

# The Geopolitical Implications of the Somali 'Islamic Courts' Activities in the Horn of Africa.

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## Abstract

Scholars, journalists, intelligence agencies, and security forces around the world intensely research, write and talk about Jihadist activities. But what exactly does 'Jihadist activities' mean? Who are the Jihadists? Do they really have regional dimensions?

This paper attempts to shed some light on this ancient and yet contemporary phenomenon, tracing religious, political and other sources of 'Jihad'. I will cover the recent developments in the Horn of Africa region taking into account many factors that are said to inspire Islamic movements and Jihadists worldwide as well as factors that are specific to the region such as the rise of the "Islamic Courts" in Somalia. I will discuss why it is important to understand their current and future role in the geopolitical stability of the Horn of Africa

Certainly there is a need to rethink the way 'jihad' and related activities are analyzed. Perhaps we should seriously look into all the factors that contribute to what we consider to be 'Jihadist activities'. For example, in the Horn of Africa, many seem to confuse 'Jihadist activities' with classic clanism and nationalism conflicts or even resource management issues. Then there are those who lack a deeper and sophisticated understanding of Islam who want to achieve their objectives whatever they might be via violence; are these really 'jihadists' or simply terrorists? Are there any constant variables, or structures that we can identify that make these groups unique?

Using the Somali 'Islamic courts' in the Horn of Africa as a case study, this paper will also cover similar movements in Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere to contribute to our understanding of the regional dimensions of the Jihadist activities.

Through many years as a researcher and close observer of the events unfolding in the Horn of Africa, I hope that this paper will contribute to filling the gaps in the understanding of this particular area and will highlight the moderate nature of Islam in Somalia, despite all the negative and media noise that attempts to prove otherwise. Also, the fact that the UIC leadership is trying to negotiate with the TFG government suggests that their ultimate goal is to ensure that the Ethiopian troops leave Somalia.

## **Introduction**

It has become commonplace recently, especially in US discourse such as the academic literature, to depict the Horn of Africa (HoA) as a hotspot of terrorism, particularly of the "jihadist" kind (Stephen 2002). Before starting any discussion, if we want to get serious about a true and undistorted image of Islam, I feel it is important to correct the definitions of "jihad"<sup>1</sup> and "holy war"<sup>2</sup> as presented by the

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<sup>1</sup> The word *Jihad* is from the Arabic root word JHD which basically means *striving* or *struggle*. In [the] Sufi tradition, the *self* is the enemy and *conquering the self* is overpowering the enemy and one of the best forms of *Jihad*. Unfortunately, the West describes *Jihad* as a *holy war* which is a wrong translation. If one translates *holy war* back to Arabic, the translation would be *harb-e-maqadas* or *sacred war*

western media. A clearer definition of jihad is to describe it as an internal spiritual struggle within oneself, and not warfare against unbelievers.

This paper focuses on the Horn of Africa region from a native author's perspective showing how statelessness and a variety of other less understood factors have led to a state of confusion about what is and what is not terrorism and how this confusion has made it easy to overlook some of the positive contributions of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in Somalia which, in recent times, has increasingly adopted terrorist tactics to achieve its objectives.

Tension, wars and inter-regional friction is no stranger to the Horn of Africa. Approximately five hundred years ago, Cushitic-speaking Muslim tribesmen from the desert plains of what is now southeastern Ethiopia and the borderlands of Somalia declared a jihad and attacked the Semitic-speaking Christian highland kingdoms whose emperors claimed descent from Solomon and Sheba. With the timely help of Portuguese musketeers under the leadership of the son of Vasco da Gama, the southerners were repelled. The next 400 years of Ethiopian history led to a gradual domination and conquest of these southern tribes. This was followed by the era of European colonialism and then the Cold War when the region became an arena for the global struggle between East and West.

In early 2006, the incipient stateless order and the chaotic geopolitics of the Horn of Africa<sup>3</sup> were upset by US attempts, to initially forge a counterterrorist alliance of warlords in Somalia. As predicted, this provoked a countervailing alliance of Islamic courts which emerged victorious, taking control of Mogadishu and most of the rest of the country. Ethiopia responded with a military intervention in December 2006, which was openly supported by the US to invade Somalia and support the otherwise

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<sup>2</sup> Ironically, "holy war" was a term introduced by the Vatican to "counter the Islamic wave" it feared would spread throughout Europe. More precisely, the word *holy war* came from the crusade when this call was made to the crusaders by then the Pope Urbana to unite them to fight against "infidels" who were occupying the birth place of Jesus

<sup>3</sup> The Horn of Africa (HoA) subregion is here defined as comprising Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan, but other analysts have included Kenya in the subregion, while some have excluded Sudan from it. One also sometimes encounters the term "Greater HoA", defined as comprising the Horn itself as well as Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. In between the two is the delimitation of the subregional organization IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development), to which Kenya and Uganda, but not Tanzania, belong.

moribund and impotent Somali Transitional Federal Government. Having defeated the Union of Islamic Courts, however, neither the TFG nor Ethiopia, the African Union or the United States have been able to restore order in the country which has, moreover, been designated as a battle ground for ‘the war against the infidels’ by the Al Qaeda network. The US chose to ignore the history of the people in the Horn of Africa which Jeffrey Haynes, neatly summarized in this way: “one cannot be friends with both Ethiopia and Somalia. Those who wish to meddle in the affairs of the Horn must be prepared to choose sides” (Haynes, 2005).

The US presence and motives in the Horn of Africa, like many other US policies under the Bush administration, require serious academic research. In brief, the Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF-Horn of Africa) is a follow-up to the EACTI (East Africa Counter-Terrorism Initiative) programme and includes the Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (JTF-HOA). The hunt for al-Qaeda operatives led to the formation of JTF-HOA consisting of 1800 military and civilian personnel based in Djibouti, and an offshore capacity centered around the command ship USS Mount Whitney with 800 US Marines aboard in the Red Sea. Task Force 150 was also established where Spain commanded a naval and air force to patrol *Bab el Mandab*. Task Force 150 is also supported by German ship and air patrol, and 1000 German personnel are stationed in Djibouti. France already had a force of 3,200 men in Djibouti (Woodward 2006). A concrete result of this interventionist posture was evidenced in repeated bombardment by US forces of alleged Al-Qaeda bases in Somalia in December 2006 and early 2007 apparently with tacit approval of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) of Somalia. It was an approval that has proven highly divisive in the Somali society, effectively paralyzing the state-building process. The misguided war on terrorism has not only victimized the Somali people unnecessarily, but also through its blind support to so-called ‘friendly states’, become a hindrance to the democratization of the country. Overall the effect of these interventions has been to increase instability and division in the region.

The headquarters of Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa CJTF-HOA is at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti. Its areas of operation comprise of the territories of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, the Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, and its mission is described as:

“... operations and training to assist host nations to combat terrorism in order to establish a secure environment and enable regional stability. The mission is focused on detecting, disrupting and ultimately defeating transnational terrorist groups operating in the region – denying safe havens, external support and material assistance for terrorist activity. CJTF-HOA counters the re-emergence of transnational terrorism in the region through civil-military operations and support of non-governmental organization operations, enhancing the long-term stability of the region...”<sup>4</sup>

The paper concludes with the finding that the facts on the ground do not support the assertion that the Horn of Africa (especially Somalia) is a hotspot for terrorism. The region is not in any particular way different from any of the other violent parts of Africa or the world for that matter. However, this could change if the international community continues to ignore what Ethiopia and Eritrea are doing in Somalia which humiliates many Somalis and pushes many to join radicals such as Al Shabab.

## **Regional Context**

The Horn of Africa in the last decade has been particularly affected by short and long term conflict of all kinds. Conflicts have included an inter-state border war between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998-2000; armed internal opposition against the governments of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and Somalia; civil wars between faction leaders (known as warlords) in Mogadishu; Ethiopian military interventions to support Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government against the Council of Somali Islamic Courts in late 2006; and inter-communal clashes over resources based on “nationality”, ethnicity or clan in several countries. In all these conflicts, international humanitarian law – the Geneva Conventions, which apply to both international and internal conflicts and to both government forces and opposition groups – has been frequently violated with impunity.

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<sup>4</sup> See “Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans Sahara (OETF-TS)” and “Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative,” at [www.GlobalSecurity.org](http://www.GlobalSecurity.org); and Boudali, Lianne Kennedy: “The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership” (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center, United States Military Academy, 2007). On the background see Wycoff, Karl: “Fighting Terrorism in Africa,” testimony before the House International Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Africa, 1 April 2004, at [www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/2004/31077.htm](http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/rm/2004/31077.htm); Patterns of International Terrorism 2002 (Washington, DC: State Department, 2002), p. 4. See also “Terrorism in the Horn of Africa,” Special Report, no. 113 (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, 2004), at [www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr113.pdf](http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr113.pdf).

The ill-advised December 2006 UN Security Council Resolution 1725 promoted by the United States to support African peacekeepers to maintain security in Baidoa, protect the interim regime, and train TFG forces did nothing but escalate the conflict. While the resolution did not endorse the intervention by neighboring countries such as Ethiopia, it was clearly designed to obstruct the Islamic Courts and did spark a preemptive attack that drew Ethiopia, and by extension Washington, deeper into the Somali conflict. The resolution urged the resumption of peace talks but unambiguously stressed that the authorities in Baidoa offer “the only route to achieve peace and stability” in Somalia. The then U.S. Ambassador Bolton introduced the resolution and framed the choice as either intervening or “doing nothing” in the face of an expanding crisis. The resolution was both dangerously provocative and was more symbolic than substantive due to the overwhelming challenges of fielding a combined AU and Intergovernmental Authority on Development force for the first time. With neighboring states excluded, only Uganda has offered troops.

The US “War on Terror” policy in the Horn has involved US forces in combating alleged “terrorism” within or emanating from Somalia during the period of the Islamic Courts’ rule in Mogadishu in mid-2006. In pursuit of the alleged Al-Qaeda operatives<sup>5</sup> suspected of involvement in the bombings of US embassies and other facilities in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, US forces conducted at least two bombing raids in Southwest Somalia in January 2007 killing dozens of civilians. The phenomenon of “renditions” – secret and illegal extraditions of political suspects – has also appeared in the Horn, with Kenya detaining and deporting to Somalia dozens of Kenyan Somalis as well as foreign nationals and asylum-seekers allegedly involved with the Islamic Courts in Somalia. Most were then rendered by Ethiopian troops in Somalia to secret detention in Ethiopia, where they were interrogated by western intelligence agencies.

The author’s interviews with many influential people from the Horn of Africa and close observation of the situation on the ground confirms that as far as East Africa and

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<sup>5</sup> The United States has devoted an enormous amount of energy to tracking down three individuals—Fazul Abdullah Mohammed from the Comoro Islands, Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, and Abu Talha al-Sudani from Sudan—all of whom were implicated in the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.

the HoA region is concerned the threat from Islamic terrorism is often blown out of proportion. Arguably, some parties tend to exaggerate the threat to serve their own interests. For instance, Ethiopia's interests in Somalia have a long historical dimension that is beyond the scope of this paper. Sufficed to say that as an ally of the United States in its global "war on terror", Ethiopia is likely to be a beneficiary of some much needed political and military support to achieve its own strategic and geopolitical objectives. In the process, the Tigrey regime in Ethiopia succeeded in achieving its goal of labeling its opponents "terrorists", thereby resorting to "extraordinary measures" to defeat them.

The United States' stance toward Ethiopia (the EPRDF regime) complicates the reality on the ground further. The measures taken are not sustainable and may end in violence that will have spillover effects across the region. Significantly, the invasion of Somalia by Ethiopian forces almost dragged the US into a conflict that will be framed in many parts of the Muslim world as another U.S.-sponsored attack on Islam.

### **Islam in the Horn of Africa**

Islam spread through the Horn of Africa from the first century of Hegira. It came in successive waves, making its way smoothly through the area. Some clans claim to be descents from the early Arab leaders who arrived on the coast. Islam is now the religion of more than approximately 98 percent of the Somali population<sup>6</sup>, which follows the Sunni Shafi'ite school of thought. Since the 16th century, three main brotherhoods settled in the area: the **Qaadiiriya**, with its *Uweysiya*, *Rizaqiya* and *Zayliya* branches, the **Ahmediya**, with its *Dandarawiya*, *Saalihiya*, *Rashidiya* and *Marganiya* branches, and the **Rufa'iya**. **Qaadiiriya** and **Rufaciya** can be qualified as Sufi brotherhoods, while the **Ahmediya** is reformist: it proclaims a faith purified of all its emotive manifestations and is rather austere (tobacco, coffee, khat are forbidden, dress must respect very strict codes). Nevertheless, the majority of Somali people practice Islam with moderation and with respect for the teachings of the Koran and Sunnah (Mukhtar 2006).

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<sup>6</sup> Different sources quote similar or a figure close to this, UNDP (2005), World Bank (2006) as well as many other reports produced by local NGOs, such CRD (2006).

Islam came to Somalia via the Indian Ocean trade, where Arab and other traders gradually expanded enclaves along the coast of East Africa. By the early 16th century if not before, all of Somalia was Muslim. The dominant form of Islam has ever since, at least until very recently, been that of Sufism. Hence the predominance of Sufi orders and brotherhoods (especially the *Qadiriya*, the *Ahmediya* and the *Saalihya*) most of which are fairly liberal and often significantly “creolised,” i.e. syncretic. The clergy and scholars (*ulama*), on the other hand, tend to be more orthodox Sunni Muslims, and in many cases they are closely related (via clan, ethnic or patron-client bonds) to the ruling elites. The influence of the more radical and/or conservative and fundamentalist *Salafi* orders (such as *Wahhabism*) is of a much more recent vintage. As pointed out by Ken Menkhaus (2008), rigid forms of *shari’a* thus tend to be viewed as “an imposition of Gulf Arab customs, seen by most Somalis as “un-Somali,” whereas such fundamentalist variants of Islam are more likely to attract a popular following among the Somali diasporas in non-Muslim lands or in Somalia proper when confronted by a foreign and non-Muslim threat.

Religion had not played any major political role in Somalia until the 1990s. A group called ‘*Wahda*’ was founded in 1969, promoting the ideas of the Islamist reformers such as Qutb and Mawdudi, yet with entirely peaceful means and mainly in the present Somaliland. Siyad Barre’s regime nevertheless cracked down on them in 1978. Apparently, this contributed to further politicize the organization leading its members to support the SNM with its secessionist agenda. Neither did religious organizations play any major role for most of the civil war, except in so far as they provided various social services and in the sense that Islam and its various institutions were able to provide a modicum of security. Roland Marchal (2002) has identified a total of six predominantly religious groups playing a certain role: *Ahle Sunna wa Jama’a*, set up as a counter to the radicals by Aideed, the quietist *Al Tabliq Al Majma al Islam*, the Wahhabist *Ansar-e-Sunna*, *Al Islaah* (Somali Islamic Movement) and *Al-Ittihad al Islaamiya* (AIAI) of which only the latter played any role as a combatant in the civil war. AIAI is based on *Wahhabism* and an offspring of the Muslim Brotherhood (Abdullahi 2008).

### **The Rise of the Union of Islamic Courts**

Interest in political Islam in the Horn of Africa recently increased due to the emergence of the Union of Islamic Courts. The media coverage has been very superficial and has often focused on today's security issues rather than the underlying historical ailments. To get a deeper understanding of political Islam, one needs to access the academic and scholarly work in this field which provides many examples of armed Islamic movements in Kashmir, Afghanistan, Chechnya, Palestine, Algeria and Somalia, etc. Examples of peaceful organizations are found in Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen, Jordan, Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Somalia and Egypt. In the Somali context, Somali students in Arab universities in the 1960s interacted with different Islamic groups, embraced similar ideas and gradually formed comparable movements. Two main organizations became more prominent since the 1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood affiliated Islah (reform) Movement (1978) and the neo-Salafia associated al-Ittihad (Islamic Union) Movement (1980) and its successive offshoots.

Generally, the original Union of Islamic Courts and other Islamic movements in Somalia are neither anti-western nor do they imitate western patterns of culture that contravenes Islamic values. Instead, they seem to have realistic, mature and forward looking pro-Somali sentiments, struggling to create an enabling environment for the Somali people on the basis of their social and cultural realities. It is also not a fundamentalist<sup>7</sup> movement, a negatively used term; Christian in its original roots, which is alien to Muslim culture, but they are an indigenous reformist movement. Its moderate views and peaceful programs are demonstrated by its consistent denunciation of all sorts of extremism and violence.

During 2006 a variety of Islamist organizations, centered on a long-standing network of local Islamic or *sharia* courts in Mogadishu, came together under an umbrella organization, popularly known in the Western media as the Union of Islamic Courts. The UIC became an alternative to the internationally recognized, but internally disputed, Transitional Federal Government, then restricted to Baidoa. The UIC were

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<sup>7</sup> The origin of the word fundamentalism dates to an early 20th Century American religious movement which took its name from twelve volumes published between 1910 and 1915 by a group of Protestant laymen entitled: *The Fundamentals: A Testimony of the Truth*. It came to embody both principles of absolute religious orthodoxy and evangelical practice which called for believers to extend action beyond religion into political and social life. It has been used by the western scholars and media to explain Islamic movements in the Muslim world.

a huge success in dealing with criminality in north Mogadishu. But when it became apparent that they were heavily influenced by strands of political Islam and transnational Islamist and had international business and finance networks to the outside world- where the shift in the politics of Somalia had gone largely unnoticed- the Courts' sudden ascendance looked like a carefully planned Islamic revolution. This was an incorrect analysis that led to the implementation of faulty US policies that diminished the power of the UIC and in the process enabled Ethiopia to invade Somalia and led to the most violent phase of the conflict. The brutal Ethiopian military occupation that began on Christmas eve of 2006 contributed to the disintegration of Somali society.

### **Aims and Intentions of the Islamists**

The UIC achieved the unthinkable in 2006, uniting Mogadishu for the first time in 16 years, and re-establishing peace and security. The Courts undertook significant and highly symbolic public actions. Road blocks were removed and even the ubiquitous piles of rubbish that had blighted the city for a decade or more were cleared. The main Mogadishu airport and seaport were reopened and rehabilitated for the first time in a decade. Squatters were made to vacate government buildings, illegal land grabs were halted, and special courts were opened to deal with the myriad of claims for the restitution of property. The activities and the impressive achievements of the UIC were too obvious to ignore, and in many ways were seen as a challenge by the Transitional Federal Government.

However, the UIC was a 'broad mosque', bringing together people from moderate and extreme wings of political Islam. Indeed the wide appeal of the Courts left ample room for contradictory interpretations by insiders, observers and critics. Nevertheless, key activists within the Islamic Courts certainly subscribed to forms of political Islam ranging from Quttubism to Wahabism that have all espoused radical, violent and anti-'Western' sentiment in one form or another.

### **The Fall of the Union of Islamic Courts**

The speedy rise of the Courts' popularity and its accumulation of power that reached beyond Mogadishu unnerved many in the Horn of Africa and beyond. Ethiopia was no stranger to intervention in the internal affairs of Somalia, as clearly revealed in its many roles as a supporter of the President of the Transitional Federal Government, Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf as well as many other stakeholders, and is the main external factor involved in the rise and fall of the Courts. The regional tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as the global 'war on terror', had a role to play. The US government was convinced that non-Somali terror suspects were sheltered in Mogadishu by elements connected to the UIC.

The Bush administration, perceiving Somalia and the Islamic Courts through the lens of the 'war on terror' and having botched the earlier support for the warlord program to fight the UIC, began stepping up aid to longtime ally and neighboring Ethiopian autocrat Meles Zenawi. Behind the scenes, General John Abizaid, at the time U.S. Centcom commander, had visited Addis Ababa to express some last-minute reservations to Prime Minister Zenawi. The decision had been made though, and ultimately Washington lent its support to the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia. The historical significance of this less publicized invasion is enormous. For the first time in the history of modern international politics, international law and nation-states, a country was invaded by another state and no concern was raised.

Since the Courts had always rejected the idea of such external forces, this encouraged not just al-Shabab<sup>8</sup> but also the 'hawks' within the Supreme Council of the UIC to think there was an international conspiracy against them. The trigger point for the Ethiopian invasion was a week's ultimatum to leave Somalia or face forcible expulsion given by the Courts' military arm, Sheikh Indha'adde, and his (*Al-Shabab*) deputy, Sheikh Muktar Robbow 'Abu Mansour' on 12 December 2006.

The Ethiopian military crossed the Somali border on 24 December 2006, and reports indicate that "CIA agents traveled with the Ethiopian troops, helping to direct operations" (Bloomfield 2008). The United States also provided important satellite

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<sup>8</sup> Al shabab are mainly confused, ruthless youth with no profound understanding of Islam. They can cause a great damage for a short period, but there is no evidence to show that they have the necessary skills to govern or produce a credible leadership.

intelligence and other battleground information from unmanned Predator drones. "A lot of what we taught them was used to fight that global War on Terror," observed an American military adviser who had trained Ethiopian soldiers now fighting in Somalia. In terms of weaponry, he noted, "They got what they needed" (quoted in Bloomfield 2008).

American Special Forces also conducted periodic operations inside Somali territory (Bloomfield 2008), possibly moving out of a rumored CIA base in eastern Ethiopia (The Economist 2008). U.S. warships also moved into position off the coast of Somalia in anticipation of coming operations. Acting on intelligence from the ground, Washington ordered bombing raids targeting what it believed to be Islamist militants. Since January 2007 American-piloted AC-130 gunships and cruise missiles have blasted Somali territory at least half dozen times. The first of these air raids killed what turned out to be 70 Somali goat herders whom the Pentagon had initially claimed were Islamic fighters (McLure 2008). After several other attempts, in May 2008, the bombings finally succeeded in killing the leader of the al-Shabab militia, Aden Hashi Ayro (Schmitt and Gettleman 2008). Here too, the strike demolished the surrounding homes, killing 10 others (Perry 2008).

In summary, the year 2006 was to become quite dramatic for Somalia, featuring the creation of a counter-terrorism alliance of warlords of dubious repute, the establishment of control over most of the country by the Islamic courts with a somewhat opaque agenda, and an illegal Ethiopian armed intervention which was followed by a rapid plunge of the country into an abyss of chaos and human suffering.

While the leadership of the Union of Islamic Courts was originally a mix of moderate and conservative Islamic actors, the current insurgency in Somalia no longer maintains this character. A peace agreement between the former moderate elements of the Courts, now called the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia, and the TFG has moved the reconciliation process forward, but also created a rift among the Islamic Courts leadership. The old leaders of the Courts no longer control the insurgency. Battle-hardened al-Shabab militants, perhaps poised to succeed the Transitional Federal Government, espouse a far more radical and anti-Western Islamic ideology.

## **Is Somalia a Breeding Ground for Terrorists?**

Somalia has recently attracted growing attention as allegedly one of the most likely breeding grounds for terrorism. These accusations have mainly been made by the US and Ethiopia for different and overlapping reasons. These converging strategic reasons pushed Somalia further over the edge in 2006-07. In this section of the paper, a brief historical analysis of the background of these recent events is provided. To keep the issues in perspective, one needs to realize some of the recurrent themes within Somalia which also play a role on the external view of Somalia. These include nationalism and irredentism, clanism, various “state pathologies,” the economy and religion.

According to Issa-Salwe (1996), “[T]he Somali inter-clan conflict is centred on feuds as it aims to injure or eliminate the hostile clan, to seek revenge, to reverse wrongs, and to protect its rights over resources.” One might even speak of a “security dilemma of clan rivalry” as argued by David Laitin (1991: 151):

“First, for all nomadic groups in a battle against unforgiving nature, every grazing area, every watering hole, is vital for survival. Increased measures by any clan to enhance security must therefore be seen by leaders of other clans as threatening their physical survival. The security dilemma can thus be seen as a permanent condition of life in the Somali bush. Second, as Siyaad seeded clan warfare through strategic distribution of weapons he received as foreign aid, he surely threatened the survival of enemy clans, who themselves were impelled to seek comparable arms to secure their future. Third, after the collapse of the Siyaad regime in 1991, all clans feared for their futures if an enemy clan captured the reins of power. Surely they armed themselves in part because of the disastrous potential consequences for their security of not arming”.

One could also argue that Somalia was and still remains a violent place, but for variety of other reasons that have nothing to do with the contemporary notion of terrorism. However, it is possible to link Somalia’s problem to external forces. For example, even though it has not been officially confirmed, the United States – seemingly acting through the CIA and the private military company “Select Armor” – was in the beginning of 2006 “handing suitcases full of cash to warlords on the streets

of Mogadishu”. This was bluntly put by John Prendergast and Colin Thomas-Jensen (2007), who estimated the cash flow to be \$150,000 per month. The outcome of these efforts was the formation in February 2006 of an Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT, sometimes referred to as ATA: Anti-Terrorist Alliance) as covered by many experts in the field (Prunier 2006; Tomlinson 2006). The rationale for the Bush Administration’s support for the ARPCT was spelled out by Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jenday Frazer, who maintained and promoted a policy based on the fact that the US “...will work with those elements that will help us root out al-Qaeda and to prevent Somalia from becoming a safe haven for terrorists” and that they were “doing it in the interest of protecting America” (McGregor 2006). US policy has enabled the capturing or killing of persons who are believed to have been involved in international terrorist attacks and an effort to stop Somalia from becoming a safe haven for al-Qaeda operatives.

In a September 2008 paper entitled *Somalia: A Country in Peril, a Policy Nightmare* Ken Menkhaus, professor at Davidson College and an American who has been following developments in Somalia for many years, made some important comments about al-Shabab. After al-Shabaab severed its links with the Union of Islamic Courts and the ARS, Menkhaus explained that jihadist cells in Mogadishu linked to al-Shabaab have engaged in a campaign of threats and alleged assassinations against Somalis who worked for western aid agencies or those who collaborated with United Nations agencies and western NGOs. In July 2008, Menkhaus emphasized that however, not all al-Shabab members embraced this policy. Al-Shabaab’s spokesperson, Sheikh Mukhtar Robow, condemned the policy of assassinations, commenting that it was unbecoming for al-Shabaab to kill persons who are trying to help the Somali people.

It is not clear to what extent the so-called Somali Jihadists have played a role in facilitating al-Qaeda operations and planning. Somalia is a chaotic, dysfunctional and anarchic place and this would seem to preclude any group from being able to offer external militants a reliable conduit through which to develop a viable logistical presence. Furthermore, Somali Muslim tendencies- while strong and anti-western in focus- are heavily driven along ethnic and tribal lines and traditionally have not provided a firm ideological framework for the fostering of concerted transnational

militant jihadist identity. It is important to note that the role of radical Islam is limited and Somalia cannot be considered as a main theatre for radical Islamist activity. This is largely because it is too poor for most people to care about anything more than getting by on a day-to-day basis. Another factor many overlook is that there is no tradition of martyrdom in Somalia, and importantly, the country's Islamist community has not been instrumental in sending fighters to participate in overseas jihadist struggles such as those that have occurred in Afghanistan and Bosnia (Rabasa, et al. 2006). This could change if the al-Shabab segment splits from the UIC and continues its violent methods to control the whole country.

Intelligence officials say that al-Qaeda has had a presence in Somalia since the early 1990s and that it was associated with al-Ittihad al-Islami, a precursor to the UIC (Terrorism Monitor, February 10, 2005)<sup>9</sup>. The plotters of the East Africa embassy bombings are also reported to have used Somalia as a staging area. Although al-Qaeda's presence in Somalia appears to be long standing, it has yet to translate into a significant number of foreign fighters coming into the country, such as in Afghanistan and Iraq, or of Somali resistance fighters crossing borders (see appendix).

## **Conclusion**

Somalia is a conflict-ridden country that has experienced a host of problems throughout its history, most of them related to the frustrated national ambitions and weak state structures. Since the early 1990s, the country has been in a state of war, pitting clans against each other with their respective political superstructures and in ever-changing patterns of alignment, both internally and with external players.

The above analysis has attempted to show that some of the US policies with regard to Somalia were based on erroneous premises. Neither has the Horn seen many terrorist attacks linked to Islamist groups in the past (see appendix), nor were there sufficient reasons prior to the dramatic events in Somalia in 2006-07 to expect a change in that pattern in the near future. As it was, there did not seem to be much fertile soil for the

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<sup>9</sup> Terrorism Monitor is managed by Erich Marquardt, Program Manager of Global Terrorism Analysis at The Jamestown Foundation ([www.jamestown.org](http://www.jamestown.org)).

seeds of Islamist extremism which some, including the al Qaeda network, tried to sow there.

Even though the sub-region was host to several intractable conflicts, most took the form of ordinary guerrilla war rather than terrorism, and most were primarily motivated by political grievances and nationalism rather than by religious fervor. Religious extremism has never been predominant and, at most, an epiphenomenon, i.e. a vehicle for articulating political grievances and rallying support for a political cause rather than a motive for conflict as such. Moreover, contrary to prevailing opinion, Somalia was neither a battlefield, staging area nor a breeding ground for terrorism, not even after the collapse of the state. However, US policies in the region may have inadvertently helped bring to power and subsequently radicalise some of the Islamist forces in the country.

Ethiopian involvement in Somalian affairs will continue in different ways. However, their military presence will diminish and there is ample evidence which indicates that Ethiopian forces will leave Somalia soon. Ethiopia can't afford to stay in Somalia without the help of the US and the constant attacks from the Somali-Islamist groups are not only causing a lot of casualties but also damaging its economy. The major concern is the viability of the Somali Transitional Federal government which this paper considers to be very fragile, and the possibility of the formation of many more Islamist militant groups as a result of splits and disintegration of the UIC which might prolong the civil war in Somalia.

### **Postscript**

*On Saturday 22nd of August 2009, Residents of certain parts of Mogadishu could not hear the call for prayer to break the fast of the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, as al-Shabab started shelling the TFG and AMISOM locations. This has nothing to do with any form of Islam; this is pure greed for power at any cost. A week before this incident, al-shabab moved all the sellers of khat (a plant that's leaves are consumed by many Somalis as a mild stimulant) to a distant location from the main shopping areas.*

Alshabab can be analyzed using these two events. On the one hand, by removing the khat sellers from the city centre, the organization did something that many Somalis support. On the other hand, many more oppose al-Shabab as they violated a fundamental Islamic principle by killing people during the holy month of Ramadan. Al-Shabab opted to ignore that Allah commands that "There is no compulsion in religion" Surah (Chapter) 2, Ayah (Verse) 256. He also states: "So remind them (O' Muhammad) for you are only a reminder. You are not one who should be authoritarian over them (in teaching them about their religion)" (Chapter 88, Verses 21 and 22). He also says "And if it had been thy Lord's will, they would all have believed (all mankind.) Wilt thou (O' Muhammad) then compel mankind, against their will to Believe? (Nay!)" (Chapter 10, Verses 99 and 100).

The Islamist group (Union of Islamic courts) that led the successful insurgency campaign which ended the Ethiopian occupation has primarily split into two factions; the moderate faction (that was based in Asmara, Eritrea for a while) and that is now part of the unity government. The other faction is the extremist group that is sworn to oppose it to the end. This opposition group who previously were part of the Islamic group, re-branded themselves as the al-Shabab and Hizbul Islam, an entity that many refer to as neo-Islamists. They have carried out strings of violent attacks, high profile assassinations and suicide bombings in various parts of the country.

This paper suggested the possibility of the Islamist groups disintegrating into different smaller groups, some more violent than others. We have seen this happen, however, many believe that the al-Shabab movement is nothing more than an ephemeral phenomenon. They have neither coherent strategy nor the necessary popular support of the 2005-2006 Islamist group, the UIC. They seem to attract and recruit many confused youth of impressionable age from the refugees camps and recently even from the Somali diaspora. It is this latter group that require further research and thorough analysis; what makes a Somali teenager, who may apparently be doing well at school, to leave the easy and comfortable life of a US or Australian city and join terrorists fighting for reasons beyond human comprehension.

There are also reports of many foreign fighters joining al-Shabab. However, the numbers quoted seem to be exaggerated. One needs to keep in mind that al-Shabab

lacks credible Islamic leaders. The track record of the current leadership reveals their confused agenda of fighting tribal wars in the name of Islam or seeking power via Islamic camouflage. Al-Shabab used the speech of the Speaker of the Parliament, when he called upon Somalia's neighboring states including Ethiopia, whose oppressive occupation had ended a few months earlier, and called on all Somalis to unite in order to justify their invitation of foreign fighters to the country. Al-Shabab accuses the unity government of being a foreign agent formed by the UN and the US and therefore claim to have the right to wage a religious war against them to end all forms of foreign domination.

One needs to be mindful of the only goal al-Shabab ever publicly mentioned, and that was to expel Ethiopian troops from Mogadishu, which has been achieved. However, the organization is now insisting on the removal of African peacekeepers – AMISOM from Somalia. The question then is: what will they want next? So far al-Shabab has failed to get popular support among the Somalis in general, however, the weakness and the corruption of the unity government which alienate many Somalis, seem to delay their inevitable implosion.

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## Appendix I

Table 1: Terrorist Incidents in East Africa, 1998-2005								
Country	Year	Date	Inc.	Inj.	Fat.	Perp.	Nature	Targ.
Djibouti	2004	18/01	B	6	0	?	?	Train
Eritrea	2003	10/08	As	1	2	EIJM	Isl	Car
	2004	01/03	B	12	3	EIJM	Isl	Hotel
	2004	24/05	B	50	3	?	?	Gov.
	1999	03/04	K	0	0	ONLF	Pol	Aid
	1999	13/11	B	1	2	?	?	Train
	2000	22/03	LM	1	14	OLF	Pol	Kenyans
	2000	17/08	R	0	6	?	?	El. mon.
	2002	23/07	B	?	?	OLF	Pol	Vehicle
	2002	11/09	B	38	1	?	?	Hotel
Ethiopia	2003	19/01	M	1	0	?	?	?
	2003	20/03	B	12	0	?	?	Hotel
	2003	10/09	AA	?	1	?	?	Aid
	2003	26/09	B	9	2	?	?	Train
	2004	04/01	B	0	0	?	?	Vehicle
	2004	05/04	AA	0	0	OLF	Pol	Education
	2004	02/05	AA	3	1	OLF	Pol	Business
	2004	24/06	B	?	?	OLF	Pol	Gov.
	1998	07/08	B/S	5,000	291	AQ	Isl	US Emb.
Kenya	2002	28/11	R B/	0	0	AQ	Isl	Aircraft
	2002	28/11	S B	80	13	AQ	Isl	Hotel
	2002	18/12		0	0	?	?	Discotec
	2002	20/12	Ar	0	0	?	?	Discotec
	2003	08/03	B	0	0	?	?	Mosque
	1998	15/04	K	?	?	?	?	Aid
	1999	19/09	B	0	0	ULA	Isl	Oil pipeline
	2001	16/11	AA	9	18	?	?	Quran School
	2003	28/07	B	0	0	?	?	Hotel
Somalia	2004	20/06	K	?	?	?	?	NGO
	2004	04/10	As	0	1	?	?	Aid worker
	2005	09/02	As	0	1	AI	Isl	Journ.
	2005	17/02	B	6	2	?	?	Hotel
	2005	03/05	B	38	15	?	?	Gov.
	2005	11/07	AA	?	1	?	?	NGO
Sudan	2005	06/11	AA	?	5	?	?	Gov. target
	1998	02/07	B	?	?	?	?	Airport
	1998	02/07	B	?	?	?	?	Power plant
	1999	18/02	K	0	4	SPLA	Pol	NGO
	2001	23/01	B	0	0	SPLA	Pol	Oil pipeline
	2001	05/08	?	?	?	SPLA	Pol	Oil pipeline
	2002	26/04	AA	0	60	LRA	Chr	Funeral Party
	2002	15/10	H	?	?	?	?	Saudi aircraft
	2005	05/7	AA	0	5	LRA	Chr	Vehicle
	2005	05/7	AA	11	6	LRA	Chr	NGO
2005	05/11	AA	1	1	LRA	Chr	Air worker	
Tanzania	1998	07/08	B/S	77	10	AQ	Isl	US Emb.

Tanzania (Zanzibar)	1999	23/12	B	0	0	?	?	Beer depot
	2004	20/03	B	0	0	?	?	Restaurant
	2004	20/03	B	0	0	?	?	Gov.
	2000	12/11	B	1	0	?	?	Gov.
Uganda	1998	04/04	B	2	0	?	?	Hotel
	1998	04/04	B	5	2	?	?	Hotel
	1998	12/07	B	3	1	?	?	Restaurant
	1998	18/07	B	?	?	?	?	Civilians
	1998	25/08	B	6	30	NALU	Pol	Bus
	1998	27/11	AA	17	16	LRA	Chr	Aid
	1999	01/03	B	4	0	?	?	Restaurant
	1999	01/03	K	0	8	IH	Pol	Tourists
	1999	10/04	B	4	0	?	?	Taxi park
	1999	11/04	B	13	2	?	?	Taxi park
	1999	14/04	B	35	4	?	?	Restaurant
	1999	24/04	B	16	5	?	?	Stadium
	1999	06/05	B	1	0	?	?	Civilians
	1999	07/05	B	10	1	?	?	Civilians
	1999	30/05	B	12	2	AMM	Isl	Restaurant
	2000	04/05	K	0	0	LRA	Chr	Rel.
	2000	01/10	As	?	1	LRA	Chr	Rel.
	2000	09/10	B	60	9	LRA	Chr	Disco
	2001	14/03	B	3	2	?	?	Civilians
	2001	16/03	B	4	1	?	?	Civilians
	2001	07/07	B	13	1	?	?	Civilians
	2002	24/07	K	?	?	LRA	Chr	Gov.
	2003	01/09	Am	?	22	LRA	Chr	Vehicle
	2003	13/10	AA	20	22	LRA	Chr	Restaurant
	2003	18/11	AA	?	12	LRA	Chr	Civilians
	2004	01/02	AA	?	8	LRA	Chr	Civilians
	2004	21/02	B	60	239	LRA	Chr	Refugees
	2004	05/02	AA	50	47	LRA	Chr	Refugees
	2004	14/04	AA	8	13	LRA	Chr	Vehicle
	2004	18/04	K	0	0	LRA	Chr	Rel.
	2004	17/05	AA	10	7	LRA	Chr	Vehicles
	2004	20/12	AA	1	2	LRA	Chr	Vehicle
	2005	19/01	As	0	1	LRA	Chr	MP
	2005	23/02	AA	7	1	LRA	Chr	Civilians
2005	26/02	Ae	8	1	LRA	Chr	Civilians	
2005	09/03	AA	16	6	LRA	Chr	Civilians	
2005	15/03	AA	7	2	LRA	Chr	Civilians	
2005	26/03	K	13	?	LRA	Chr	Civilians	
2005	05/05	AA	?	4	LRA	Chr	Vehicle	
2005	05/05	AA	14	10	LRA	Chr	IDPs	
Uganda	2005	10/07	AA	?	14	LRA	Chr	Civilians
	2005	18/11	AA	?	5	LRA	Chr	Vehicle
	2005	21/11	AA	5	12	LRA	Chr	Vehicle
	2005	13/12	AA	?	8	LRA	Chr	Vehicle
<p><b>Legend:</b> AA: Armed Attack; AI: Al-Islah; Am: Ambush; AMM: Ahmadiya Muslim Mission; AQ: Al Qaeda; Ar: Arson; As: Assass; B: Bomb; C: Christian; EIJM: Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement; H: Hijacking; I: Islamist; IH: Interahamwe; K: Kidnapping; LM: Land Mine; LRA: Lord's Resistance Army; M: Mortar; NALU: National Army for the Liberation of Uganda; OLF: Oromo Liberation Front; ONLF: Ogaden National Liberation Front; P: Political; R: Rocket; S: Suicide attack; SPLA: Sudan People's Liberation Army; Tanz(Z): Tanzania (Zanzibar); ULA: Ummah Liberation Army</p>								

Year	Inc.	Inj.	Fat.
1998	11	5,110	350
1999	14	96	28
2000	6	62	30
2001	6	29	22
2002	9	118	74
2003	10	43	61
2004	18	200	324
2005	20	126	100
Av. 1998-2005	11.8	723.0	123.7
Av. 1999-2005	11.9	96.3	91.3

**Legend:** Inc: Incidents; Inj: Injuries; Fat: Fatalities;  
Av: Annual Average

Motive	Inc.	Inj.	Fat.
Unknown	43	284	76
Political	11	10	57
Christian	32	308	534
Islam	8	105	21
Emb. attacks	2	5,077	301

Country	Inc.	Inj.	Fat.
Dibouti	1	6	0
Eritrea	3	63	8
Ethiopia	15	191	43
Kenya (A)	6	5,080	304
Kenya (B)	5	80	13
Somalia	11	53	43
Sudan	10	12	76
Tanzania (A)	5	78	10
Tanzania (B)	4	1	0
Tanzania (C)	0	0	0
Tanzania (D)	4	1	0
Uganda	44	427	521

**Legend:** Inc: Incidents; Inj: Injuries; Fat: Fatalities;  
(Kenya and Tanzania) A: Total; B): without embassy bombings; (Tanzania) C: Mainland; D: only Zanzibar

Based on data from the MPIT Terrorism Knowledge Base at <http://www.mipt.org/>, last accessed on 20 October 2008.

**Table 1** was compiled as a complete listing of all the terrorists incidents in the region, based on the incident records in the “Terrorism Knowledge Base,” which is referred to as the authoritative database by the very same US Counterterrorism Office which has placed the spotlight on East Africa. It has taken 1998 as the starting year, for the simple reason that this was the first year with data for both international and domestic terrorism. However, 1998 was special because of two almost simultaneous incidents, i.e. the aforementioned attacks on the USA embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on the 7th of August, which account for about one third of the total fatalities for the entire period and almost ninety percent of the total recorded injuries. The analytical **tables 2-4** have therefore also included totals excluding the 1998 figures, i.e. totals for 1999-2005.