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Iranian Warship

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AL-SHABAAB COUNTEROFFENSIVE IN MOGADISHU THREATENS AFRICAN UNION'S MILITARY GAINS

The cautious consolidation of its control over Mogadishu by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) encountered a pair of serious setbacks in late October as al-Shabaab Islamists ambushed a Burundian patrol on October 20 and mounted a suicide attack on Ugandan troops in their base at the German Metal Factory near Mogadishu Stadium.

A statement from al-Shabaab describing the "Mogadish Bloodbath" claimed two "martyrdom seekers" disguised as Transitional Federal Government (TFG) troops infiltrated the camp housing Ugandan troops and forces of Somalia's TFG and set off their bombs, killing themselves and a number of Ugandan soldiers. This much is acknowledged by AMISOM; the Shabaab statement, however, describes a more complete victory obtained when mujahideen followed the blasts by raiding the base, securing all access routes in and out and massacring all Ugandan and TFG forces contained within. [1] Al-Shabaab spokesmen later claimed at least one of the two suicide attackers was an American citizen who had joined the Somali mujahideen (AFP, October 30). Uganda's Lieutenant General Katumba Wamala claimed the Ugandans had suffered only three killed and two wounded in the attack, though some reports have suggested far greater losses (*Sunday Nation* [Nairobi], October 30). Nevertheless, sources in Mogadishu have confirmed that gunmen wearing TFG uniforms rushed the camp after the bombings, killing at least ten soldiers (AP, October 29; Reuters, October 29). Following the attack, a senior AMISOM officer promised that the African Union forces would soon "destroy" al-Shabaab (Shabelle Media Network, October 28; Horseed Media, October 28).

Though al-Shabaab claimed to have killed anywhere from 76 to 150 Burundian troops in the earlier ambush in Dayniile district and displayed dozens of bodies wearing AMISOM gear afterward, the real figure appears to be closer to 50. Burundian authorities have claimed a much lower figure of ten killed, but this figure appears intended to ward off domestic opposition to the mission in politically volatile Burundi. The Bujumbura government reaffirmed its commitment to the AMISOM mission after the clash, urging its troops to “double their efforts and vigilance” while calling on the international community to supply the African Union peacekeepers with enough “hardware” to carry out their mandate (PANA Online [Dakar], October 27).

Al-Shabaab now describes their sudden August withdrawal from most of Mogadishu not as a sign of weakness, but rather as a strategic operation designed to focus efforts on causing as much damage to AMISOM as possible without having to defend ground. According to the Shabaab statement on the Dayniile clash of October 20, “The recent battles have lured the AU forces, who previously sought refuge behind their heavily fortified bases and underground bunkers, out into the open; thereby exposing their intense vulnerabilities and proving their inability to fight in an urban area” (Ansar1.info, October 24; Mareeg Online, October 24; *Africa Review* [Nairobi], October 25). Al-Shabaab’s general withdrawal from Mogadishu has presented the undermanned African Union mission with the dilemma of how to occupy and consolidate its gains in Mogadishu without spreading AU forces too thin. According to AMISOM spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Paddy Ankunda: “The outer north and eastern fringes of the city must still be cleared, but key ground and buildings are no longer under the control of the extremists” (AFP, October 11). The Shabaab strategy also has the benefit of freeing up forces to fend off Kenyan occupation of the Shabaab-held port of Kismayo, which would constitute a crippling financial loss to the Islamist movement.

Note:

1. Press Office, Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, “The Mogadishu Bloodbath – 80 Ugandan Soldiers Killed,” October 29, 2011.

LEADER OF EGYPT’S MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD DISCUSSES FUTURE OF EGYPT AND RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES

A series of once inconceivable meetings between U.S. representatives and leaders of Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood [MB] in October presented a triumph for the Brothers’ efforts to establish themselves as responsible partners in the post-Revolution democratic transition. In the wake of these developments, the Egyptian Brotherhood’s leader, Dr. Muhammad Badi, discussed the implications of these discussions and the Brotherhood’s role in Egypt’s political transition (*Akhbar al-Yawm* [Cairo], October 30).

Regarding the movement’s recent contacts with U.S. representatives, MB General Guide Dr. Badi recalls that not long ago the United States regarded such contacts as “100% taboo” and urges Washington to deal with new political realities in the Middle East: “The U.S. Administration has to understand well the lesson of the Arab spring revolutions. We hope it will deal with the peoples not rulers because rulers are bound to go. Consequently the interests of the Americans are not guaranteed with the rulers. So I hope they will deal with the Egyptian people as being the source of the powers. The people are the side to wager on now.”

Though the Brotherhood has emphasized it is not seeking a majority in the new parliament and is not running a presidential candidate to mute claims the Brothers are seeking to take control of Egypt, the Brothers’ political wing, *izb al-Hurriya wa al-’Adala* (Freedom and Justice Party – FJP), has nonetheless emerged as the strongest political faction in the current political environment. Badi insists that this is not a sin or crime for which the movement should seek forgiveness: “It is the harvest of jihad and struggle and of having stood in the face of injustice for tens of years. We paid a dear price for it. Suffice it to mention that over the past 15 years alone 40,000 MB members were detained.” Nonetheless, Badi maintains that reforming Egypt will take a broad, unified effort: “We cannot run Egypt, live in Egypt, or win in the elections except through accord. This is a foregone conclusion, for we know that Egypt’s problems are too heavy to be borne by any single faction under any circumstances.”

However, deliberately avoiding responsibility for the inevitable failings (real or perceived) of the new government may well be a practical political strategy for the MB. As Badi notes, those who are demanding a new

government must realize that such a government will face a host of problems accumulated over thirty years: “[The new government] will face problems and those who demanded its appointment will go down to Tahrir Square to call for its downfall. This is why we must realize that we are in a transitional period.”

Despite the Brotherhood’s insistence it is not seeking to take power in the new government, the movement is taking measures to make sure its MPs are among the most effective and least tainted by corruption in the new government by excluding all candidates involved in unethical behavior or financial irregularities. According to Badi, an educational camp has been set up for the training of all MB candidates.

While observers have noted a proliferation of new MB offices in nearly every district of Egypt since the Revolution, Badi rejects accusations that the movement was suddenly in possession of funds from abroad: “Not a single cent entered our pocket from any funds or financing. We are the people most concerned about transparency and integrity because we fear Allah. We can never accept any funds from any quarter under any circumstances.” Dr. Badi warns that the Revolution is under threat from both “vested interests” inside Egypt and external interests that used to benefit from the pliable nature of the former regime, which was always ready to respond positively to foreign demands.

Like most of the MB’s leadership, Badi is a veteran of repeated terms in Egypt’s prisons, but he believes that the detentions of the movement’s leaders gives the group credibility among the Egyptian masses and provided an opportunity to reflect on the correct course for Egypt: “While we were in prison we were thinking of what is in Egypt’s interest, like Prophet Joseph who entered jail on a false charge but despite this kept thinking about how to save Egypt.”

Last month Dr Muhammad Sa’d al-Katatni, the secretary general of the FJP met with an official from a U.S. national security organization and the First Secretary of the U.S. Embassy in Cairo at the FJP headquarters in Cairo (*Bikya Masr* [Cairo], October 6). Shortly thereafter, a delegation of assistants to U.S. House representatives met with MB Secretary General Dr. Mahmud Husayn and movement spokesman Dr. Mahmud Ghazlan on October 18.

In an interview with a pan-Arab news agency, al-Katatni downplayed the significance of the unprecedented dialogue with official American representatives: “The United States has interests in the region, and if observers see that the FJP is close to power, then it is natural that the Americans should hasten to initiate dialogue with it to know its inclinations. This falls also within diplomatic norms and not only within reconciliation” (Ilaf.com, October 3).

According to MB spokesman Dr. Ghazlan, the MB leaders assured the Americans that the movement had set a ceiling of acquiring only a third of available parliamentary seats and would not run a candidate for president “because the Brotherhood was used as a scarecrow in the past,” adding that the Americans’ understanding of Islam “included frivolities, distortions and misconceptions. We explained to them the status of non-Muslims in the Islamic State and that they have the freedom of belief and worship and to apply the rules of their religion in dealings and to perform their rites in full freedom” (*al-Hayat*, October 21).

The Three Strategies behind Iran's Projection of Naval Power

Nima Adelkhab

News of the deployment of Iranian warships across the Atlantic Ocean as far as the Gulf of Mexico has raised new concerns regarding the Islamic Republic's growing projection of naval power (Mehr News, September 30; Press TV October 5). The news follows other alarming reports concerning Iran's naval activities in international waters this year. In March, for instance, two Iranian warships raised a storm of controversy by their transit through the Suez Canal and their visit to a Syrian port in the Mediterranean (see *Terrorism Monitor*, March 10). Likewise, in October, Iran's 16th extraterritorial naval mission sailed into the Sea of Oman, the Gulf of Aden and the northern Indian Ocean, a move that was carefully watched by Iran's Arab neighbors in the Persian Gulf (Mehr News, July 11, 2011; Press TV, October 17, 2011). Since 2009, Iran has made 15 naval deployments beyond its maritime territories, an unprecedented step in Iran's military history (IRNA, April 21).

Such developments are of concern as the Iranian defense ministry expands its weapons systems, arming both older and newer warships with new cruise missile capabilities, produced en masse in Iran and designed largely for sea-based targets (IRNA, October 1). The mass-produced Ghader anti-ship missiles carried both by the regular navy and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) can be fired from ground and sea and are equipped with anti-jamming radar capabilities. Iran's defense ministry claims the Ghader has a range of more than 200 kilometers (Press TV, September 28). The Ghader missiles are expected to replace the undelivered Russian S-300 missile defense system, with the aim of protecting Iranian nuclear facilities against Israeli or American ship-launched aerial or cruise missile attacks.

Likewise, domestically-built destroyers like the Jamaran are a product of a new Iranian naval strategy that relies on newly built warships for the launch of cruise missiles designed to strike sea-based targets. [1] New warships like the Jamaran are equipped with advanced electronic warfare technology that includes anti-aircraft capability (Press TV, October 9, 2011). Meanwhile, the building of new warships is matched by the production of new submarines like the *Ghadir* (launched in 2007) and *Fateh* (launched in 2011), high-speed missile boats and

naval aircraft in a bid to increase the state's maritime capabilities in the Persian Gulf and beyond (Press TV, October June 1). Having announced plans to build a new aircraft carrier, the Islamic Republic now claims to have one of the strongest naval forces in the region, even capable of challenging the United States (Press TV, September 28, 2011). Such claims, however, are almost certainly part of Iran's "Soft War" propaganda strategy as Iran's navy, even with an aircraft carrier, cannot pose a serious challenge to the American navy (for the "Soft War" strategy, see *Terrorism Monitor*, June 12, 2010).

However, such increased naval activity entails a number of purposes that go beyond a simple objective of deterring the United States. In many ways, Iran's latest naval activities can be identified on three strategic levels. First and most obviously, on the security level, Iran's objective is to hold off the United States in its initial stage of aerial attack, which most likely would be focused on both the Iranian Air Force and Iran's nuclear facilities. The development of Iranian missile capabilities in recent years is primarily meant to cause significant damage to the American naval forces, especially as the American air attacks will most likely be launched from its naval assets in the Persian Gulf. This type of conventional military operation, including coastal missile launchers, would most likely include blocking the Strait of Hormuz and be backed with the deployment of asymmetrical weapons, such as unleashing the IRGCN's speed-boats against sea-based targets like American warships (IRNA, July 7; Mehr News, February 1).

The second strategy of Iranian naval activity revolves around economic security. With the increase of piracy in the Gulf of Aden, the Iranian navy has the responsibility of protecting Iranian commercial cargos and securing Iran's economic activities in the Persian Gulf sea-lanes (IRNA October 17). However, Iran's recent naval presence in the Atlantic and Mediterranean seas brings to light a third strategy that serves neither an immediate military nor an economic security interest. While one can see a mere symbolic move in deploying its warships near American and Israeli coastlines, Iran's third naval strategy should be viewed as part and parcel of the "Soft War" that Tehran launched against its enemies in September 2009. In an attempt to obtain intelligence and "spread Iranian culture," the presence of the Iranian navy in Atlantic waters dominated by U.S. naval assets represents a propaganda strategy to overstate the capabilities of Iran's armed forces and give the impression of an overwhelming force to the Islamic Republic's enemies (IRNA, October 9). Moreover, as

Tehran undergoes major internal factional conflict and weakening of the regime, such military displays may also provide an opportunity for Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to promote an image of strength, mostly for domestic consumption.

The April 1988 American defeat of the Iranian naval forces near the close of the Iran-Iraq War still haunts Tehran. In order to prevent a repeat of this outcome, the Iranian navy will continue to make its presence felt while trying to avoid a military confrontation. As the Iranian terror-plot against a Saudi Arabian diplomat on American soil moves the U.S. and Iran closer to open conflict, the lack of communication between Iranian naval forces (particularly those of the IRGCN responsible for unconventional warfare) and the American navy carries a strong potential for military confrontation.

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Note:

1. Though Iranian officials describe the Jamaran as a destroyer, its size and armament is actually equivalent to a small frigate.

Islamist Militants of the Philippines Restructure to Intensify the Anti-Government Jihad

Jacob Zenn

As it has done many times before, Abu Sayyaf is showing its ability to adapt and survive in the wake of predictions of its demise. As recently as May, an Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spokesperson said that Abu Sayyaf would no longer have the inspiration to carry out terrorist attacks, while the Department of National Defense predicted that the death of Abu Sayyaf's "principal patron [Bin Laden]" would bring about Abu Sayyaf's "decimation and total elimination" (*Manila Standard*, May 4).

Half a year later the AFP finds itself in the midst of intensified fighting with Abu Sayyaf. October was highlighted by twin bombings in Zamboanga City on October 9 and an ambush on October 18 that killed 19 AFP troops in Al Barka, Basilan. Both attacks were attributed to Abu Sayyaf.

The first of the October 9 twin bombings in Zamboanga City exploded at 12:25 PM at a cockfighting pit. The bomb killed two people and was placed by a previously unknown militant. A second bomb detonated in a hotel room five minutes later, injuring six people. This attack was allegedly carried out by an Abu Sayyaf commander, Puruji Indama, who checked into the second-floor room where the blast occurred (*ABS-CBN News [Zamboanga]*, October 17).

Both bombs were made from ammonium nitrate and packed with nails to make them more lethal. Detonation was by cell phone, which is consistent with the type of bombs that Abu Sayyaf often uses in its attacks. The celebration of a Catholic holiday in honor of Zamboanga's patron saint on October 9 may have influenced the timing of the attacks (*Philstar [Manila]*, October 12).

Puruji Indama is notorious for planning simultaneous bombings. Militants under his command are believed to have carried out twin bombings on February 1, 2010; the first was a roadside bomb while the second bomb exploded in a Basilan village 30 minutes later. The second blast killed an AFP soldier and wounded 12 bystanders (*Manila Bulletin*, February 2, 2010).

While the October 9 bombings are typical of Abu Sayyaf terrorist operations, the October 18 ambush reflects the growing danger of Abu Sayyaf militants merging with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front's (MILF) more conventional militia factions. The October 18 ambush occurred when AFP Special Forces troops were conducting an operation to locate militant leaders Long Malat, Dan Laksaw Asnawi and Nur Hassan Jamiri. Jamiri is an Abu Sayyaf sub-leader notorious for high-profile kidnappings, ambushes and beheadings while Malat is an Abu Sayyaf leader and longtime associate of Asnawi, the MILF 114 Base Command deputy commander responsible for beheading 14 AFP Marines in Basilan in 2007.

Initially, Malat, Asnawi, and Jamiri were in a group of about ten militants, but they were quickly reinforced by more than 100 fighters from the MILF who overwhelmed the AFP Special Forces troops. Without sufficient ammunition to defend themselves in the ten hour confrontation, 13 of the Special Forces troops were killed at the site of the ambush and six others were taken captive and then hacked to death in the same village where Asnawi carried out the beheadings of 14 Marines four years earlier (*Inquirer* [Manila], October 21).

According to government sources, the site of the ambush was four kilometers outside of MILF territory. However, MILF spokesman Ghadzali Jaafar alleged that the confrontation took place within a MILF "satellite camp" (ABS-CBN News [Manila], October 20). Jaafar denied that Abu Sayyaf was involved in the ambush and claimed that MILF was only defending land in part of its "temporary state." However, AFP spokesperson Colonel Antonio Parlade, who was relieved of his duties for his statements after the ambush, insists that Abu Sayyaf members in the area are also part of the MILF (*Philstar* [Manila], October 22).

Even if Colonel Parlade's assertions are correct, predictions of Abu Sayyaf's demise due to depleted funds and an inspirational vacuum may not be far off the mark. Since late September a number of Abu Sayyaf members have been captured or killed:

- Abdul Aziz Kunting (a.k.a. Robert Tan) and Akmed Kunting (a.k.a. Jason Tan), both involved in the 2001 Dos Palmas kidnapping, were apprehended during a joint police-army operation in Davao on September 23.

- Adzhar Patta Mawalil, who was a member of an Abu Sayyaf cell headed by Albader Parad, surrendered when policemen and soldiers stormed his house in Jolo on October 4.

- AFP soldiers killed Abu Sayyaf sub-leader Imram Asgari on September 25 in Zamboanga City.

- An airstrike on October 30 in Sulu aimed at the camp of Abu Sayyaf leader Umbra Jumdail (a.k.a. Dr. Abu) killed three Abu Sayyaf sub-leaders, an aide to the Malaysian-born Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) bomb expert Zulkifli bin Hir (a.k.a. Marwan), and possibly Zulkifli bin Hir himself.

Coordination between Abu Sayyaf and the MILF is nothing new, but the current pressure on Abu Sayyaf makes it more advantageous than ever for Abu Sayyaf to integrate with MILF ranks. Abu Sayyaf has fewer than 400 fighters and can benefit from the 12,000-strong MILF providing reinforcements and harboring Abu Sayyaf fighters who hide out in areas near where the MILF has autonomy.

A new alliance of Abu Sayyaf members and rogue former MILF and MNLF fighters in a group called "Awliya [Friends of Allah]" is especially alarming to the AFP. [1] Since 2010, the AFP has been monitoring the cult-like group, which is led by the religiously "unorthodox" Hatib Zacharia and whose members practice a form of "mystical Islam" influenced by Sufism in which members do not care if they die (*Inquirer* [Zamboanga City], October 17).

Awliya attacked an AFP base in Talipao, Sulu Province on September 25, killing two soldiers but leaving as many as 20 Awliya men dead. Unlike the practice of other Mindanao rebel groups that recover the bodies of their dead, no one retrieved the bodies of the slain Awliya fighters or sent relatives to collect them. Awliya's rationale for their attack may be more consistent with other jihadist groups, however. One theory is that Awliya targeted the soldiers in Talipao because they were securing the grounds of a school being constructed with funds from the United States (*Zamboanga Times*, September 27).

While it is too early to tell whether Awliya is an ominous sign of a new brand of Islamist militancy in Mindanao, the group's composition of Abu Sayyaf members and

former MILF and MNLF fighters under the influence of an obscure millenarian ideology could make Awliya as dangerous and unpredictable in the 2010s as Abu Sayyaf was in the 2000s.

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Note:

1. The Awliya in Islamic tradition were the righteous supporters and defenders of the Quran and the Prophet in the earliest days of Islam.

Clan and Conflict in Somalia: Al-Shabaab and the Myth of “Transcending Clan Politics”

Abren Schaefer and Andrew Black

Clan identity and Islam are central pillars of Somali society, with clan dynamics and inter-clan rivalries magnified by decades of state collapse. Al-Shabaab - the dominant Islamist militia controlling much of southern and central Somalia - claims to “transcend clan politics,” yet reality on the ground belies this claim, revealing that al-Shabaab seeks to manipulate local clan alliances and remains deeply influenced by clan politics. This analysis shows that despite al-Shabaab’s hard-line Islamist identity and pro-al-Qaeda rhetoric, many aspects of the group’s past and current behavior remain deeply rooted in Somalia’s local dynamics. Moreover, clan rules apply even to Somalia’s most feared Islamists.

Somalia - All Politics are Local

Clan and sub-clan structures are central to Somali identity. From a young age, children are traditionally taught to memorize and recite their clan-based kinship genealogy, sometimes naming twenty or even thirty generations of their patrilineal ancestors. [1] When the Siad Barre regime collapsed in 1991 and with it the presence of centralized Mogadishu-based governance, inter-clan violence and power rivalries spiked as clan structures and identities filled the governance void. The destructiveness of this process contributed to a paradoxical perception of clans that remains palpable today. Though many Somalis often self-identify based on clan, they nevertheless blame “clannish” behavior for the fractionalization, violence, and the destruction of Somali stability. [2]

Nevertheless, Somali society continues to be defined by clan identities, and clan rivalries frame the balance of power across Somalia. Somali clans and sub-clans are geographically interwoven rather than clearly divided between homogeneous clan territories, although certain sub-clans exert significant power in specific regions. For example, the capital of Mogadishu is divided among Hawiye sub-clans while the Rahanweyn (also called the Digil-Mirifle) continue to play the key role in central Bay and Bakool regions. The Isaaq dominate Somaliland in the northwest, and various Darod sub-clans reside

mainly in Puntland, the north-central provinces, and the southern Juba region. [3] These geographic divisions often correspond to battle lines, as clans vie for influence and resources.

This complex and interlocking system establishes the rules by which Somali politicians, warlords, and even terrorists must abide. As al-Shabaab has developed in recent years and sought to balance domestic priorities with international jihadi ideals, the role of clan has continued to plague and shape the organization.

Al-Shabaab—Avoiding the Stigma of “Clannish Behavior”

Al-Shabaab rose to prominence in 2006 as a militia subordinate to the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and was typically criticized as being a Hawiye militia. [4] The Habr Gedir/Ayr sub-clan factions of the powerful Hawiye clan were noted as being particularly influential within the Islamic Courts at the time. Under the leadership of Aden Hashi Ayro, al-Shabaab became known for its Takfiri-Salafi worldview and links with al-Qaeda. [5]

With the dissolution of the ICU following the invasion of Somalia by the locally-reviled Ethiopian military, al-Shabaab arose as the most competent and capable resistance force against the Ethiopian occupation, even drawing on members of Somalia’s minority clans (“loomo ooyan”) and building a multi-clan leadership structure (*Suna Times*, November 10, 2010). [6] Dr. Andre Le Sage notes that Ahmad Abdi Godane, Fu’ad Shongole, and Ibrahim Haji Jama, along with al-Shabaab’s foreign fighter cadre, are the more radical leaders favoring the ideology of al-Qaeda’s global jihad. In contrast, other Shabaab leaders and many of the groups rank-and-file have little loyalty to this trans-national cause. [7]

Al-Shabaab’s protracted campaign against the deeply resented Ethiopians allowed the group’s more jihad-oriented leadership to equate their radical agenda with nationalist sentiment and gain more cross-clan support than would have been possible absent a “common enemy.” [8] In an effort to galvanize cross-clan support, al-Shabaab highlighted its Islamist and nationalist credentials, and in the face of the Ethiopian occupation, al-Shabaab succeeded in establishing hegemony in south-central Somalia. In a pattern that has recurred throughout Somali history, the presence of an outside invader was able - albeit only temporarily - to rally otherwise disparate Somali factions. [9]

Since the Ethiopian withdrawal from Somalia, al-Shabaab has maintained that it “transcends clan,” based on Islamist beliefs and the goal of Shari’a law. Al-Shabaab’s determination to distance itself from clannish behavior stems from a) the belief that strength comes through unity; b) the belief by some of the group’s more hard-line leadership in the universalism of al-Qaeda’s Salafi-Jihad worldview; and c) the aforementioned sentiment that the fractionalization of Somali society is largely the result of clan-based power struggles. Therefore, this transcendent narrative provides al-Shabaab with the flexibility to negotiate and mobilize support across clan lines, while simultaneously providing the common ideological link across segments of Somali society, the diaspora, and even the global jihadi movement.

However utilitarian this narrative may seem, al-Shabaab’s clannish behaviors in Somalia belie the universality of this narrative, and show the organization to be fighting clan-based struggles internally and with other key players in Somalia.

The Rise of al-Shabaab—Still Fighting Clan Battles

Al-Shabaab’s strategy and its inability to avoid clan influence has affected the way the group projects force, recruits fighters, and influences the Somali population. In these ways, al-Shabaab has evolved drastically over the past five years. Initially a relatively small militia, al-Shabaab gained local support as the only effective fighting force against the Ethiopian intervention in Somalia from late 2006 through early 2009. [10] As noted before, this strong position bolstered al-Shabaab’s numbers and reinforced its universal narrative. Today, al-Shabaab is estimated to field roughly 2,500-3,000 fighters, likely augmented by an additional 3,000 or so loosely aligned militia. However, much of this façade began falling apart with the Ethiopian withdrawal in 2009 as clan disputes surfaced immediately affecting al-Shabaab’s leadership and conflicts with other Somali actors.

While al-Shabaab’s multi-clan leadership has been beneficial to the movement, disagreements between key leaders like Amir Ahmad Abdi Godane “Abu Zubayr” (Isaaq/Arap) from the north and Commander Mukhtar Robow “Abu Mansur” (Rahanweyn/ Mirifle/ Laysan) have created friction within the group. Al-Shabaab’s Ramadan offensive in 2010 ended with numerous reports in the Somali press of a major leadership rift within al-Shabaab - a reaction to the failed offensive and the grievances of clan constituents.

Specifically, Mukhtar Robow allegedly withdrew his Rahanweyn forces from Mogadishu because he and Rahanweyn elders were angry that their clan fighters bore a disproportionate share of the casualties (Garowe Online, January 9; *East African* [Nairobi] January 24; see also *Terrorism Monitor*, October 21, 2010). This incident highlights longstanding grievances between Robow and Abdi Godane dating back to 2008. Robow incurred Abdi Godane's wrath by giving safe passage to Somali government officials who were his clansmen and allowing humanitarian aid because it benefited Robow's clan constituents in the Bay and Bakool regions. [11] These clan-based leadership disagreements have increased in 2011; particularly over contentious issues such as allowing humanitarian aid and the integration of Hizb al-Islam into al-Shabaab (see *Terrorism Monitor*, August 12).

Al-Shabaab's cross-clan narrative helps to mask the relative weakness of its leaders, Amir Ahmed Abdi Godane and Ibrahim Haji Jama al-Afghani, both of whom are members of the Isaaq clan of Somaliland, an autonomous region far from al-Shabaab's normal region of operations in southern Somalia. Consequently, these leaders lack a natural power base in areas of southern Somalia where al-Shabaab dominates. In contrast, many al-Shabaab leaders with Hawiye, Darod, or Rahanweyn clan affiliations, like Mukhtar Robow, are typically better able to tap into clan-derived power bases across southern Somalia - often leading them to strike a balance between more pragmatic local interests and al-Shabaab's ideological hard-liners. [12]

Fighting Clan Battles

A review of al-Shabaab's battles in recent years reveals clear clan dynamics. Fighting between al-Shabaab, allied Islamist militia around Mogadishu, and Somalia's feeble Transitional Federal Government (TFG) surged in May 2009 and again during al-Shabaab's Ramadan offensive of 2010 (see *Terrorism Monitor*, October 21, 2010). In both cases, the presence of the roughly 7,000 peacekeepers of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) prevented al-Shabaab from toppling the TFG. Fighting in central Somalia continues to ebb and flow, with AMISOM holding the initiative in Mogadishu in 2011 until taking substantial losses in al-Shabaab ambushes in October (see *Terrorism Monitor*, October 28). Sub-clan divisions are a significant factor in this violent stalemate. Within Mogadishu, the powerful Hawiye sub-clans of the Abgal, Haber Gedir, and Murosade are internally split between the government

and the al-Shabaab insurgents. [13]

South of Mogadishu, al-Shabaab has engaged in clan-based fighting to control the strategically important port of Kismayo. In Fall 2009, al-Shabaab seized full control of Kismayo, consolidating power by ousting its former ally, an Islamist militia known as Hizb al-Islam. The group began as an umbrella organization comprised of various clan/sub-clan factions with alliances intended to reflect a clan-based balance of power. These included the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia-Asmara, the Somali Islamic Front, the Ras Kamboni militia, and the Anole militia. Alliances in the fighting broke down along sub-clan lines, with al-Shabaab fighters affiliated with the Marehan sub-clan ultimately defeating the Ras Kamboni militia (Ogadeni sub-clan power base) and the Harti sub-clan fighters called the Anole faction. [14] Al-Shabaab's success in taking the port represented a major strategic victory, providing access to port revenue and taxation fees. Research suggests that al-Shabaab leadership in the Kismayo area, led by Ibrahim Haji Jama al-Afghani, continues to manage al-Shabaab's interests by manipulating a network of clan allies to maintain local control. [15]

Emergence of Ahlu Sunna wa'l-Jama'a

Farther north, al-Shabaab has fought against a loosely structured alliance called Ahlu Sunna wa'l-Jama'a (ASWJ). Although nominally a Sufi conglomeration that armed itself in reaction to al-Shabaab's desecration of Sufi tombs, ASWJ is largely formed along clan lines in the Galguduud, Hiraan and Gedo regions. ASWJ's strength stems in part from clan-based support, as elements of the Habir Gedir, Dir, and Marehan sub-clans elected to support ASWJ against al-Shabaab (Shabelle Media Network, January 24; Garowe Online, January 25). [16]

Even beyond southern and central Somalia, al-Shabaab factions are tied to clans. Al-Shabaab exerts considerably less influence in Somalia's northern Puntland and Somaliland areas, but the group has conducted bombings and assassinations and is known to have active networks there. Puntland-based militia leader Shaykh Muhammad Sa'id "Atam" has fought sporadically against the Puntland government in the mountainous Galgala district of Puntland's Bari Region. [17] Atam has also been described by UN experts as "essentially a Warsengeli clan warlord," although he and his network in Puntland are known to be sympathetic to al-Shabaab and its aims. There remains some debate

as to whether Atam's network has direct ties with al-Shabaab, as Atam and senior al-Shabaab members have denied the links. The UN in 2011 noted that Atam sought financial and medical assistance in Mogadishu and Kismayo, and his networks in Sool and Sanaag have "effectively merged with Al-Shabaab." [18] Much of the fighting breaks down along sub-clan lines, pitting Atam's Darod/Harti/Warsengeli sub-clan against the Darod/Majarteen clan which forms the foundation of President Farole's government. [19]

Even recruitment of foreign fighters - at least those of ethnic Somali origin - may have a clan-based component. A March 2010 report by the United Nations noted that more than half of the initial twenty Somalis who left Minneapolis to fight in Somalia had a parent from the Harti sub-clan, and several American Somalis killed in Somalia were discovered to have Harti familial ties, supporting the conclusion that recruitment has occurred along clan-linked peer networks. [20]

It is worth noting the unique challenges clan dynamics impose on al-Shabaab as the organization attempts to recruit foreign fighters. Somalia's strong clan identities, prevailing instability, and wariness of foreign influence make the country inhospitable to individuals of non-Somali origin. [21] Al-Qaeda learned this lesson in the early 1990s, when Osama bin Laden - then based in Sudan - dispatched a deputy, Abu Hafis al-Misri, to develop terrorist networks and training camps in Somalia. Abu-Hafis and his colleagues ultimately failed, complaining that Somalis lacked commitment to jihad. According to Abu-Hafis, the al-Qaeda operatives had to pay tribal expenses, but could only buy - or more accurately rent - temporary sub-clan "loyalty" and were constantly plagued by shifting alliances. [22]

Conclusion: Clan Influence and Countering al-Shabaab

The foregoing has shown the inconsistencies between al-Shabaab's narrative and the group's clannish behaviors. Though attempting to position itself as transcending clan rivalries in pursuit of a pan-Somali and Islamist agenda, evidence shows al-Shabaab to be embroiled in local clan-based disputes.

For policy-makers, this presents multiple strategic opportunities. In terms of al-Shabaab's placement as an adherent to al-Qaeda's worldview, the organization is caught between proving its Salafi-Jihadi credentials to core al-Qaeda and affiliated movements while attempting to establish power among a Somali

population that focuses internally on parochial clan interests. Any disruption to this careful balance risks either undermining al-Shabaab's carefully built power-base in Somalia or losing the support of international Salafi-Jihadis.

Partly in recognition of this opportunity, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnnie Carson announced a new "Dual Track" policy for Somalia in October 2010 designed to support not only the TFG, but also promote local civil society and stability efforts across Somalia. [23] Success for this dual track initiative would almost certainly require greater clan involvement and therefore would challenge al-Shabaab's local power-base and potentially disrupt the group's internal leadership balance. For the strategy to succeed, Somalia's TFG will need to foster clan alliances, both militarily and politically, and show greater strength independence from AMISOM (Reuters, August 6). Some experts point to nascent indicators of an Iraqi-style "Awakening movement," however, such efforts have not yet materialized in a systemic manner (*East African*, January 24). New clan-based groups opposed to al-Shabaab have emerged, but their sustainability remains uncertain. [24]

This review of al-Shabaab's evolution and Somalia's ongoing conflict leaves little doubt that clan politics continue to influence al-Shabaab to a substantial degree. Looking ahead, the group's ability to forge and maintain clan alliances will be fundamental to al-Shabaab's trajectory and viability in the long term.

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The views expressed in this article are those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of State or the U.S. Government.

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12. Le Sage, *op cit.*

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