

# **COUNTER-TERRORISM IN SOMALIA: LOSING HEARTS AND MINDS?**

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## COUNTER-TERRORISM IN SOMALIA: LOSING HEARTS AND MINDS?

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nearly four years after 9/11, hardly a day passes without the "war on terrorism" making headlines, with Iraq, Afghanistan, Indonesia and now London holding centre stage. But away from the spotlight, a quiet, dirty conflict is being waged in Somalia: in the rubble-strewn streets of the ruined capital of this state without a government, Mogadishu, al-Qaeda operatives, jihadi extremists, Ethiopian security services and Western-backed counter-terrorism networks are engaged in a shadowy and complex contest waged by intimidation, abduction and assassination. The U.S. has had some success but now risks evoking a backlash. Ultimately a successful counter-terrorism strategy requires more attention to helping Somalia with the twin tasks of reconciliation and state building.

During the 1990s, jihadism in Somalia was synonymous with al-Itihaad al-Islami, a band of Wahhabi militants determined to establish an Islamic emirate in the country. Al-Qaeda also developed a toehold, contributing to attacks on U.S. and UN peacekeepers in the early part of the decade and using the country as a transit zone for terrorism in neighbouring Kenya; some leading members of al-Qaeda's East African network continue to hide in Somalia.

Since 2003, Somalia has witnessed the rise of a new, ruthless, independent jihadi network with links to al-Qaeda. Based in lawless Mogadishu and led by a young militia leader trained in Afghanistan, the group announced its existence by murdering four foreign aid workers in the relatively secure territory of Somaliland between October 2003 and April 2004. Western governments, led by the U.S., responded to the threat of terrorism in and from Somalia by building up Somali counter-terrorist networks headed by faction leaders and former military or police officers, and by cooperating with the security services in Somaliland and neighbouring Puntland. The strategy has netted at least one key al-Qaeda figure, and as many as a dozen members of the new jihadi group are either dead or behind bars.

Despite these successes, counter-terrorism efforts are producing growing unease within the broader public. Few Somalis believe there are terrorists in their country, and many regard the American-led war on terrorism as an assault on Islam. Unidentified surveillance flights, the abduction of innocent people for weeks at a time on suspicion of terrorist links, and cooperation with unpopular faction leaders all add to public cynicism and resentment. Without public support, even the most sophisticated counter-terrorism effort is doomed to failure.

Militants have responded by assassinating at least a dozen Somalis working for Mogadishu's Western-backed counter-terrorism networks. Meanwhile, an Ethiopian intelligence network hunts Islamist militants and insurgents among Somalia's small, fearful community of Oromo migrants and refugees.

Since the formation of the new Transitional Federal Government (TFG) for Somalia, in October 2004, the dirty war between terrorists and counter-terrorist operatives in Mogadishu appears to have entered a new and more vicious stage that threatens to push the country further towards jihadism and extremist violence unless its root causes are properly addressed. Urban terrorism has claimed the lives of a female BBC producer, two young Somali footballers and a Somali woman working for an international NGO. Eager to earn the support of Western governments as an ally in the war on terrorism, the TFG leadership has attributed the attacks to Islamist extremists but some of the evidence appears to implicate supporters of the interim president instead.

The threat of jihadi terrorism in and from Somalia is real. But attempts by the new Somali leadership and its regional allies to exploit this threat for short-term political gain risk plunging the country into even greater crisis. Several key leaders in the deeply divided transitional government are notorious for smearing adversaries and critics with allegations of terrorist linkages -- conduct that threatens to deepen the schisms within the government. More alarmingly, the faction of

the TFG aligned with the interim president has tried to use the threat of terrorism to justify deployment of a regional intervention force to Somalia -- a widely unpopular and deeply divisive proposition that would not only irrevocably split the government and trigger renewed conflict, but would also dramatically strengthen the jihadis.

Ultimately, the threat of jihadi terrorism from Somalia can only be addressed through the restoration of stable, legitimate and functional government. Dealing with that threat requires Somalia's friends to do more to assist in bringing Somali society together again and rebuilding the state. But such assistance must be carefully planned and finely calibrated in order to ensure that it does not empower one faction of the TFG at the expense of another or otherwise destabilise a fragile peace process.

A successful counter-terrorism campaign requires more engagement with the broader public, including civil society organisations and more moderate Islamist groups. Somalis must be persuaded not only that some individuals guilty of terrorism are indeed in their country but also that the counter-terrorism agenda does not involve subjugation by factional or foreign interests. At the same time, Somalia's partners must become involved with the peace process, helping to overcome the TFG schisms and to forge a genuine government of national unity. If they fail to do so, jihadis will gradually find growing purchase among Somalia's despairing and disaffected citizenry, and it will only be a matter of time before another group of militants succeeds in mounting a spectacular terrorist attack against foreign interests in Somalia or against one of its neighbours.

**Nairobi/Brussels, 11 July 2005**

## COUNTER-TERRORISM IN SOMALIA: LOSING HEARTS AND MINDS?

### I. INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1990s, three extremist groups operating from Somalia have chalked up a deadly track record. The most dangerous -- and most wanted by counter-terrorism agencies -- is an al-Qaeda cell composed of militants responsible for the 1998 bombing of the American embassy in Nairobi, the 2002 bombing of a tourist hotel on the Kenyan coast and the simultaneous attempt to shoot down an Israeli charter aircraft.

The second includes leaders of al-Itihaad al-Islami, a Somali Islamist and nationalist political grouping with some long-standing links to al-Qaeda that aimed to establish an Islamic emirate in the Somali-inhabited territories of the Horn of Africa.<sup>1</sup> During its heyday in the early 1990s, al-Itihaad had a militia more than 1,000 strong and was funded in large part by Islamic charities from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. It established military training camps staffed by foreign jihadis,<sup>2</sup> including members of al-Qaeda, and in the

mid-1990s was implicated in several terrorist attacks in Ethiopia. Following Ethiopian retaliatory raids on its Somali bases in early 1997, however, al-Itihaad's military and political architecture was dismantled and the movement formally disbanded. Some leaders remained active and may have played a supporting role in the 1998 Nairobi embassy bombing.

Since 2003, a third group has also emerged: a small but ruthless independent jihadi network based in Mogadishu and with links to al-Qaeda.

The notoriety and effectiveness of these militants has contributed to perceptions of Somalia as a breeding ground for Islamist extremism and a hub of terrorist activity. A March 2005 UN report portrayed Somalia as home to an "army" of jihadi fighters supported by a network of at least seventeen terrorist training camps.<sup>3</sup> In reality, jihadism is an unpopular, minority trend among Somali Islamists. Al-Itihaad's military wing has been largely dismantled, the new jihadi network's effective membership probably is in the tens rather than the hundreds, and ranking al-Qaeda operatives in Somalia probably number less than half a dozen. Several Western countries host larger and more sophisticated jihadi networks.

What makes Somalia an object of special concern is its lack of a functioning central government, which renders the country a "haven for terrorist groups".<sup>4</sup> In the absence of functioning police, immigration, customs and intelligence agencies, foreign security services -- predominantly from the U.S. -- have taken up the challenge of countering terrorism in Somalia. An American military presence -- the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) -- was

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<sup>1</sup> Crisis Group has reported frequently on Islamists and Islamism and their relationship to a wide variety of political situations in the Middle East and North Africa, Central Asia, Afghanistan, South Asia and South East Asia. We treat Islamism as synonymous with "Islamic activism", the active assertion and promotion of beliefs, prescriptions, laws, or policies that are held to be Islamic in character: see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005. Earlier Crisis Group reporting generally defined Islamism more narrowly, as "Islam in political mode". But two problems became apparent with that definition. First, it presupposed that Islam per se is not political, whereas insofar as Islam is inherently interested in matters of governance, in fact it is. Secondly, it presupposed that all forms of Islamism are equally political, whereas in fact, there are significant distinctions in this regard between those forms that privilege political activism, missionary activity or violence. Al-Itihaad is a complex political movement. It and other Somali Islamist groups will be examined in detail in a forthcoming Crisis Group report.

<sup>2</sup> The term "jihadi" is used by Crisis Group in reference to activists committed to violence because they are engaged in what they conceive to be the military defence (or, in some cases, expansion) of *Dar al-Islam* (the House of Islam -- that area of the world historically subject to Muslim rule) and the

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community of believers (*umma*) against infidel enemies. Within this general category, several distinct currents can be distinguished. See Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit.

<sup>3</sup> J.E. Tambi, M.E. Holt, Jr., C. Li and J. Salek, "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1558 (2004)", United Nations Security Council (S/2005/153), 8 March 2005, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> See Crisis Group Africa Report N°45, *Somalia: Countering Terrorism in a Failed State*, 23 May 2002.

established in neighbouring Djibouti in 2002 to coordinate and underpin regional counter-terrorism initiatives. But for many of the same reasons that Somalia is a focus of concern, it is unlikely ever to become a refuge for al-Qaeda on a par with Afghanistan under the Taliban: there is no sympathetic authority to provide protection; the flat, open terrain offers few opportunities for concealment; and a rich oral tradition makes it difficult to maintain secrets.

Over the years, Somali leaders have, nevertheless, attempted to exploit the small jihadi presence for their own political ends. After 9/11, faction leaders queued up to declare their country a potential haven for terrorists.<sup>5</sup> Ethiopia backed these claims and denounced the Transitional National Government (TNG) as a front for Islamist groups and terrorists.<sup>6</sup> In 2001, Addis Ababa backed formation of a coalition of opposition factions, the Somali Restoration and Reconciliation Council (SRRC), which soon set to work providing "intelligence" about the TNG and its supporters. SRRC reports included lengthy lists with names of its political rivals and their alleged affiliations with various "extremist" groups including al-Itihaad and a shadowy group with Egyptian origins, Takfir wa'l-Hijra.<sup>7</sup>

Some leading TNG figures were indeed associated with al-Itihaad and the more progressive Islamist movement, Harakaat al-Islax, but the claims were absurdly exaggerated: much of the TNG cabinet and the nucleus of Mogadishu's business elite were alleged to have extremist affiliations, as well as their sponsors and business partners in Djibouti.

Concerns about the TNG's Islamist ties and the threat of terrorism provided much of the impetus behind an initiative of Somalia's neighbours, acting within the framework of the regional Inter-Governmental

Authority on Development (IGAD),<sup>8</sup> to replace the floundering TNG with a more reliable partner. In October 2004, peace talks conducted in Kenya under IGAD's auspices established a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) for Somalia, based in Kenya, that was headed by President Abdillahi Yusuf, a central figure in the SRRC, and dominated by his clan and factional allies.<sup>9</sup> Yusuf earned his credentials as anti-Islamist campaigner by fighting and defeating al-Itihaad militarily in northeast Somalia in 1992 and has lived on this success ever since.<sup>10</sup> As president of the regional government of Puntland, he cooperated closely with the Ethiopian and American intelligence services, and many observers expected him to win the enthusiastic endorsement of both governments. Addis Ababa did back Yusuf to the hilt but Washington -- like many other capitals -- remained noncommittal because it harboured deep reservations about his ability to build consensus among the Somali actors and lead a continued reconciliation process.

International concerns appeared justified when Yusuf appealed for a 20,000-strong multinational military force to return his government to Somalia and later announced he would relocate his government not to Mogadishu but to the towns of Baydhowa and Jowhar. Unpersuaded by the request and overstretched by commitments elsewhere, including the Sudanese region of Darfur, the African Union (AU) vacillated, prompting IGAD member states to propose their own intervention force of 10,000. Although routinely described as a peacekeeping mission, the operation was in fact proposed as peace enforcement, involving "all measures necessary" against any party deemed to threaten the process: precisely the kind of mission that brought U.S. and UN forces into conflict with Somali militias in the early 1990s. The original concept also included a reference to counter-terrorism, indicating that peace keeping was not the only consideration of Somalia's neighbours.<sup>11</sup>

These critical issues polarised the TFG between Yusuf's SRRC wing and a coalition of mainly Mogadishu-based faction leaders. The transitional parliament divided similarly, with one wing -- led by Speaker Sharif Hassan -- returning to Mogadishu, while the other, led by President Yusuf and Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Geedi, remained in Nairobi. The Mogadishu-based group rapidly set to work, galvanising a coalition of civil society organisations, women's groups and former

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<sup>5</sup> Matt Bryden, "No quick fixes: Coming to terms with terrorism, Islam and statelessness in Somalia", *The Journal of Conflict Studies* (vol. XXIII, no.2), Fall 2003, University of New Brunswick, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> The TNG was established in August 2000 at a peace conference in Djibouti, and was headed by President Abdiqasim Salad Hassan. It was succeeded in 2004 by the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which was formed as a result of peace talks in Kenya. See Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°11, *Salvaging Somalia's Chance for Peace*, 9 December 2002; Crisis Group Africa Report N°59, *Negotiating a Blueprint for Peace in Somalia*, 6 March 2003; Crisis Group Africa Report N°79, *Biting the Somali Bullet*, 4 May 2004; and Africa Report N°88, *Somalia: Continuation of War by other Means?*, 21 December 2004.

<sup>7</sup> See Medhane Tadesse, *Al-Itihad: Political Islam and Black Economy in Somalia* (Addis Ababa, 2002).

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<sup>8</sup> The members of IGAD are Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda.

<sup>9</sup> See Crisis Group Report, *Continuation of War by other Means?*, op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, April 2005.

military and police officers in order to restore security and stability to the capital, in the hopes of demonstrating it was a suitable location for the TFG, and no foreign troops were required. Yusuf's wing continued to insist that Mogadishu was too insecure, and foreign troops were essential. The impasse threatened to fracture the TFG into hostile armed camps, derailing the fragile peace process and plunging Somalia back into crisis.

## II. MANUFACTURING JIHAD

Since the dismantling of al-Itihaad in the mid-1990s, the fortunes of Somali militants had been on the decline. Many former jihadis had abandoned violence, returning to a more conventional school of Salafi Islamic thought.<sup>12</sup> The flow of funding from Islamic charities in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf began to dry up after 9/11, and the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 removed important training opportunities.

From a jihadi perspective, Yusuf's rash appeal for foreign troops -- especially from neighbouring Ethiopia -- and the furore it unleashed must have seemed like an answer to their prayers. A prominent Somali Internet columnist warned in an editorial on al-Jazeera:

Fatwas on Jihad would be issued, and streets of Mogadishu would witness bloody clashes between the Somalis and Ethiopian soldiers. Such clashes would also grab the attention of the Muslim world, thus spurring foreign legions of bin Ladens and Zargawis to find their way to heaven to kill the infidel Abyssinian soldiers in Somalia.<sup>13</sup>

Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, a prominent jihadi leader in Mogadishu, predictably condemned the proposed deployment and warned Somalis would wage jihad against any foreign troops who set foot on Somali soil.<sup>14</sup> His view was echoed by the leadership of Mogadishu's influential Shari'a courts and a variety of religious leaders.

TFG supporters were quick to brand opponents of the deployment plan as "extremists"; Addis Ababa likewise

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<sup>12</sup> The term "Salafi" refers to the founding fathers of Islam, the so-called "venerable ancestors" (*al-Salaf al-Salih*, whence the movement's name), notably the Prophet Mohammed and the first four "rightly-guided" Caliphs -- *al-Rashidun* -- of the original Muslim community in seventh century Arabia. Originally a movement for modernist reform, the Salafiyya movement has become closely associated with the puritan and fundamentalist Wahhabi tradition of central Arabia, based on literalist readings of scripture. See Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Bashir Goth, "Ethiopia as an enemy is engraved in the collective memory of Somali people", [www.al-Jazeera.info](http://www.al-Jazeera.info), 19 March 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Aweys is a former vice chairman and military commander of al-Itihaad. His long-standing ties to al-Qaeda led to his designation by the U.S. government under Executive Order 13224 as an individual linked to terrorism. His background will be covered in greater detail in a forthcoming Crisis Group report on Somali Islamist groups.

tried to play down the opposition as a handful of Islamic militants.<sup>15</sup> But Yusuf's rivals within the TFG, including several key ministers, perceived the peacekeeping proposal as a ruse the interim president and his Ethiopian allies would use to crush them -- a sentiment widely shared within the Hawiye clan. In February 2005 Crisis Group found Mogadishu inhabitants broadly united against military intervention, and the next month a session of the Somali parliament at a chic Nairobi hotel degenerated into a brawl when the question of foreign troops was brought to a vote.

Mogadishu residents who subsequently took to the streets in mass demonstrations were from a broad cross section of Somali society. A young professional explained to Crisis Group:

From Ethiopia's perspective it will be a war between Ethiopia and the Islamists [*Ikhwaan*]. But for we Somalis, it is not so simple. I have to fight side by side with anyone who is fighting Ethiopia....People do not want to join the Islamists [*wadaado*]...but if it comes to that, how can you refuse a coalition with them? It won't matter who chews *qaad* and who doesn't when the enemy is just over the horizon.<sup>16</sup>

Others simply feared that a foreign military intervention would propel Islamists into leadership roles. "If there is a war there will be no warlords", an employee of a Western-oriented Somali NGO told Crisis Group. "The religious groups (*wadaado*) will take the lead".<sup>17</sup> Moderate Islamists, meanwhile, feared that intervention could tilt the balance towards the militants: "The jihadis are praying for the Ethiopians to come", explained a member of al-Islax. "They can easily make Somalia like Iraq".<sup>18</sup>

Recognising the risks, a variety of international actors moved quickly to head off a potential catastrophe. The U.S. came out strongly against an international military intervention, partly out of fear it could serve as a catalyst for the rise of a "jihadi movement" inside Somalia.<sup>19</sup> The EU, IGAD's Partners Forum and the UN Security Council all followed the U.S. lead in urging restraint by IGAD and Somalia's neighbours.

On 19 March 2005, IGAD put forward a revised deployment plan that excluded Somalia's neighbours from the first phase. The counter-terrorism component was removed at AU request. In May, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) approved only the first phase of the planned IGAD deployment, effectively proscribing neighbours from taking part, and sought UN Security Council approval for the operation -- approval it was unlikely to receive given U.S. reservations about introducing foreign troops into the country.<sup>20</sup>

After nearly nine months of procrastination, the TFG finally wore out its welcome in Nairobi. On 13 June 2005, the Kenyan government bade it farewell in a carefully staged ceremony that left President Yusuf and his followers no choice but to depart.<sup>21</sup> Other than the Kenyan guard of honour and military band at the airport ceremony, there were no foreign troops on hand to deliver the interim president back into his country. In Mogadishu, efforts to prepare the city for the TFG's entrance were well underway, including the removal of roadblocks and cantonment of militia outside the city. Calls for jihad went silent; even Hassan Dahir Aweys agreed to contribute 28 battlewagons with crews to the disarmament process. Although Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi continued to warn of the "very active" al-Qaeda presence in Somalia, he affirmed that a Somali government was the best way to eliminate it, apparently aligning his government with the broader international consensus. The threat of a broad-based jihadi insurgency appeared to have receded.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Crisis Group interview, Addis Ababa, April 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, February 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, February 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, February 2005.

<sup>19</sup> Crisis Group communication with U.S. government official, March 2005.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, "Somalia -- Restoration of Governance", 3 March 2005. A joint US-EU statement on 11 May and a U.S. statement of 22 June reiterated that any decision on a peacekeeping mission must have the approval of a broad quorum of the Somali parliament if it is to receive Washington's support.

<sup>21</sup> Yusuf did not return to Somalia however, instead visiting Djibouti and a number of other countries.

<sup>22</sup> Chris Tomlinson, "Ethiopia: al-Qaeda operating in Somalia", Associated Press, 12 May 2005.



### III. THE DIRTY WARS

Nevertheless, Somalia remains the theatre for a shadowy confrontation involving local jihadis, foreign al-Qaeda operatives and intelligence services from a number of regional and Western countries.

#### A. THE NEW JIHADIS

The main protagonist on the jihadi side is a small but ruthless network based in Mogadishu led by Aden Hashi 'Ayro, a young, Afghanistan-trained protégé of a once prominent al-Itihaad military commander. Other members of the network include former al-Itihaad combat veterans, several of whom have also trained abroad. Since its emergence in 2003, the group has been implicated in the assassinations of four foreign aid workers and at least ten Somali former military and police officers, as well as the desecration of an Italian cemetery in Mogadishu. The group is also believed to have helped al-Qaeda operatives in Somalia with logistics, jobs, identities and protection and to operate training sites in the Banaadir and Lower Shabelle regions.

Many call this new jihadi network "al-Itihaad", referring to the revolutionary jihadi movement properly known as al-Itihaad al-Islami, which was most active in Somalia during the first half of the 1990s.<sup>23</sup> But the new jihadis differ from that movement in a number of important ways. It has no known name, its membership is largely clandestine and its aims are undeclared. Whereas al-Itihaad's leadership included numerous respected sheikhs, the new jihadi leadership has little or no religious authority. And whereas al-Itihaad relied on a range of instruments -- military force, territorial administration, and missionary activism (*da'wa*) -- to achieve its political purposes, the new jihadis seem to be organised exclusively to conduct urban insurgency and terrorism operations without a clear political aim.

#### 1. The Somaliland killings

On 5 October 2003 an Italian nurse, Annalena Tonelli, was murdered on the grounds of the hospital in Boroma, Somaliland, where she treated tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS patients. Tonelli was well-known, having worked among Somalis for almost three decades, and

her killing both shocked and perplexed the community. Suspicion fell upon a number of local figures and groups with whom she was believed to have argued, but none could plausibly be accused of her killing.

On 21 October 2003, two British teachers, Richard and Enid Eyeington, both in their early 60s, were shot through their living room window while watching television late one evening at their residence on the grounds of the Sheikh Secondary School in central Somaliland. The assassin was apparently an expert marksman, and his weapon may have been silenced, since neighbours heard no shot. As the administrators of its most prestigious secondary school, the Eyeingtons were widely known and well-liked, and their murder sent shockwaves through Somaliland. Within days most foreign aid workers had withdrawn to the comparative safety of Djibouti or Nairobi. The government quickly claimed to have arrested the killers but failed to bring anyone to court or provide a convincing account of the incident.

It took one more killing to provide investigators with a break in the case. On 19 April 2004, a vehicle belonging to the German aid agency, GTZ, was attacked on the road between Hargeysa and Berbera. The five assailants posed as passengers beside a broken-down vehicle. During the ambush a Kenyan woman, Florence Cheruoyot, was killed and the German project manager injured; GTZ's Somali police escort fired on the attackers, allowing the project manager to drive out of the ambush, to safety in Berbera. The attackers, with the security guard as prisoner, tried to flee southwards across the Ethiopian border. By then, villagers were on the look out for the attackers, who were apprehended after a brief fire fight at the village of Doqoshey and handed over to Somaliland authorities.

#### 2. The assassins

The suspects were five men from various backgrounds. The alleged leader, Jaama Ali Isma'il "Kutiye", had trained as a commando in the Somali National Army. He was reportedly recruited by al-Itihaad in 1991 in the village of Doqoshey and fought the next year in its battles against the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) in northeast Somalia.

The other senior member was Da'ud Salah Iidle, a well-known businessman from Bur'o, in eastern Somaliland. He also served with al-Itihaad during the early 1990s but settled into a job as deputy manager of the local office of the large Saudi charity, al-Haramayn. In 2003, the U.S. charged that al-Haramayn's Somali offices were linked to terrorism -- specifically al-Qaeda. Under pressure from Washington, the Saudi government recalled its

<sup>23</sup> For more information on al-Itihaad, see Crisis Group Report, *Countering Terrorism in a Failed State*, op. cit., and the forthcoming Crisis Group report on Somalia's various Islamist groups.

international staff, including the Sudanese manager of the Bur'o office, and suspended its programs. Since then, Idle had operated a pharmacy in Bur'o. The other suspects appeared to be young guns for hire from Mogadishu. Farhan Abdulle Mohamed claimed to have been a student at a Tablighi school, Daar ul 'Uluum, before he joined the ranks of Mogadishu's *mooryaan* (freelance militia).

Interrogations of the men, together with the telephone numbers stored in their Thuraya satellite telephone, pointed to a broader network -- including two men already in the custody of the Somaliland police. A suspicious taxi driver had turned his passengers in at a checkpoint near the capital, Hargeysa, where a quick search revealed them to have cash stolen during a recent carjacking near the Ethiopian border. More importantly, statements from the GTZ ambush team allegedly implicated them in the murder of Tonelli.

According to U.S. officials, the assassins also revealed they had reconnoitred targets in neighbouring Djibouti, leading to the cancellation of a visit by the German president to inspect his country's forces based there.<sup>24</sup> A deeply irritated Djiboutian government, however, attributed that decision to an unreliable walk-in tip.<sup>25</sup>

Under questioning, the suspects described how one cell had planned and carried out Tonelli's murder while the second had identified and targeted the Eyeingtons. Under the leadership of Mohamed Ali 'Isse Yusuf, the owner of a pharmacy in Bur'o, investigators believe, the killers had carefully reconnoitred the Sheikh school for nearly two weeks before the assassination, posing as pre-war graduates revisiting the town out of nostalgia. Yusuf initially returned to Bur'o but disappeared immediately after the arrest of the five GTZ attackers. According to counter-terrorism sources in Mogadishu, another suspect was Ibrahim "al-Afghani", a Hargeysa man who had reportedly fought in Afghanistan and Kashmir before returning to Somalia to join al-Itihaad in 1990.<sup>26</sup>

According to Western intelligence sources, the GTZ operation had been planned as a kidnapping, which would end with the execution of the hostages.<sup>27</sup> But the plan went awry and degenerated into a roadside ambush.<sup>28</sup> One suspect allegedly admitted that killing Cheruiyot had been a mistake: he had wanted to

murder an "infidel" Westerner.<sup>29</sup> Regional intelligence services estimated the budget of the Somaliland operations to have been some \$100,000, suggesting the group was well-financed and possibly had external support.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. The leaders

Under questioning, the suspects painted a picture of an extensive, highly organised network, headed by the self-styled jihadi from Mogadishu, 'Ayro. Little known even within his clan, 'Ayro seems to have received scant formal education, either secular or religious, before joining the militia of the Ifka Halane Islamic court in the mid-1990s.<sup>31</sup> There he appears to have been adopted as a protégé of al-Itihaad's former vice chairman and military commander, Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys, and was selected for further training in Afghanistan.<sup>32</sup> By one account he travelled there with Aweys on the eve of the American offensive, returning to Somalia several months later.<sup>33</sup>

'Ayro's training prepared him to serve as an instructor in a variety of subjects, including explosives, in Islamic court militias, notably at Circola court, where he was reportedly wounded in a training accident in 2001. In 2003, 'Ayro's path began to diverge from the courts, and he was increasingly perceived as a militia commander in his own right, albeit still in Aweys's shadow.<sup>34</sup> He also appears to have been organising the domestic jihadi network that would carry out the Somaliland killings. At some point in his brief jihadi career, U.S. intelligence sources believe, 'Ayro became affiliated with al-Qaeda as well.<sup>35</sup> At least two of the

<sup>24</sup> Crisis Group interview, April 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Crisis Group interview, Djibouti, April 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Hargeysa, July 2004 and Mogadishu, March 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Crisis Group interview, Addis Ababa, April 2004.

<sup>28</sup> Crisis Group interview, U.S. official, Nairobi, April 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, March 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Crisis Group interview, Ethiopian official, Addis Ababa, April 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Islamic law (Shari'a) courts emerged during the 1990s in some parts of southern Somalia. For the most part they are manifestations of local efforts to establish rule of law in a collapsed state, drawing on the source known best in the community and are usually not part of a broader political agenda. See Crisis Group Report, *Countering Terrorism in a Failed State*, op. cit. A detailed description of the courts will be included in a forthcoming Crisis Group report.

<sup>32</sup> The U.S. designated Aweys an individual with links to terrorism in November 2001. Like Aweys, 'Ayro is a Habar Gidir 'Ayr clan member but they do not appear to be otherwise related.

<sup>33</sup> Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, February 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu and Nairobi, December 2004.

<sup>35</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi and Mogadishu, February 2005.

Somaliland assassins trained in al-Qaeda's Afghan camps.<sup>36</sup>

In January 2005, 'Ayro emerged from the shadows when militia under his command -- some still associated with Mogadishu's Islamic courts -- took control of a colonial-era Italian cemetery in the capital and disinterred the human remains. The Somali public and international community were equally outraged, and the leaders of the Ifka Halane court denied any role. Leaders of the Habar Gidir 'Ayr clan summoned Aweys and 'Ayro separately in an attempt to stop the affront, but to no avail. According to witnesses, Aweys insisted 'Ayro was beyond his control; 'Ayro protested his actions were consistent with the teachings of Islam but when challenged by learned sheikhs from the clan, he was unable to justify himself.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, his militia erected a makeshift, corrugated iron mosque on the cemetery site, where the faithful could attend angry sermons. 'Ayro and his men appeared to be entrenching themselves for the long haul.

How 'Ayro emerged as leader of the network remains a topic of some speculation. Some counter-terrorism sources in Mogadishu told Crisis Group he owes his influence to the patronage of his kinsman and former mentor, Aweys; others believe he has split with Aweys and is now directly affiliated to the al-Qaeda network through its operatives in Somalia.

## B. THE AL-QAEDA CONNECTION

Although evidence linking 'Ayro to al-Qaeda appears to be largely circumstantial, the allegations are serious enough to merit a brief review of al-Qaeda's involvement in Somalia over the years and the scope of its current presence there.

Al-Qaeda never adopted Somalia as a major base of operations but it has maintained a close association since the early 1990s. Somalia's lack of a functioning central government, unpatrolled borders, and unregulated arms markets make it a useful platform for actions aimed at foreign interests elsewhere in the region.

### 1. The head of the snake

Al-Qaeda first became involved in Somalia during the U.S.-led United Nations interventions between 1992 and 1995. Islamist militants of diverse origins, including al-Qaeda, reportedly flowed into the country

at that time, offering resources, arms and training in the hopes of transforming Mogadishu into a "second Kabul" or a "second Beirut" for the Americans.<sup>38</sup> Bin Laden denounced the intervention as a beachhead for American domination of Muslim lands in the region and called upon his followers to "cut the head off the snake". It was to be one of al-Qaeda's most ambitious and least successful initiatives.

The head of al-Qaeda's military committee, Abu Uba'idah al Bانشiri, was placed in charge of Somali operations. According to British intelligence sources, his deputy, Mohamed Atef, visited several times during 1993.<sup>39</sup> Several al-Qaeda cadres, including chief instructors Ali Muhammed and Sadiq Mohamed Odeh, were despatched to set up training camps for Somali Islamists and other groups opposed to the American presence.<sup>40</sup> Odeh told FBI investigators that al-Qaeda's activities were coordinated with al-Itihaad leaders, apparently including Aweys, and with the militia faction headed by General Mohamed Farah Aydiid.<sup>41</sup> Odeh also told Kenyan police that over seven months he trained 25 fighters, whose job was to train others to fight the U.S.-UN forces.

During the summer of 1993, violence between Somali militia loyal to Aydiid and foreign troops escalated, culminating in the 3 October 1993 battle (described in the book and film *Black Hawk Down*) that bin Laden and others believe led to the U.S. withdrawal. Bin Laden subsequently claimed the episode as a victory for Somali Muslims, in cooperation "with some Arab holy warriors who were in Afghanistan".<sup>42</sup> Although some al-Qaeda fighters later told Odeh they had taken part, nothing suggests their contribution was more than marginal.

### 2. The embassy bombings

The withdrawal of U.S. and other international forces from Somalia led al-Qaeda to shift its focus to countries

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<sup>38</sup> The sensationalist terms are borrowed from Yossef Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man Who declared War on America* (New York, 1999), p. 83.

<sup>39</sup> Rohan Gunaratna, *Inside Al-Qa'eda* (New York, 2002), p. 37. Atef was killed by U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

<sup>40</sup> According to some analysts, al-Qaeda was not alone in seizing this opportunity, and Iranian Revolutionary Guards, Hizbollah and others also mounted training and support operations in Somalia. Bodansky, op. cit.

<sup>41</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, transcript of interview of Mohamed Sadiq Odeh (FD-302), Nairobi, 31 August 1998.

<sup>42</sup> Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War Inc.* (London, Phoenix, 2001), p. 22. Bin Laden made the claim in a 1997 interview with Bergen and a 1996 interview with Abdel Bari Atwan of the *al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper.

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<sup>36</sup> Crisis Group interview, Addis Ababa, April 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu and Nairobi, February 2005.

where soft American targets were more readily available, such as Kenya. Its Somali connections were to prove instrumental in planning the next major terrorist attack.

Towards the end of 1993, while conducting training in Somalia, al-Qaeda instructor Ali Mohamed was already casing targets in Nairobi.<sup>43</sup> Team members rented an apartment in the Kenyan capital and by January 1994 were providing surveillance information on potential targets there and in Djibouti.<sup>44</sup> In consultation with bin Laden, the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi was identified as the target.

Wadih el-Hage, an American of Lebanese descent, took the lead in setting up al-Qaeda's Kenyan infrastructure, establishing an NGO, Help Africa People, and becoming closely involved with the Nairobi office of Mercy International Relief Agency (MIRA), a Dublin-based organisation headed by a Saudi dissident, Safar al-Hawali -- one of bin Laden's ideological mentors. MIRA's Nairobi office was headed by a Somali whom Odeh described as a close associate of bin Laden's during the al-Qaeda chief's sojourn in Sudan during the early 1990s. In Somalia, MIRA supported al-Itihaad's regional administration in the Gedo region until it was shut down by Ethiopian raids in 1997, and apparently also served as a conduit for the travel of foreign jihadis to and from Somalia.

When el-Hage had to return to the U.S. to appear before a grand jury investigating bin Laden, Fazul Abdullah Mohamed,<sup>45</sup> a Comorean national with a Kenyan passport, replaced him as Nairobi cell commander.<sup>46</sup> The cell's direct communications with bin Laden, however, were channelled through the leader of the Mombasa network, Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan.

On 7 August 1998, the painstaking preparations paid off when a massive truck bomb driven by "Azzam" detonated at the Nairobi embassy, and minutes later a second bomb exploded outside the Dar-as-Salaam embassy. Together the bombs killed 225 people and wounded over 4,000. Only twelve of the dead were American; the vast majority were Kenyan or Tanzanian bystanders.

Subsequent trials of al-Qaeda team members demonstrated that travel to and from Somalia had continued in the years prior to the bombings. According to U.S. intelligence sources, al-Qaeda's residual linkages with Somalia reflected the involvement of al-Itihaad cells led by Aweys and Hassan Turki in the preparations.<sup>47</sup> Odeh told American investigators that just over one month before the attack, Aweys despatched a message to bin Laden requesting a meeting in Afghanistan. Aweys was designated as an individual with links to terrorism by the U.S. government in November 2001; Turki was added in 2004 and has been formally indicted for the murder of an American citizen.

### 3. The Mombasa attacks

In the aftermath of the 1998 embassy bombings, several members of al-Qaeda's East Africa cell were apprehended, but Fazul and Nabhan remained at large and began assembling a new team. In November 2001, less than two months after al-Qaeda's attacks in New York and Washington, Fazul assembled part of this new team in Mogadishu.<sup>48</sup> According to regional security sources, within the confines of a cramped apartment, senior members provided small arms training, using locally purchased Kalashnikovs, pistols and hand grenades. Finances were handled by a Sudanese national, Tariq Abdullah (a.k.a. Abu Talha al-Sudani), operating between Somalia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

One month later the group dispersed. Fazul returned to the Kenyan coastal village of Siyu, where he had established a new identity and married a local girl. Meanwhile, under the leadership of Nabhan, one cell began to reconnoitre possible targets in the Mombasa area. By April 2002, the choice had been made: Moi International Airport and the Paradise Hotel, a beachfront lodge in the coastal village of Kikambala, owned by Israelis and frequented by Israeli tourists. Under Nabhan's supervision, the team began to prepare crude bombs: two propane gas cylinders filled with homemade explosives based on ammonium nitrate.

Back in Mogadishu, the remaining al-Qaeda team members -- guided by occasional visits from Fazul -- set about procuring additional materials for the operation. According to Somali counter-terrorism sources, these included materials for a detonator that would later be smuggled into Kenya and joined with the explosives in

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas H. Kean (Chair) et al., *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States* (New York, 2004), p. 68.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Fazul goes by several known aliases, including "Harun", "Abdulkarim" and "Abu Luqman".

<sup>46</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report*, op. cit., p. 69.

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<sup>47</sup> Crisis Group interview, Washington, 24 August 2004.

<sup>48</sup> J. Peleman, E.H. Johns, P.S. Sandhu and J. Tambi, "Report of the Panel of Experts on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1474 (2003)", United Nations Security Council (S/2003/1035), 27 October 2003, p. 29.

Mombasa.<sup>49</sup> From the local arms market, they ordered two "Strela 2" surface-to-air missiles that had found their way via Yemen onto the streets of Mogadishu.

In July 2002, the operation was nearly derailed when Kenyan police reportedly arrested Fazul in connection with an armed robbery in Mombasa but they did not realise he was a wanted terrorist with a \$25 million bounty on his head, and he escaped the following day.<sup>50</sup> Roughly one month later, Fazul apparently smuggled the missiles across the Somali border. According to a UN report, the launchers had been painted blue and white, presumably to camouflage their military character and minimize the risk of discovery during transport to Mombasa.<sup>51</sup>

By the last week of November 2002, preparations were complete, and the team divided into four elements: one, including Suleiman Ahmed Salim Hemed (a.k.a. Issa Tanzania) and Tariq Abdullah (a.k.a. al-Sudani), remained in Mogadishu, where Somali associates had provided Suleiman with jobs at a local electronics firm and a hotel car pool. A second group attacked the Paradise Hotel in a four-wheel drive vehicle owned by Nabhan. The group led by Fazul headed to an empty plot near the airport, within view of an unmanned police lookout. Statements recorded by Kenyan police indicate that another young Kenyan, Omar Said Omar, was sent to Lamu to prepare a boat for the team's return to Somalia.<sup>52</sup>

On 28 November 2002, Kenyan police believe, as Arkia airline flight 582 departed Moi International Airport for Tel Aviv, Nabhan and another Kenyan, Issa Osman Issa, fired the two Strela missiles.<sup>53</sup> Their primitive guidance systems and the two terrorists' lack of practical training apparently caused them to miss their target. At the same time, two more Kenyans, Fumo Mohamed Fumo and Haruni Bamusa, armed with a Kalashnikov assault rifle and a Tokarev pistol, drove Nabhan's blue Pajero into the Paradise Hotel, killing fifteen and injuring about 80. The next day the remaining team members regrouped at the boat in Lamu. Two days later they crossed the border into Somalia.

#### 4. Al-Qaeda's Somalia cell

Al-Qaeda's Somalia cell is still considered a regional security threat. Americans believe al-Qaeda members in Kenya and Somalia have continued "a high level of activity since the 2002 bombing",<sup>54</sup> and in May 2003 intelligence reports, combined with sightings of Fazul near Mombasa, triggered security warnings and a ban on British airways flights into Kenya.

"Fazul and Nabhan are back", Western counter-terrorism officials in Nairobi told Crisis Group in early 2004, asserting that the leaders of al-Qaeda's Somalia cell remain active and dangerous.<sup>55</sup> There is plenty of evidence to suggest the network remains determined to carry out further acts of terrorism. In August 2003, intercepted "chatter" led to the discovery of a safe house near Mombasa. Inside were five anti-tank weapons, which law enforcement officials believe were for use against soft targets such as cruise ships in Mombasa port or tourist buses.<sup>56</sup>

The members of al-Qaeda's Somalia cell are today among the most wanted fugitives on the planet. As the "wildcard" of the group, Fazul is considered the most dangerous and is, therefore, the most sought after.<sup>57</sup> Counter-terrorism officials describe the diminutive Comorean as a master of disguise, an expert forger and an accomplished bomb builder. He is also maddeningly elusive, moving with apparent ease between Kenya, the Comoros and Somalia. Mogadishu counter-terrorism sources claim he alternates between several safe houses and uses false travel documents procured locally and from the UK.<sup>58</sup> Kenyan police sources also believe he may have travelled to Ethiopia and the UAE since the 2002 bombing.

Next to Fazul, Nabhan and al-Sudani are highest on the wanted list. Al-Sudani is believed by Somali counter-terrorism sources to have married a Somali woman in Mogadishu and settled there.<sup>59</sup> Nabhan was often reported sighted in the city during 2003 and 2004, but by early 2005 seemed to have disappeared. Other al-Qaeda suspects whom intelligence agencies believe may be in Somalia include Ali Swedhan, Issa

<sup>49</sup> Crisis Group private communication.

<sup>50</sup> Andrew England, "A 'most wanted' Qaeda terrorist slips Kenya police", Associated Press, 15 June 2004.

<sup>51</sup> Peleman et al., "Report of the Panel of Experts (2003)", op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> Statement under inquiry of Omar Said Omar, recorded by Kenyan Police, undated.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Crisis Group interview, U.S. official, Nairobi, 21 April 2004.

<sup>55</sup> Crisis Group interview, British High Commission, Nairobi, 20 April 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, 2003.

<sup>57</sup> Crisis Group interview with U.S. government official, June 2005.

<sup>58</sup> Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, 17 April 2004.

<sup>59</sup> Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, February 2005.

Osman Issa, Samir Said Salim Ba'amir and Mohamed Mwakuuza Kuza.

In order to avoid detection and capture, foreign members of al-Qaeda require the support and protection of Somali partners. Until his capture in March 2003, Suleiman Ahmed Salim Hemed was believed to be closely associated with the owners of Global Hotel in northern Mogadishu; UN officials who hired him as a driver from the hotel car pool were told he was a deaf-mute, apparently to conceal that he spoke little or no Somali.<sup>60</sup>

More recently, attention has focused on the apparent relationship between the al-Qaeda team and 'Ayro, who is alleged to have travelled to Afghanistan at least once before the American campaign against the Taliban. His militia is believed to have protected al-Sudani, Nabhan and several suspects in the Somaliland killings (two of whom are believed by U.S. intelligence to have been trained by al-Qaeda).<sup>61</sup> In the hunt to identify al-Qaeda's Somali partners, 'Ayro has clearly emerged as a prime suspect.

## C. WHO'S HUNTING WHOM?

### 1. The U.S.

The U.S. has long kept a watchful eye on Somalia as a potential haven for terrorists, including the al-Qaeda network. As early as 1998, when the Clinton administration launched cruise missiles at terrorist training camps in Afghanistan, the head of its Counter-Terrorism Group, Richard Clarke, became concerned bin Laden might be planning to adopt Somalia as an alternate refuge.<sup>62</sup>

Al-Qaeda did not relocate to the Horn of Africa but immediately after 9/11, U.S. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld instructed his senior commanders to examine options for military action in Somalia.<sup>63</sup> From late 2001, the U.S. stepped up its counter-terrorism efforts in the region, effectively opening a new front in its "war or terror". A military base, the only one of its kind in Africa, was established in Djibouti. A massive increase in the collection of human and signals intelligence has been underway ever since. In 2003, the Bush administration pledged \$100 million in new funds for an

East African Counter-Terrorism Initiative aimed at boosting the capabilities of the states of the region.

U.S. intelligence resources have financed development of a variety of Somali counter-terrorism organisations and networks. In Puntland, a local intelligence agency established in 2002 with American assistance has become a central pillar of the regional administration's security apparatus. The Puntland Intelligence Service's (PIS) responsibilities include surveillance, investigation and arrest of suspected terrorists; monitoring of ports and airports; and protection of foreigners. After a rocky start, Somaliland's National Intelligence Service (NIS) also began cooperating closely with the U.S. in mid-2003 and has begun to participate in regional intelligence coordination efforts.

In southern Somalia, counter-terrorism efforts have depended on the collaboration of faction leaders and former military or police officers. Mohamed Omar Habeeb (a.k.a. Mohamed 'Dheere', regional "governor" of Middle Shabelle), Bashir Raghe (a north Mogadishu businessman), Mohamed Qanyare Afrah, Hussein Aydiid, and Generals Mohamed Nur Galal and Ahmed Jili'ow 'Addow are widely considered the most prominent figures in the Mogadishu counter-terrorism networks. Each reportedly manages a network of informers, often at own expense, in the expectation that compensation will come at some point in future.

The U.S. investment in Somali counter-terrorism capacity has been rewarded with some signal successes, the most celebrated of which was the seizure of Suleiman Ahmed Hemed Salim (a.k.a. Issa Tanzania) in April 2003. Acting on a tip from American intelligence, militiamen loyal to Mogadishu faction leader Mohamed Dheere prepared an ambush for him in south Mogadishu. He escaped but was injured and sought refuge at Keysaney Hospital in north Mogadishu, which was managed by the sister of one of his employers. Dheere's men traced him to the hospital, apprehended him, and turned him over to U.S. officials for extradition to Kenya.

On 30 June 2004 a U.S.-led operation tracked an alleged ringleader of the Somaliland assassinations to his hide-out in Mogadishu. U.S. intelligence officers told a Somali faction leader they had identified a safe house used by Tariq Abdallah (a.k.a. Abu Talha al-Sudani, a senior al-Qaeda suspect) and offered him \$4 million for al-Sudani's capture.<sup>64</sup> The faction leader, who had cooperated with the Americans since 2002,

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<sup>60</sup> Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, April 2005.

<sup>61</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu and Nairobi, February and March 2005.

<sup>62</sup> Kean et al., *The 9/11 Commission Report*, op. cit., p.125.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 336.

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<sup>64</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu and Nairobi, December 2004 and April 2005.

agreed to assist, even though the suspect was not in an area under his control.

Reconnaissance of the target revealed that the house belonged to the jihadi leader, 'Ayro, was well-guarded, and appeared to be a sort of guest house. Three days later, at roughly two a.m., the raid began, taking the occupants entirely by surprise. In fifteen minutes the raiders seized two captives, one injured, and a bomb-making manual in English and Arabic. Neither prisoner was al-Sudani -- he had not been present -- but Mohamed Abdi 'Isse Yusuf, an alleged ringleader of the Somaliland assassination team and brother-in-law to 'Ayro, was a valuable prize.<sup>65</sup> His leg was wounded during the raid and was later amputated.

U.S.-led counter-terrorism efforts have apparently also disrupted operations in the planning stages. One Thursday evening in June 2004, for example, American intelligence alerted the Somaliland security services to the movements of a suspected al-Qaeda team from Mogadishu and provided basic descriptive information. The security services manned checkpoints and trawled hotels in Bur'o until they intercepted a young Somali man in possession of maps, a GPS, training manuals in Arabic, a small HF radio and nearly two-dozen explosive detonators. Two other team members were presumed to remain at large.

Although the U.S. is by far the largest player in Somali counter-terrorism, other Western countries -- including the UK, France and Italy -- maintain active interest. The intelligence services of Ethiopia and Djibouti are both active throughout Somalia, while Kenya keeps a close watch on its remote northeastern border. Ethiopia is the most significant of these additional players.

## 2. Ethiopia

Ethiopian intelligence services maintain a significant presence throughout much of Somalia, monitoring al-Qaeda, al-Itihaad and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).<sup>66</sup> Despite a public preoccupation with jihadist groups in Somalia, Addis Ababa in fact considers the OLF a more serious challenge to Ethiopia's stability.<sup>67</sup> Formed in 1974, the OLF fought side by side with

other Ethiopian opposition movements against the military regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. Towards the end of the 1970s, a militant Islamist splinter group broke away to form the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromiyya (IFLO). After the victory of the Ethiopia Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991, dissatisfaction with the transitional arrangements led it to withdraw from the governing coalition the next year.

Following the OLF's withdrawal from government, the EPRDF sought to eradicate the organisation, establishing large internment camps and killing thousands of its members and sympathisers. These draconian measures, however, did not succeed; instead, they served primarily to drive the OLF's senior leaders into exile and transform its domestic wing from a political party into a clandestine, underground movement.

The OLF remains an active force within Ethiopia and still commands a large following among Oromos. Addis Ababa believes it should be designated a terrorist organisation on the grounds that its units attack civilians and government officials in Oromo areas, including the burning of schools, the bombing of the popular Blue Tops restaurant in Addis Ababa in April 1997, and the bombing of a hotel in Addis Ababa's Piazza neighbourhood on 11 September 2003.<sup>68</sup> Other attacks attributed to the OLF include the 1997 bombing of a private hotel and the post office in Harar, the bombings of the Makonnen Hotel in Dire Dawa, the Tigray Hotel, and Tana market in Addis Ababa.<sup>69</sup> Ethiopian security forces also claim to have thwarted OLF attempts to blow up two fuel tankers in public places in 2003, and in early 2004 to have intercepted 21 OLF fighters trying to enter Ethiopia with twenty kilos of explosives.<sup>70</sup>

Western governments have shown little sympathy for the Ethiopian position. Some consider the accusations exaggerated: "Anytime anything happens it's blamed on the OLF" a European diplomat in Addis Ababa told Crisis Group. "If someone throws rocks at your car, it's OLF".<sup>71</sup> Others argue that the OLF is too disorganised and incompetent to merit the designation. According to one U.S. counter-terrorism official, "[the OLF] is a disparate bunch of yahoos...Sure they do bad things,

<sup>65</sup> 'Ayro is reportedly married to Halima Abdi Issa Yusuf. Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, December 2004 and February 2005, and Nairobi, March 2005.

<sup>66</sup> The OLF seeks self-determination for the Oromo people, who are widely accepted to constitute at least 40 per cent of Ethiopia's population.

<sup>67</sup> "The OLF is a greater threat at this time than other groups", a senior government official told Crisis Group in an April 2004 interview in Addis Ababa.

<sup>68</sup> Crisis Group interview, officials from Ethiopia's office of Security, Immigration and Refugee Affairs (SIRA), Addis Ababa, 9 April 2004.

<sup>69</sup> David H. Shinn, "Ethiopia: Coping with Islamic Fundamentalism before and after September 11", *CSIS Africa Notes* no. 7, February 2002, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Crisis Group interview, SIRA officials, Addis Ababa, 9 April 2004.

<sup>71</sup> Crisis Group interview, Addis Ababa, 8 April 2004.

but it's sloppy. They kill civilians out of sloppiness. 'Terrorist' is too high a praise for the OLF".<sup>72</sup>

Addis Ababa is dismayed by such reactions. "Given the OLF's track record, we simply can't understand why our international partners would be reluctant to designate them as a terrorist organisation", an Ethiopian diplomat told Crisis Group.<sup>73</sup> Left alone to address the problem, Ethiopia has apparently extended its campaign into Somalia. Members of the Oromo community in Mogadishu described to Crisis Group a pattern of abductions and assassinations, dating from the end of the Ethiopia-Eritrea War (1998-2000) that they attributed to agents of the Ethiopian government. In some cases, their accounts were independently corroborated by Somali residents of Mogadishu.

In February 2000, three OLF members, including Usmaïl Gaachu, a senior figure, accepted an invitation to a rendezvous with colleagues at a house near Taleex Hotel in southern Mogadishu. During the discussion, armed men abducted them. One of those involved in the operation was identified as an ex-militiaman known as Dhege, allegedly associated with General Mohamed Nur Galal. The captives were believed to have been taken to the border crossing at Ferfer, northwest of Beledweyne, and handed over to the Ethiopian authorities.<sup>74</sup>

Sheikh Mohamed Sa'id Samantar did not survive his attempted abduction. A fiery Islamist and anti-Ethiopian preacher at Kuwait Mosque in Mogadishu's Madina district, he received funding from Islamic charities and ran schools for the Oromo community. One afternoon in June 2003, on his way home from Friday prayers, he was stopped by men in a taxi. When he refused to enter their vehicle, they shot him in the street. He managed to identify his assailants as gunmen loyal to Musa Sudi Yalahow -- a faction leader then aligned with Ethiopia -- but died a week later, and his network of schools collapsed.

Other Oromos in Mogadishu have been assassinated, with no apparent attempt to abduct them. In early 2002, gunmen entered the house of a prominent Oromo general named Da'ud, who lived in Mogadishu's Towfiiq district, and shot him dead. In July that year, a leader of the Oromo community in Qorioley, Muldissa Abagada, was gunned down by armed men in a car while walking in the "Black Sea" neighbourhood. As recently as 2 April 2004, two Oromo businessmen

were shot dead in Bakaaraha market, with no apparent robbery attempt.

Despite the belief among Mogadishu's Oromos that the Ethiopian government is behind such killings, no link has yet been proven, and Mogadishu is a dangerous city in which unexplained killings occur daily. However, in March 2005, Kenya arrested and deported four men it accused of being Ethiopian agents responsible for abducting Oromo dissidents in Nairobi, suggesting that the fears may not be entirely without foundation.<sup>75</sup>

### 3. Hunting the hunters

As this peripheral campaign of the war on terror unfolds in Mogadishu's anarchic and rubble-strewn streets, it is not always clear who is hunting whom. Since 2001, a number of Somalis believed to have been working for foreign counter-terrorism networks have been assassinated. In an environment as lawless and violent as the capital, it is often extremely difficult to identify with certainty those responsible for a given act, but at least ten such killings appear to be the work of jihadi militants. Twice witnesses implicated gunmen controlled by 'Ayro.

Mohamud Aaga was a respected Oromo intellectual and community activist. His links with international aid agencies and suspicions that he enjoyed good relations with the Ethiopian government had earned him several threats from Somali Islamists (*wadaado*). In 2001, he travelled to Djibouti, where he was rumoured to have met with Ethiopian embassy officials. The morning after his return to Mogadishu, men described by his family as *wadaado* entered his house and killed him.

Colonel Abdillahi Mohamed Warsame "Nero" and Captain Mohamed Aden both worked as counter-terrorism officials for the TNG. In association with Colonel Amin Haji Yusuf, they were believed to have been involved in the arrest and deportation of terrorist suspects to Djibouti, where they were said to have handed their prisoners over to U.S. custody. In April 2003, "Nero" was visiting Lafaole, to the west of Mogadishu, when he was shot dead by three masked men with handguns. Almost simultaneously, Mohamed Aden was gunned down in the Mogadishu neighbourhood of Xamarweyne. Two of Nero's assassins were in turn killed almost immediately by a mob and their bodies left for several days on the roadside; when no family identified them or claimed the bodies, Somali observers concluded that Islamist militants

<sup>72</sup> Crisis Group interview, Washington DC, August 2004.

<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group telephone interview, May 2005.

<sup>74</sup> The same driver is alleged to have been involved in a similar abduction in 2003.

<sup>75</sup> "Ethiopians deported on claims they were spies", *Daily Nation*, Nairobi, 10 March 2005.



were responsible.<sup>76</sup> Colonel Yusuf reportedly left Somalia soon after and has not returned.

Another TNG police official, Ilyas Haji Abdiselam, was responsible for the arrest and deportation to Saudi Arabia of a Saudi cleric, Khamis Mahiir. According to sources in Mogadishu, local militants put a \$1,000 price on Ilyas's head; in April 2004, they apparently caught up with him near the Taleex Hotel. A car carrying three masked men blocked his taxi's path and shot him.

Militants next caught up with one of the men previously involved in the abduction of Oromos, the ex-militiaman Dhege. In July 2004, he was drinking tea at a sidewalk café in Mogadishu's Huriwaa district when gunmen linked to 'Ayro shot him dead.

Colonel Mohamed Isma'il "Gure" was a senior officer with Mogadishu's Criminal Investigation Department (CID). Mogadishu police lack resources, so officers work on a voluntary basis, receiving occasional contributions from relatives and well-wishers. When the CID wanted to send a suspect to Djibouti for questioning, it lacked a budget for an escort and so asked Gure, who was travelling for personal reasons. Gure's wife had already received a threatening phone call warning her husband off involvement in counter-terrorism activities but he accepted. Later he met with an AU delegation visiting to assess the feasibility of the controversial proposal to send in peacekeeping troops. On 14 August 2004, two men shot Gure in the head as he drank tea at an open-air café.<sup>77</sup>

Meanwhile, jihadi militia were apparently also planning retaliation for the abduction of Mohamed Abdi 'Isse Yusuf from 'Ayro's house several weeks earlier. According to sources in Mogadishu, 'Ayro's mentor, Hassan Dahir Aweys, announced in a radio interview: "We know who is responsible for this attack on our brother sheikhs, to make business selling us to the Jews".<sup>78</sup> Aweys and 'Ayro pinned the blame on a militia leader, Abdi Waal, whom they allegedly threatened over the phone with retaliation. But in the last week of September 2004, it was Abdi Waal's ally, faction leader Mohamed Qanyare Afrah, whom they actually attacked. Half a dozen of 'Ayro's militia, backed by one of his "technical" vehicles,<sup>79</sup> raided

Qanyare's airstrip at Dayniile, planting land mines along the access road and firing a rocket-propelled grenade near a parked aircraft before withdrawing in a running gun battle with his militia, several of whom were killed.

Towards the end of 2004, attacks on Mogadishu's counter-terrorism networks accelerated. On 27 October 2004, Colonel Mohamed Abdinur "Bataar" was killed while collecting cash from the Dahabshiil money transfer company in bustling Bakaraha market. While his wife waited in the car, two masked men emerged from the crowd and shot him dead. A number of his associates acknowledged to Crisis Group that he had been working for a foreign counter-terrorism network.<sup>80</sup> Just days later, another Somali collaborator, Lt. Colonel Ahmed Ugaas Foodeeye, was executed by three masked men with pistols.

The next victim may have been Brigadier General Mohamed Abdi, a respected military officer and outspoken advocate of foreign peacekeepers to assist the TFG settle in Mogadishu. In October 2004, Mohamed Abdi had engaged Hassan Dahir Aweys in heated debate over the controversial prospect of foreign troops in Somalia on a popular radio talk show. On 4 November, two men approached a young relative of the general and asked him to take them to him. When they encountered him on his way home from the mosque, the men left the car and shot him. Panicked, the driver pulled away at high speed, injuring one assailant fatally. Mogadishu security sources told Crisis Group that the dead assailant was associated with religious militants who paid his *diya* to his family.<sup>81</sup>

In November 2004, Mohamed Hassan Tako was shot dead while exiting a Mogadishu mosque. He had worked with faction leader Mohamed Dheere and businessman Bashir Raghe, both of whom have been associated with Western counter-terrorism activities. Then, on 29 January 2005, a police colonel, Hirsi Dhoore, was gunned down by masked assailants. He had worked closely with "Bataar" on intelligence missions, and the two were often seen together. According to associates of both, Dhoore was killed by

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<sup>76</sup> Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, March 2005.

<sup>77</sup> Some observers have attributed Gure's death to infighting between Mogadishu police factions.

<sup>78</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, April 2004.

<sup>79</sup> "Technical" vehicles, or simply "technicals", are trucks or four-wheel drive vehicles mounted with heavy weapons such

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as machine-guns, recoilless anti-tank rifles or anti-aircraft canons.

<sup>80</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, February 2005.

<sup>81</sup> *Diya* is compensation paid for death or injury. Unusually, Hassan Dahir Aweys later expressed regret at the General Abdi's death and denied any involvement. Some observers have attributed the death to political rivalry within the Abgaal sub-clan. Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, February 2005.

the same group responsible for Bataar's assassination.<sup>82</sup>

On 28 January 2005, veterans of the insurgency against Somali President Mohamed Siyaad Barre gathered at his former residence, Villa Somalia, to celebrate the fourteenth anniversary of his ouster. Most were from the Habar Gidir clan, whose fighters had entered Mogadishu on 26 January 1991. One, Abdirahman Diriye Warsame, took the opportunity to denounce the excavation of the Italian colonial graveyard by Islamist militants under 'Ayro's leadership. Days later, as he was walking towards his home near Villa Baydhowa, he was shot dead by three men in a white Toyota Corolla.<sup>83</sup>

In May 2005, a former military officer, Colonel Mohamad Sa'id Abdulle, was shot dead near his home in the Yaqshiid district of Mogadishu. Under the short-lived Transitional National Government (2000-2004), Abdulle had served as commander of Hawlwadaag police station in Mogadishu. In early 2005, he reportedly met several times at the airport with U.S. counter-terrorism agents, and two weeks before his murder told friends he believed he was under surveillance.<sup>84</sup> The identities of the killers remain unknown but Abdulle's involvement with counter-terrorism suggests the case fits the pattern of previous assassinations.

#### IV. SPINNING TERROR

Since the formation of the transitional government in October 2004, the dirty wars on Mogadishu's streets have taken on new significance. Each deadly incident is repackaged by spin-doctors anxious to demonstrate the capital is or is not safe enough for the TFG to be based there and whether or not foreign troops are required for its security. At the same time, allies of the interim president, both inside and outside the TFG, have taken to smearing adversaries and critics with allegations of terrorist linkages. A widely respected Somali employee at a major Western embassy was forced to leave his post following a concerted campaign by TFG officials close to the president to portray him as a member of an extremist group; several individuals familiar with the case described it to Crisis Group as an attempt to "blind" the embassy's diplomatic efforts in Somalia.<sup>85</sup> Other critics of the president, both foreign and Somali, have been subjected to harassment and intimidation by his supporters.

The reluctance of President Yusuf's faction to relocate to Mogadishu is not entirely unjustified: the city is lawless and violent, and he has many enemies there -- among them some leading members of his own cabinet. Until the many militias have been demobilised and replaced with an integrated security force, his safety and that of his entourage will depend in large part upon the peace accords signed in 2004 in Kenya and the goodwill of Mogadishu's political and military leaders.

Jihadi groups also pose a threat. In January 2005, Crisis Group warned that their leaders were planning to attack TFG officials and preparing an Iraqi-style insurgency against any foreign troop deployment.<sup>86</sup> Although the deployment plans have since been shelved, a residual threat to Yusuf remains: many jihadis resent his anti-Islamist campaigning and believe he is a proxy for those with foreign, anti-Islamic agendas.

The people of Mogadishu and their leaders have been working overtime to calm fears via a broad-based initiative to remove militias and their heavy weapons from the city, dismantle roadblocks and prepare former government buildings for TFG use. Instead of welcoming these efforts, Yusuf and his allies have dismissed them as window-dressing, issued scathing attacks on the leaders, including the speaker of parliament, and seized on every

<sup>82</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, February 2005.

<sup>83</sup> Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, March 2005.

<sup>84</sup> Crisis Group interview with a close associate of Colonel Abdulle, Mogadishu, June 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, June and July 2005.

<sup>86</sup> Matt Bryden and John Prendergast, "State building or terrorist vacuum? Time to pay closer attention to Somalia", *Chicago Tribune*, 16 January 2005.

setback or violent incident as proof the government should be based elsewhere, and IGAD's deployment plans should proceed. Even more disturbing is the possibility Yusuf's supporters may have been involved in orchestrating some of the violence.

### 1. The murder of Kate Peyton

In early February 2005, a parliamentary delegation from the new TFG arrived in Mogadishu to pave the way for relocation from Kenya. An unspoken purpose was to forestall the interim president's deeply unpopular plan to bring in foreign troops, including Ethiopians.

Kate Peyton, a producer for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) based in South Africa, was in the city with a colleague to prepare features on relocation of the TFG. Hours after arriving on 9 February and as she was emerging from the main gate of the Sahafi Hotel, where the parliamentary delegation was staying, she was shot in the back by a gunman in a passing car. She died later that day.

Initial investigations traced the abandoned vehicle to its owner in Afgooye, a man named Qasim Sharif, a former member of al-Itihaad. Sources in Mogadishu told Crisis Group he had trained in Afghanistan and was a specialist in explosives.<sup>87</sup> It began to appear as though Peyton had become the latest victim of jihadi assassins. As investigations continued, however, a different picture began to emerge. Eyewitnesses identified the killer as Mohamed Salaad Tafey, a freelance gunman from the Ayaanle sub-clan of the Habar Gidir 'Ayr.<sup>88</sup> Sources familiar with Tafey claim he was born in Ethiopia, served as a junior officer in the army, and has a close relative in the parliament in the Ethiopian Somali region. Tafey himself had allegedly been involved in the abduction of Oromos from Mogadishu, in collaboration with Ethiopian intelligence services. More recently, sources in Mogadishu allege, he had begun working with Abdi Waal, a freelance Habar Gidir militia leader occasionally involved in U.S.-backed counter-terrorism operations.

In light of these revelations, the suggestion jihadis were behind Peyton's killing began to seem less plausible. Tafey's supposed links with Ethiopia and the counter-terrorism community persuaded many Somalis in Mogadishu to seek an alternative explanation, namely that the attack had been organised by supporters of the Yusuf faction of the TFG in order to scuttle the

parliamentary delegation's mission.<sup>89</sup> Whether or not this was true, the spin-doctors in the president's camp predictably seized upon Peyton's murder to advance their agenda.<sup>90</sup>

Until Tafey or others responsible for the killing are apprehended, the motives will remain a matter of speculation. For now, the only certainty is that Peyton was a victim of a vicious new chapter in Mogadishu's dirty wars.

### 2. The Vespa bomb

The week after Peyton's killing a joint AU and IGAD fact-finding mission visited the capital to assess the feasibility of deploying foreign peacekeeping troops. Just before nine a.m. on 17 February 2005, a bomb exploded on Afgooye Road, one of the main arteries, a few hundred metres from the Sahafi Hotel and in front of the former Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the delegation was staying. According to eyewitnesses, vehicles rented by the delegation -- with only their drivers -- had passed the site minutes earlier.<sup>91</sup> Two young men at football practice on the other side of a low wall were killed. It was the first time since the departure of foreign troops in 1995 that an improvised explosive device had been detonated in the city.

The explosive was concealed in a milk carton on the rack of an old, parked red Vespa motor scooter; Somali investigators were unable to determine whether it had been set off by a timer or a remote detonator. Women managing roadside stalls claimed a young Somali man had watched over the scooter, claiming he had run out of fuel and had sent someone to fetch a jerry can. No one recalled where he was when the bomb went off.

Without evidence, Mogadishu opinion seemed evenly divided as to likely perpetrators. Some blamed jihadis opposed to the deployment of foreign troops; others pointed to supporters of President Yusuf determined to prove the capital was unsafe for the TFG.

### 3. Explosion at the Prime Minister's rally

During the first week of May 2005, TFG Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Geedi visited Mogadishu to assess progress on demilitarisation and stabilisation of the city. Although a native of Mogadishu, Geedi was appointed by Yusuf and has aligned himself closely

<sup>87</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, February 2005.

<sup>88</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, February 2005.

<sup>89</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, February and April 2005.

<sup>90</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, February and June 2005.

<sup>91</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, February and April 2005.

with the president in opposing TFG relocation there and in favour of foreign troop deployment.

At a rally in the stadium in his honour, an explosive went off in the bleachers below his seat, killing fourteen and wounding at least 38. Both Geedi and a senior police officer, Abdi Hassan Awale, described the explosion as an accidental discharge of a grenade by one of his bodyguards.<sup>92</sup> Crisis Group interviews with members of Geedi's entourage and security detail confirmed this version of events.<sup>93</sup> Officials close to the President, however, were said to be furious at that and moved quickly to paint the explosion as an assassination attempt.<sup>94</sup> A widely-quoted article in a Kenyan tabloid attributed the explosion -- somewhat implausibly given the number of people who claim to have seen the bodyguard fumble his grenade -- to a terrorist coalition of al-Itihaad, Takfir wa'l-Hijra, and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, al-Qaeda's Iraq operative.<sup>95</sup> In a subsequent article alleging that an unnamed TFG Minister was also linked to terrorist groups, the author identified a senior Somali government official "attached to the premier's office" as a source.<sup>96</sup>

There is as yet no evidence the explosion was other than an accident. The eagerness of the Yusuf faction to portray it as terrorism fits an emerging pattern of spinning tragedy to suit partisan purposes.

## V. LOSING HEARTS AND MINDS

Counter-terrorism efforts in Somalia have won a few key battles against extremists but they have been steadily losing the war for Somali hearts and minds. Many Somalis believe the war on terror is in fact a war on Islam. Counter-terrorism measures have left the country more isolated than ever: the Somali passport is now practically useless, restricting overseas travel essentially to the small minority who possess foreign passports. The remittance companies that transfer money from the Somali diaspora to families at home have come under increasing regulatory pressure. The country's reputation as a terrorist sanctuary discourages potential investors, including aid agencies. Many Somalis doubt there are terrorists on Somali soil and believe their country has been wrongly targeted. A Somali civil society activist told Crisis Group counter-terrorism efforts were beginning to generate a dangerous backlash: "Even those who support the Americans, those who are secular, become very angry".<sup>97</sup>

Some of the irritations are relatively minor. The occasional surveillance flights over Mogadishu remind many residents of the American AC-130 gunships that frightened the city in 1993, breeding anxiety and indignation. Others, such as the closure of the major Somali money transfer company, al-Barakaat, directly affected thousands whose savings were lost when the company's assets were frozen.

As noted, in 2003 Saudi Arabia required one of its largest official charities, the al-Haramayn Foundation, to suspend Somali operations following U.S. allegations its funds were being used to support terrorist groups -- specifically al-Qaeda. That left over 2,600 orphans on the streets of Mogadishu. Relatives took in about 20 per cent, and a group of businessmen stepped in to assist others but many remained on the streets. Sabir Abdi Addow, a fourteen-year old from a minority clan, told Crisis Group he had been sleeping under a bush since the closure of the orphanage and just wanted to go back to school.<sup>98</sup> Furious residents were prepared to accept the U.S. and Saudi reasons for the closure were legitimate but many echoed the sentiments of the NGO worker who said, "When al-Haramayn was shut down ... they [the Americans]

<sup>92</sup> Abdullahi Mohamed, Geeska Africa Online, 4 May 2005, [www.geeskaafrika.com/somalia\\_4may05.htm](http://www.geeskaafrika.com/somalia_4may05.htm).

<sup>93</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, June 2005.

<sup>94</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, June 2005.

<sup>95</sup> "Security Alert", *The East African Standard*, Nairobi, 15 June 2005, accessed at [allafrica.com/stories/200506060753.html](http://allafrica.com/stories/200506060753.html).

<sup>96</sup> Johnson Muthumbi, "Somalia Minister linked to al-Qa'idah", *The People*, 6 July 2005

<sup>97</sup> Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, June 2004.

<sup>98</sup> Crisis Group interview, Saabir Abdi Addow, Mogadishu, 15 April 2004.

should have stepped in to help the orphans. Now these orphans are going to grow up hating Americans".<sup>99</sup>

### A. WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE ...

Ironically, the faction leaders who work most closely with the U.S. often feel they receive neither the support nor recognition they deserve for risky work. As the number of counter-terrorism agents presumed assassinated by jihadis continues to mount, surviving colleagues are beginning to feel the heat. One complained to Crisis Group:

If we want to snatch or kill someone we have to hire militia from the right place. But the militia will ask you: "Where is the money?" No one wants to risk his life for nothing.<sup>100</sup>

Another claimed the Americans established a listening post in an area under his control but expected him to pay for round-the-clock electricity and security:

We do it and we don't complain because this is first and foremost our fight. If [the extremists] discover it, they will attack it immediately. So what choice do we have but to pay?<sup>101</sup>

Perhaps the most common critique by local partners is that U.S. counter-terrorism efforts are piecemeal and ad hoc, a problem complicated by rapid turnover of personnel. Such arguments are perhaps to be expected from ambitious Somali leaders eager for training, better hardware and more resources. But even the most committed complain their American "friends" seem uninterested in advice and expect them to assume all the risks when intelligence is faulty or operations go wrong. If that is the way the Americans want to work, a Mogadishu militia commander told Crisis Group, he would start doing things his own way and at his own rhythm.

Even Somaliland, which has enjoyed close cooperation on counter-terrorism, criticised U.S. forces in Djibouti for having allegedly violated its airspace and "sovereignty" during aerial and amphibious operations along the northern coast in early May 2005. Residents in several villages reported that small groups of American troops had landed, shown them photos of terrorist suspects and sought information. General Samuel Helland, commander of U.S. forces in Djibouti, however, denied any landings had taken place.

The disaffection of counter-terrorism partners pales in comparison with the resentment most ordinary Somalis feel at the opportunistic partnership between U.S. agents and Somali warlords. While admitting only faction leaders may be able to provide the firepower needed to deal with jihadi groups, many fear they are being empowered at the expense of other sectors of society. "To empower the faction leaders was the worst thing the Americans could have done", a veteran Somali civil servant and UN official told Crisis Group.

Ahmed Nur Jim'aale, al-Barakaat's founder and director, spoke for many when he told Crisis Group: "This is giving the wrong impression, using the killers, the gangsters. You should bring the Peace Corps, not spend your money on snatching and killing".<sup>102</sup> Others simply argue the U.S. should also engage civil society and moderate religious groups in its attempts to isolate the extremists.<sup>103</sup>

### B. ABDUCTIONS

The scramble by Mogadishu faction leaders to nab al-Qaeda figures for American reward money has spawned a small industry in abductions. Like speculators on the stock market, faction leaders have taken to arresting foreigners -- mainly, but not exclusively Arabs -- in the hope they might be on a wanted list. According to one militia leader who has worked closely with the Americans in counter-terrorism operations, as many as seventeen suspected terrorists have been apprehended in Mogadishu alone since 2003 -- all but three apparently innocent.<sup>104</sup>

One victim of mistaken identity described his experience to Crisis Group. Abdulmanaf Abdullah identified himself as a former Iraqi soldier who left his homeland after the Gulf War and spent eight years as a migrant worker in the Gulf States, where he met and married a Somali woman. On 8 November 2001, the couple travelled to Mogadishu where he said he had hoped to be registered by the UN as a refugee.

Abdulmanaf claimed personal knowledge of four or five kidnappings of Arabs in Mogadishu in 2002 and 2003: only one (Suleiman Ahmed Salim Hemed), he

<sup>99</sup> Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, 11 April 2004.

<sup>100</sup> Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, April 2004.

<sup>101</sup> Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, February 2005.

<sup>102</sup> Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Ahmed Nur Jimaale, Mogadishu, 13 April 2004.

<sup>103</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, April 2004 and December 2004.

<sup>104</sup> Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004. Most of this section is based on Crisis Group interviews conducted in Mogadishu in September 2003.

acknowledged, was probably an al-Qaeda operative. Two others were friends; one was flown to Nairobi for interrogation, released and went to Djibouti instead of returning to Somalia; the other was flown directly to Djibouti, where Abdulmanaf claimed both men have since registered as refugees. In 2002, Abdulmanaf was himself arrested by the TNG as a terrorist suspect and spent two months in prison.

After his release, Abdulmanaf landed a job at the Saudi al-Haramayn Foundation as a store-keeper. He grew his beard long and was nicknamed Osama. After eight months, he received notice that the office would be closed, and the expatriates would have to leave. Unlike his co-workers, two Sudanese and a Yemeni, Abdulmanaf remained in Mogadishu with his family but found no work and was soon reduced to scrounging for handouts. He became a familiar figure at a nearby open-air garage, chewing a little *qaat* with friends to pass time. As he returned home one day in March 2003, men jumped from a minibus and two saloon cars, pointed weapons, hit him over the head and bundled him into the van and blindfolded him.

When the blindfold was removed, he was in a small room, with his hands and feet tied uncomfortably behind his back. Some Somalis compared his face with a photo and said, "this is you". They shaved him to resemble the man in the photo more closely and spoke to him in Swahili, but he explained he did not speak the language. He asked his captors when they would release him and was told: "In two days you'll be in Guantanamo".

Two days later, four Americans came to his room and asked him his name and nationality. "I explained I had come from Dubai", he told Crisis Group. "They asked me a lot of questions....Did I know someone named Harun? How long was I working for al-Haramayn?" After a lengthy interrogation they told Abdulmanaf he was lying. "They were looking for a Yemeni who looked like me. If I knew this Yemeni, I would have slit his throat for what he put me through. His name was Nabhan. It was written under his picture".<sup>105</sup>

A week later the Americans returned, took his picture, fingerprints, and clothes and the telephone numbers from his mobile phone. His Somali captors eventually acknowledged Abdulmanaf was not the suspect. "Nabhan is here", they told him, "but he's well protected, and we can't get to him".

After 27 days in hand and leg-cuffs, Abdulmanaf received another visit from the Americans and was released. Although he was free to go, he claims he asked to see the Americans and one was brought to him: "I told him that I had been treated like an animal. I told him that now I had to leave this place, and you have to help me [to get home]. He said he couldn't help, and he left. At nine p.m. they took my shirt, trousers, and shoes and threw me out in the street near K4".<sup>106</sup> He walked home to find his apartment empty, his wife and belongings gone. In his absence they had been unable to make ends meet and had moved in with relatives.

Puntland authorities admit to having detained and questioned numerous foreigners without encountering a bona fide al-Qaeda suspect. In August 2003 the PIS detained Pakistanis from the proselytising Tablighi sect but found no evidence they were anything but missionaries and released them.<sup>107</sup> Soon afterwards it seized an alleged Iraqi terrorist, calling himself Khalid, in Gaalkayo. Like Abdulmanaf, he was detained for almost a month before American agents authorised his release. Another Iraqi, who described himself as a teacher and refugee named Abdul Jafar al-Mansuri, was arrested and released the same month.

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<sup>105</sup> The U.S. government has distributed images of most wanted al-Qaeda suspects to a number of Somali counter-terrorism partners. The name of each suspect is typically displayed beneath the photo.

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<sup>106</sup> "K4" stands for Kilometre 4, a major road junction in south Mogadishu.

<sup>107</sup> "Foreign terror suspects freed in Puntland", UN-IRIN, 28 August 2003.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Given Somalia's long years of civic conflict and statelessness, the surprise is not so much that it hosts a jihadi movement, as that the movement is not larger and more firmly established. Likewise, al-Qaeda's presence is perhaps less remarkable than its minute scale. Nevertheless, as their exploits in Somaliland and Kenya have shown, a handful of determined jihadi operatives can terrorise a community through mass murder or multiple assassinations. If Somalia's protracted crisis is allowed to persist, its stateless territory will continue to attract criminal and extremist elements, and it will be only a matter of time before they succeed in carrying out new acts of terror against Somalis or their neighbours.

Counter-terrorism measures have helped to disrupt jihadi networks, keeping their leadership off-balance and preventing some terrorism, but they address only symptoms of the problem, not causes, and are in many respects counterproductive. Unless there is also a more comprehensive strategy aimed at restoring legitimate, functional government in Somalia, jihadism and extremist violence are likely to remain persistent features of the Somali scene.

TFG leaders and supporters -- domestic and foreign -- have long sought to exploit international terrorism concerns by portraying themselves as partners in the war on terror, while labelling rivals and critics as members of extremist groups. In reality, ordinary Somalis -- including members of other Islamist groups -- are equally dedicated to containing jihadism and often have better information and analysis. Engaging these elements, without attempting to coopt them, would help build mutual understanding of both the threat and the solution.

Over the longer term, containing and ultimately eliminating jihadism requires patient, sustained support for the twin processes of reconciliation and peacebuilding, until legitimate, functional government is restored. There are no quick fixes<sup>108</sup> and no substitute for forging a government of national unity and painstaking completion of critical transitional tasks such as voluntary disarmament, formation of local administrations and a new constitution.

Only a legitimate, credible and broadly inclusive Somali government will be able to do those things. Ill-conceived attempts to circumvent the challenges through deployment of foreign troops or backing one coalition of

faction leaders over another threaten not only to destabilise Somalia but also to provide a popular platform for the spread of jihadism and terrorist violence. Western governments and Somalia's neighbours need to demonstrate they are prepared to support the emergence of a government that meets Somali needs and aspirations, not only their own.

**Nairobi/Brussels, 11 July 2005**

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<sup>108</sup> Bryden, "No Quick Fixes", op. cit.

## APPENDIX A

### MAP OF SOMALIA





## APPENDIX B

### ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

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The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with over 110 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and printed copy to officials in foreign ministries and international organisations and made available simultaneously on the website, [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org). Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board -- which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media -- is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by Lord Patten of Barnes, former European Commissioner for External Relations. President and Chief Executive since January 2000 is former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.

Crisis Group's international headquarters are in Brussels, with advocacy offices in Washington DC (where it is based as a legal entity), New York, London and Moscow. The organisation currently operates sixteen field offices (in Amman, Belgrade, Bishkek, Dakar, Dushanbe, Islamabad, Jakarta, Kabul, Nairobi, Port-au-Prince, Pretoria, Pristina, Quito, Seoul, Skopje and Tbilisi), with analysts working in over 50 crisis-affected countries and territories across four continents. In Africa, this includes Angola, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Liberia, Rwanda, the Sahel region, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda

and Zimbabwe; in Asia, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Kashmir, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Myanmar/Burma, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; in Europe, Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia; in the Middle East, the whole region from North Africa to Iran; and in Latin America, Colombia, the Andean region and Haiti.

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**July 2005**

## APPENDIX C

### CRISIS GROUP REPORTS AND BRIEFINGS ON AFRICA SINCE 2002

#### CENTRAL AFRICA

*Storm Clouds over Sun City: The Urgent Need to Recast the Congolese Peace Process*, Africa Report N°44, 14 May 2002 (also available in French)

*Burundi: After Six Months of Transition: Continuing the War or Winning the Peace*, Africa Report N°46, 24 May 2002 (also available in French)

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