Fee Sabeelillaah!”<sup>234</sup> Indeed, within days, a new iteration of Heegan.net had been born in the form of <http://www.almujaahid.com>. The domain [almujaahid.com](http://www.almujaahid.com) was recorded as registered to “macsharo cawaale” on Howlwadaag Street in the Bakkara Market in Mogadishu.<sup>235</sup> While in theory, the direct offspring of Heegan.net, the [Almujaahid.com](http://www.almujaahid.com) website was noticeably more explicit and hardcore—with animated images of Usama Bin Laden, Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, various Somali suicide bombers, and a masked mujahid firing an AK-47. The logo for [Almujaahid.com](http://www.almujaahid.com) was rendered in flashing red, blood dripping from the letters. The meaning of the website could hardly have been more explicit—yet, once again, most of the material on the site was made available only in the Somali language, limiting its usefulness to non-Somalis interested in the jihad of Shabaab al-Mujahideen.

The final iteration of the official Shabaab al-Mujahideen website was relocated to a new domain, first registered as <http://www.kataaib.net> (later changed to [kataaib.info](http://www.kataaib.info)) in April 2007 by an unidentified person in the town of Marka Caday in western Somalia. Much more subtle, further refined, and with better menus and graphics—the [Kataaib.net/Kataaib.info](http://www.kataaib.net) website has come to define the face of Shabaab’s mainline propaganda. Along with similar content to what was pioneered on Heegan.net and [Almujaahid.com](http://www.almujaahid.com), the [Kataaib](http://www.kataaib.net) site also offered other more advanced multimedia—such as the Somali-language mujahideen newsletter “Nashrada al-Jihad” (over 50 issues of which have been published by Shabaab) and even the unusual opportunity for the general public to submit questions directly to the emir of Shabaab, Shaykh Mukhtar Abu az-Zubair, through a special function on the site.<sup>236</sup> Though the relationship between Shabaab and the [Kataaib](http://www.kataaib.net) website is relatively obvious to most observers, it has also been directly confirmed by Shabaab itself in an official communiqué from November 2008. Reacting angrily to a false report broadcast on the Al-Jazeera satellite network and attributed to Shabaab al-Mujahideen, the latter quickly responded, informing anyone still unaware that “our movement has an official website ([www.kataaib.net](http://www.kataaib.net)) that carries our official statements.”<sup>237</sup>

However, static Somali-language websites like Heegan.net, [Almujaahid.com](http://www.almujaahid.com), and [Kataaib](http://www.kataaib.net) are only one facet of a larger media and propaganda campaign that has been mounted on the Internet in the name of Shabaab al-Mujahideen. Aside from content aimed at Somalis and Somali exiles, Shabaab has also been able to branch out to other potentially sympathetic audiences by arranging for that content to be re-broadcast in other languages—particularly Arabic and English—over online jihadi discussion forums. In fact, in order to accomplish this task, Shabaab has partnered up with a virtual transnational organization (which exists solely on the Internet) known as the “Global Islamic Media Front” (GIMF). The GIMF is one of several prominent online entities which perform essential media and logistical tasks on behalf of mujahideen around the world—including Al-Qaida. Those tasks can be as mundane as translating material into other languages—and as sophisticated as being called on to serve as the official courier responsible for delivering raw jihadi media content from terrorist organizations directly to supporters and sympathizers on the Internet. While pursuing this mission over the past six years, the GIMF has won wide acclaim and, thus, has been granted elite access by the administrators of Arabic-language jihadi discussion forums to post content in the “official data section” of the forums—

<sup>233</sup> <http://www.heegan.net/diyaarad.DAT> and <http://www.heegan.net/AVSEQ01.DAT>.

<sup>234</sup> <http://inshallahshaheed.wordpress.com/2007/04/01/the-youthful-jihad-in-somalia/>. April 1, 2007.

<sup>235</sup> WHOIS domain registry search on “ALMUJAAHID.COM.” April 24, 2007.

<sup>236</sup> <http://kataaib.info/suaalo.php>. February 2009.

<sup>237</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “An Important Clarification Regarding the False News Broadcast by Al-Jazeera.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=36096>. Released: November 24, 2008.

which are strictly limited to qualified representatives from actual frontline organizations (such as Al-Qaida).

As previously cited in this report, on March 25, 2007, the As-Sahab Media Foundation released a new video of Al-Qaida commander Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Liby, titled “To the Army of Distress in Somalia.” At the conclusion of his address, Abu Yahya added a “special request of the mujahideen on the media frontline, who are carrying out an act of worship which is among the most honorable of devotions and loftiest of acts of obedience: incitement to fighting”:

“It is a request to them to adopt the cause of their brothers the mujahideen in Somalia... by spreading their news, broadcasting their sacrifices, following their developments, and bringing them to the Muslims through every legitimate means, whether text, sound or video, and encouraging them to stand at their side and provide them with every backing in order for the cause of jihad in Somalia to remain alive and active, lest it be forgotten with time and neglected like other modern Islamic causes have been. How many a concern your releases have awakened, and how much hope they have revived, and how much resolution has been renewed by them, and how many men they have mobilized, and how many an enemy they have disappointed. May Allah bless you lions of the front, for by Allah, the fruits of your combined efforts – sound, video and text – are more severe for the infidels and their lackeys than the falling of rockets and missiles on their heads.”<sup>238</sup>

Six days later, on March 31, 2007, the first Shabaab al-Mujahideen text communiqué surfaced in the “official data section” of the forums—posted care of the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) registered correspondent.<sup>239</sup> They have appeared there ever since, without fail, care of the same GIMF superuser account.

Just prior to taking over as the logistical arm for Shabaab’s media wing, the GIMF issued a public statement, titled “Ways to Support Our Brothers in Somalia.”<sup>240</sup> In that document, the GIMF urged its supporters to provide assistance to Shabaab al-Mujahideen—namely, through “departing for jihad”, “financial support”, “attacking the interests of the enemies”, and “jihad by word.” The document called on Muslims to travel to Somalia—“especially those with experience in military matters, explosives, and urban warfare”—and for others “to attack the interests of our enemies outside of Somalia... especially economic, military, and political targets, such as embassies and factories... One of the most important places to target the Ethiopian enemy is their international airport.” However, the GIMF devoted equal attention to its own particular area of expertise: “jihad by word”: “this type of jihad should not be ignored, and especially for the Muslim clergy to encourage people to leave for jihad... Media people must make the Islamic nation aware of the truth behind the current battles, and publish written, video, and audio productions—and publish them widely... and they must coordinate those media efforts as much as possible with the mujahideen.”<sup>241</sup>

Once again, as with the “Kataaib” series of Internet websites, Shabaab al-Mujahideen has left little mystery about the nature of its relationship with the GIMF. In rather blunt fashion, Shabaab has publicly declared, “we have an official wing that deals with all the audio, video and written statements. The wing is called ‘Sada Al-Jihad Media Center’ and it belongs to the ‘Global Islamic Media Front.’ Therefore, we are not responsible for any statement published from any party other than the ones mentioned above.”<sup>242</sup> Even the emir of Shabaab al-Mujahideen, Shaykh Mukhtar Abu az-Zubair, has openly hailed the work of the GIMF in an audio message released in June 2008: “I salute our brothers in the Global Islamic Media Front for their persistence and support... know that you are the bridge between the Islamic nation and its fighters, you are preserving the

<sup>238</sup> As-Sahab Media Foundation. “Shaykh Abu Yahya al-Liby: To the Army of Distress in Somalia.” March 25, 2007. (Dated: February 2007)

<sup>239</sup> <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=118815>. March 31, 2007.

<sup>240</sup> Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). “Ways to Support Our Brothers in Somalia.” *Sada al-Jihad*. Issue 13; March 2007.

<sup>241</sup> Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). “Ways to Support Our Brothers in Somalia.” *Sada al-Jihad*. Issue 13; March 2007.

<sup>242</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “An Important Clarification Regarding the False News Broadcast by Al-Jazeera.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=36096>. Released: November 24, 2008.

treasured history of this Islamic nation, and you are providing all the necessary means of motivating future generations, by illuminating the path of the Islamic nation towards glory and empowerment.”<sup>243</sup> Likewise, according to the eminent Shaykh Mukhtar Robow:

“We thank the brothers who are putting up their efforts in the Jihad media generally, and our brothers at GIMF especially who played an important and key role in making the Somalia jihad prominent and adopted our publications and statements and covered our operations. For before the emergence of the jihad media, the eyes and ears of many Muslims were fixed on the crusader government media which distorts the image of jihad... From this darkness emerged the jihadi media which surged forward and forced our enemies to await the statements of the mujahideen in the forums and the jihadi websites... There are many men whom Allah has guided to jihad thanks to these anonymous brothers on the Internet and much good news reaches us through these brothers—of whom we know nothing other than we are joined by the bonds of faith, worship, and jihad.”<sup>244</sup>



**Chart: The Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement's Media and Propaganda Pipeline**

Perhaps a sign of the GIMF's curious influence over Shabaab, in the fall of 2008, the latter began producing a new online propaganda magazine, "Millat Ibrahim", this time printed exclusively in Arabic.<sup>245</sup>

<sup>243</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. "Shaykh Mujahid Mukhtar Abu az-Zubair: 'Our Jihad Until There is No More Tumult or Oppression, and There Prevails Justice and Faith.'"

<http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=181838>. Released: June 1, 2008.

<sup>244</sup> Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF). "An Interview With the Commander Abi Mansoor (Mukhtaar Ali Robo), the Spokesman of the Youth Islamic Movement in Somalia." *Sada al-Jihad*. Issue 25; May 2008.

<http://www.alhesbah.net/v/showthread.php?t=179163>.

<sup>245</sup> *Millat Ibrahim*. Vol. 1; No. 1. Released: October 3, 2008.

Though it has played the most prominent public role, the GIMF has hardly been the only virtual organization to jump into the jihad media fray on behalf of Shabaab al-Mujahideen. On December 21, 2008, the aspiring GIMF clone known as “Ansar al-Mujahideen” announced that they would be hosting a live question-and-answer session with Shaykh Mukhtar Robow himself on a public channel hosted via the PalTalk chat network.<sup>246</sup> For unspecified reasons, Robow was a no show, and instead replaced with “Abu Abdelrahman”, a field commander fighting with Shabaab al-Mujahideen in Somalia.<sup>247</sup> Later, when the credentials of Ansar al-Mujahideen were questioned by other online jihads, the group’s “media emir”—Abu Omar al-Maqdisi—retorted, “if you wish to get to know me and the brothers, and as I said to you before, we are located in the Ansar channel on PalTalk with the jihadi Shaykh Abu Abdelrahman, may Allah protect him, one of the commanders in Somalia. So why would he choose to trust us and allow us to record and broadcast his interview? We have brothers from the Islamic State of Iraq, Chechnya, and Dagestan... We are willing to blow ourselves up near the apostates at any moment, and if you have enough resources to provide us with the necessary financing, then a terrorist is ready.”<sup>248</sup>

Other sympathizers—particularly those living in Western countries—have come together in order to help re-distribute Shabaab propaganda on YouTube and other similar file sharing sites, as well as translate Shabaab web content into English. In 2008, unknown parties created an account on the popular WordPress blogging site in order to provide regular, daily translations of Shabaab military communiqués in English. On several occasions, the administrators of abushabaab.wordpress.com have put out flashy appeals for Somali/English and Somali/Arabic translators, “designers”, and “video editors” to step forward and volunteer “to help raise the profile of the struggle against the evil democracy, against the crusaders.”<sup>249</sup> At one point, “Abushabaab” even added a personal plea: “our deeply felt apologies about the lack of news translations from the mujaahideen of al-shabaab in Somalia, this is due to unforeseen events and combination of lack of Somali-English translators and increasing operations of the mujaahideen in Somalia, this in turn lead to this situation, for the past year or so this has happened approximately 2 times and its out of our hands... Here we would like to take this opportunity to seriously ask for more somali - english translators to come forward and join us in this struggle.”<sup>250</sup>

## Part VIII: Shabaab al-Mujahideen and the Issue of Ocean Piracy

Over the past five years, the problem of ocean piracy has taken on epidemic proportions off the coast of the Horn of Africa. Most of these pirates operate from land bases along the Somali coastline, beyond the reach of international authorities or law enforcement. By striking lucrative commercial shipping lanes heading to and from the Suez Canal, these modern day pirates have earned a collective wealth in ransom—and also the consternation of many regional and world powers. For television audiences in the United States, these fears were crystallized during the hijacking and eventual rescue of the “MAERSK Alabama”, an American cargo vessel attacked by Somali pirates while transporting humanitarian supplies destined for needy Somalis. Yet, in the Middle East, it was the earlier hostage drama in November 2008 involving the Saudi oil tanker “MV Sirius Star” which captured the public imagination. The notion of young, trigger-happy desperados in control of hundreds of millions of dollars worth of flammable material sent the media into an uproar—including the Al-Jazeera satellite network.

In late November, at the height of the episode involving the Sirius Star, Al-Jazeera broadcast a report suggested that Shabaab al-Mujahideen was seeking, for the first time, to embroil itself in the pirate drama and “liberate” the Muslim vessel held captive by “bandits.” Yet,

<sup>246</sup> <http://www.shamikh.com/vb/showthread.php?t=30147>. December 21, 2008.

<sup>247</sup> Ansar al-Mujahideen. “Exclusive: Ansar al-Mujahideen Hosts an Audio Interview with one of the Field Commanders of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement.” <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=1881>. December 22, 2008.

<sup>248</sup> Private Message recovered exclusively by NEFA Foundation investigators from <http://www.as-ansar.com>.

<sup>249</sup> <http://www.ek-ls.org/forum/showthread.php?t=164676>. August 3, 2008.

<sup>250</sup> <http://abushabaab.wordpress.com>. November 2008.

within days, Shabaab immediately responded with a statement rejecting the “completely false report... confirming that our movement has threatened the pirates and assured the release of the Saudi oil tanker. We question the truth behind that report and ask Al-Jazeera about their unknown spokesman. Did Al-Jazeera even confirm such news with our media office, which is known to them?”<sup>251</sup> The subject of the relationship between Shabaab and the nearby pirate gangs surfaced again in December 2008 during the Paltalk Q&A session with “Abu Abdelrahman.” When asked, the Shabaab field commander abjectly refused to even respond to any query about the pirates. Instead, the interview moderator came online and admonished the questioner that “the pirates are not a jihadi movement.”<sup>252</sup> As indicated by these two sources, there is little available open source evidence—at present—to suggest any significant linkages or coordination between Shabaab al-Mujahideen and the notorious Somali pirate gangs.

Even so, given recent developments off the coast of Somalia, regional and Western governments will have to keep a close eye on how armed clashes with U.S. and other naval vessels may influence future developments in pirate politics. For now, it would appear that a Navy SEAL-led raid on the MAERSK Alabama has provoked an angry and petulant reaction on the part of some pirates—who are now determined to prove they will not be deterred by the U.S. government. The key factor seems to be whether or not the U.S. and its allies end up extending the battle against the pirates from sea to land. While Shabaab al-Mujahideen has made its general philosophical distaste for piracy fairly clear, this is also a movement which is cash-hungry and can recognize valuable pragmatic opportunities when they exist. The concern is that—even should the two sides fail to meet on an ideological level—were Shabaab simply to resort to extortion by skimming pirate ransoms and diverting that money towards armed conflict, this could be an equally unwelcome scenario.

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<sup>251</sup> Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement. “An Important Clarification Regarding the False News Broadcast by Al-Jazeera.” <http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=36096>. Released: November 24, 2008.

<sup>252</sup> Ansar al-Mujahideen. “Exclusive: Ansar al-Mujahideen Hosts an Audio Interview with one of the Field Commanders of the Shabaab al-Mujahideen Movement.” <http://www.as-ansar.com/vb/showthread.php?t=1881>. December 22, 2008.