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“Al Shabaab: Recruitment and Radicalization within the Muslim American
Community and the Threat to the Homeland”

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Chairman King, Ranking Member Thompson and other members of the Committee, I want to thank you for inviting me to speak today about Al Shabaab and the threat it poses to the U.S. Homeland and American interests. I would also like to thank my colleague at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and *The Long War Journal*, Bill Roggio, who helped me prepare this written testimony.

My testimony will focus primarily on Shabaab's ties to al Qaeda and the risk of Shabaab attacking America. Shabaab's ability to win new recruits inside the United States and the West is particularly disturbing. The possibility that an American Shabaab recruit may return from Somalia as part of a terrorist operation is obviously a major concern for intelligence and law enforcement professionals.

Before getting to the heart of my testimony, however, I want to make a general point about Shabaab's reach here and its terror inside Somalia. It is obvious that a majority of Somali-Americans do not support Shabaab or its agenda. Most Somalis came to this country to start a new life and get away from the poverty and war that has ravaged their nation. At the same time, many of the Somalis who remained in their home country have resisted Shabaab's reign of terror. Indeed, there is great tension between the Sufi version of Islam that is prevalent among Somali clans and Shabaab's perverse ideology. Many Sufi leaders inside Somalia were forced to abandon their peaceful roots to fight Shabaab. In fact, the victims of Shabaab's terror are predominantly Muslims in Somalia who do not adhere to Shabaab's horrible ideology. Shabaab has also undertaken a deliberate program to desecrate and destroy Sufi mosques and shrines.

The resistance to Shabaab's version of Islam inside Somalia can be seen even in al Qaeda's propaganda. In December 2008, Anwar al Awlaki called on Muslims to financially support Shabaab and prayed for the group's success inside Somalia. While cheering on Shabaab's efforts to implement Sharia law, Awlaki also advised the group to be patient with Muslims who "are suffering from the illnesses of tribalism, ignorance, and a campaign of defamation of sharia." Awlaki added, "Therefore you need to win the hearts and minds of the people and take them back to their fitrah [natural predisposition]." ¹

In other words, Shabaab does not represent the "hearts and minds" of most Somalis, either here in America or abroad.

Shabaab has, unfortunately, wooed some young men from America to Somalia. And in a few cases, these recruits have launched suicide attacks. The first known American suicide bomber, Shirwa Ahmed, blew himself up in Somaliland as part of a Shabaab attack in October 2008. Since then, there have been at least two other reports of Somali-Americans who were convinced to become Shabaab suicide bombers. ²

The willingness of these recruits to die for Shabaab's cause creates an opportunity for the al Qaeda terror network and a threat to American security. Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, al Qaeda has consistently attempted to recruit Muslims living in the West for its

¹ Thomas Joscelyn, "Alleged Shabaab operative to stand trial in New York," *The Long War Journal*, July 6, 2011; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/07/alleged_al_shabaab_o.php.

² As of June of this year, one of these reports remains unconfirmed.

operations. In 2002, for example, a convert to Islam named Jose Padilla was arrested in Chicago after returning from Pakistan, where he conspired with senior al Qaeda leaders to attack targets inside the U.S. Al Qaeda recognized that by relying on recruits from the West it could more easily defeat the elaborate layers of security put in place since late 2001. Padilla's case is hardly unique. Al Qaeda recruits living in the UK and elsewhere have been used in attacks in their adopted homelands. Al Qaeda's July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks in London, for example, utilized British citizens of Pakistani descent who traveled to Pakistan for terrorist training.

It is possible that Shabaab's recruits could be used in a similar manner. However, there is great confusion here in the U.S. as to whether or not Shabaab is really a part of al Qaeda's international terrorist network. Most press accounts accurately note that Shabaab is "linked" to or "affiliated" with al Qaeda. My view is that the link is much stronger than some counterterrorism analysts realize. And this link goes far beyond the two organizations' identical ideological roots.

Indeed, my worry is that some counterterrorism analysts may be falling into the same trap analysts fell into previously with respect to another al Qaeda affiliate, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). Although AQAP was well known to CT and intelligence officials prior to the failed Christmas Day 2009 attack on Flight 253, they did not consider AQAP a major threat to the U.S. In its report on the intelligence failures that allowed Umar Farouq Abdulmutallab on board Flight 253, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence found (emphasis added): "Prior to the 12/25 plot, counterterrorism analysts at NCTC, CIA, and NSA were focused on the threat of terrorist attacks in Yemen, but *were not focused on the possibility of AQAP attacks against the U.S. homeland.*"

This was a potentially devastating analytical error. As we've witnessed on multiple occasions now, AQAP has the intent and the capability to strike the U.S. This should not have come as a surprise. Since the 1990s, al Qaeda's strategy for inciting global conflict has relied on so-called "local" jihadist groups that can be folded into its international jihad. Jihadist groups from Southeast Asia to northern Africa have started out as local endeavors and eventually adopted al Qaeda's desire to strike the U.S.

With that focus in mind, I will now turn to a three-part overview of the relationship between Shabaab and al Qaeda. In the next section below, I highlight public statements made by senior Shabaab and al Qaeda leaders. Senior Shabaab terrorists have repeatedly said that their struggle is part of al Qaeda's international jihad, and senior al Qaeda terrorists have repeatedly praised the group.

Despite these public declarations, some analysts argue that the organizational ties between the two groups are minimal. My view is that, as clandestine organizations, neither Shabaab nor al Qaeda publishes an organizational chart. So, we do not know the full scope of their "operational" links. And as Bill Roggio has reported, Ayman al Zawahiri has even commanded Shabaab to play down these links publicly after previously trumpeting them.

In the second section below, I provide an overview of Shabaab's leadership. Shabaab's most senior leaders, including its founders, have longstanding ties to al Qaeda. The depth of these

personal ties cannot be easily dismissed. In the third and final section below, I evaluate the threat of Shabaab's recruits living in the West through the lens of Shabaab-al Qaeda relations.

Shabaab & Al Qaeda's Public Statements

Senior al Qaeda leaders have long seen Somalia as contested territory in their international campaign against the West and its allies. Al Qaeda members have claimed that they were instrumental in the 1993 "Black Hawk Down" episode in which 18 American servicemen were killed. While al Qaeda's claims of responsibility are almost certainly overblown, there is solid evidence that al Qaeda operatives were on the ground at the time. And al Qaeda never took its eyes off of Somalia.

In 2006, for instance, Osama bin Laden specifically mentioned Somalia as a key war front:

We will continue, God willing, to fight you and your allies everywhere, in Iraq and Afghanistan and in Somalia and Sudan until we waste all your money and kill your men and you will return to your country in defeat as we defeated you before in Somalia.³

In August 2008, senior Shabaab leader Mukhtar Robow admitted: "We are negotiating how we can unite into one [with al Qaeda]. We will take our orders from Sheik Osama bin Laden because we are his students."⁴ Robow continued:

Al Qaeda is the mother of the holy war in Somalia. Most of our leaders were trained in Al Qaeda camps. We get our tactics and guidelines from them. Many have spent time with Osama bin Laden.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported that Robow "also spoke for the first time about eventually expanding [Shabaab's] activities outside Somalia's borders, saying Americans, even journalists and aid workers, were not immune from attack because of what he called 'the aggression of the American government.'" Robow explained, "Once we end the holy war in Somalia, we will take it to any government that participated in the fighting against Somalia or gave assistance to those attacking us."

In September 2008, a senior Shabaab leader who was also an al Qaeda operative reached out to senior al Qaeda leaders in a 24-minute video posted online.⁵ Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, the dual-hatted Shabaab/al Qaeda leader, heaped praised on Osama bin Laden:

My greetings to the courageous commander and my honorable leader: Sheikh Osama bin Laden (may Allah protect him and his followers). I hope from Allah the highest... that this salutation reaches you while you are in ease and good health. Allah knows how much

³ Bill Roggio, "Excerpts from the Osama bin Laden Tape," *The Long War Journal*, June 30, 2006; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2006/06/excerpts_from_the_os.php#ixzz1T48WFwx8_

⁴ Edmund Sanders, "Conditions may be ripe for Al Qaeda to gain in Somalia," *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 2008.

⁵ Nick Grace, "Shabaab reaches out to al Qaeda senior leaders, announces death [of] al Sudani," *The Long War Journal*, September 2, 2008; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/09/shabab_reaches_out_t.php#ixzz1T42XeJB3.

we long for your meeting and the delight of your gentle voice... My sheikh! The heart offers you thousand greetings combined with my love and humility. My salutation is nostalgia and my love is permanent, filled with the truth of the emotions of the poets.

Ayman al Zawahiri, who was then al Qaeda's #2 leader at the time, responded to Shabaab in November 2008. Zawahiri called Shabaab "my brothers, the lions of Islam in Somalia."⁶ Zawahiri continued: "[R]ejoice in victory and conquest and hold tightly to the truth for which you have given your lives, and don't put down your weapons before the Mujahid state of Islam and Tawheed has been set up in Somalia."

In February 2009, Ayman al Zawahiri praised Shabaab's gains in southern and central Somalia. Zawahiri said Shabaab's victories were "a step on the path of the victory of Islam, the empowerment of Muslims, and the expulsion of the invaders of their land."⁷ Zawahiri continued:

It is the expansion of the influence of the Mujahideen in Somalia, the spreading of the authority of sharia [Islamic law], and the expulsion of the invaders -- the enemies of the Islam and their agents -- from broad regions of Somalia, foremost among which are the city of Baidoa. This city used to host the headquarters of the American-affiliated transitional government.

Senior Shabaab Leaders & Al Qaeda

Below, I have set forth a list of 13 current and deceased Shabaab leaders and operatives. This list is not intended to be comprehensive, although it does include most of Shabaab's most senior terrorists, including its emir. The mini-biographies below show Shabaab's roots in several closely allied terrorist organizations, including al Qaeda's East Africa cells, Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya (or AIAI), and the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). Both the ICU and AIAI had strong ties to al Qaeda. Shabaab was originally founded as the "youth" wing of the ICU.

Shabaab leaders are, at minimum, ideologically aligned with al Qaeda. They have repeatedly praised al Qaeda and announced that their terrorism is part of the terror network's global campaign. Several of them were also trained in Afghanistan, most likely in camps affiliated with al Qaeda. Therefore, even if there were no active operational links between these Shabaab leaders and al Qaeda, the group's ideology and historical roots make it a threat to American interests around the globe.

However, there are operational links between Shabaab and the al Qaeda network headquartered in Pakistan. Several terrorists on the list below were involved in al Qaeda's 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. This was al Qaeda's most devastating attack prior to September 11, 2001. These same terrorists were also responsible for al Qaeda's 2002 attacks in

⁶ Nick Grace, "Shabaab Leader Sanctioned as Zawahiri Responds to Group's Oath of Loyalty," *The Long War Journal*, November 21, 2008;

http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/11/shabaab_leader_sanct.php#ixzz1T45KY5Ih.

⁷ Bill Roggio, "Zawahiri praises Shabaab's takeover of southern Somalia," *The Long War Journal*, February 24, 2009; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/02/zawahiri_praises_sha.php#ixzz1T4CLKB6L.

Mombasa, Kenya. They went on to hold senior positions in Shabaab. There are other operational links as well. For example, one of the alleged terrorists on this list is a mid-level Shabaab operative who served as a liaison to another al Qaeda affiliate, AQAP.

1. Ahmed Abdi Aw Mohamed (aka “Godane”) – Godane is the founder and emir (leader) of Shabaab. Godane, like other Shabaab leaders, has been designated a terrorist by the U.S. Godane does not hide his allegiance to al Qaeda. In early 2010, Godane co-signed a statement saying that his group had “agreed to join the international jihad of al Qaeda.”⁸ Like other Shabaab leaders, Godane “trained and fought in Afghanistan” and has longstanding ties to terrorists in South Asia.⁹

2. Aden Hashi Ayro – Ayro was one of Shabaab’s co-founders and military commander until he was killed in an American airstrike in 2008. Ayro received his terrorist training in Afghanistan and was “long identified” by counterterrorism officials “as one of Al Qaeda’s top operatives in East Africa.”¹⁰ Ayro openly claimed to have turned his militia, the proto-Shabaab, “into the East African franchise for Al Qaeda.”¹¹ When Ayro was killed, an anonymous U.S. official told *The New York Times*: “For the Horn of Africa, this is pretty significant. He’s certainly considered a leader in Al Qaeda’s effort there. This can be chalked up as a success.”¹² Ayro befriended the leader of his clan, Hassan Dahir Aweys, who reportedly arranged for Ayro “to go to Afghanistan to fight with the Taliban against American forces in 2001.”¹³

Shabaab’s official biography of Ayro, released after his death, said that “he fought under the supervision of Al-Qaeda, and with its logistical support and expertise.”¹⁴

3. Fazul Mohammed (aka Harun Fazul) – In June, Fazul was killed by Somali forces. Fazul’s career demonstrates just how seamlessly a terrorist can work for al Qaeda, the ICU and Shabaab.¹⁵ At the time of his death, Fazul was both a senior Shabaab military commander and the head of East Africa Al Qaeda (EAAQ). Previously, Fazul was the ICU’s intelligence chief and simultaneously served as a top al Qaeda operative. And prior to that, Fazul was an al Qaeda member who reportedly fought in the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu. In November 2009, Osama bin Laden named Fazul the head of al Qaeda in East Africa. Godane, the emir of Shabaab, attended the ceremony where Fazul was named to this leadership position. Prior to his demise, Mohammed was wanted by U.S. authorities for his role in al Qaeda’s 1998 embassy bombings and 2002 attacks in Mombasa, Kenya. According to a Joint Task Force Guantanamo document, Fazul sought out bin Laden’s operational advice in recent years.

⁸ Abdi Sheikh and Abdi Guled, “Somali rebels unite, profess loyalty to al Qaeda,” Reuters, February 1, 2010; <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/02/01/us-somalia-conflict-idUSTRE6102Q720100201>.

⁹ Ted Dagne, “Somalia: Current Conditions and Prospects for a Lasting Peace,” Congressional Research Service, June 29, 2011; <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33911.pdf>.

¹⁰ Eric Schmitt and Jeffrey Gettleman, “Qaeda Leader Reported Killed in Somalia,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 2008.

¹¹ Aidan Hartley, “Tea With a Terrorist,” *The New York Times*, July 25, 2010.

¹² *The New York Times*, May 2, 2008.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, “The Strategic Challenge of Somalia’s Al-Shabaab,” *Middle East Quarterly*, Fall 2009, pp. 25-36; http://www.meforum.org/2486/somalia-al-shabaab-strategic-challenge#_ftnref4.

¹⁵ Bill Roggio, “Al Qaeda’s East Africa chief Fazul Mohammed killed in Somalia,” *The Long War Journal*, June 11, 2011; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/06/al-qaedas_east_afric_1.php.

4. Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan – Nabhan, Shabaab’s senior military commander, was killed in a US airstrike in September 2009. Prior to his demise, Nabhan was wanted by the U.S. government for his role in the al Qaeda’s 1998 embassy bombings, as well as the 2002 attacks in Mombasa, Kenya. In a video recorded in July 2008, Nabhan praised Osama bin Laden as “the courageous commander and my honorable leader.” The same video shows Nabhan training Shabaab recruits.¹⁶

5. Mukhtar Robow (aka Abu Mansur) – Robow’s is Shabaab’s spokesman. Like other Shabaab leaders, Robow received his terrorist training in Afghanistan.¹⁷ Robow also does not hide his allegiance to al Qaeda. As cited above, Robow has openly declared: “Al Qaeda is the mother of the holy war in Somalia. Most of our leaders were trained in Al Qaeda camps. We get our tactics and guidelines from them. Many have spent time with Osama bin Laden.” Robow also encouraged Shabaab’s terrorists to commit the July 11, 2008 terrorist attacks in Kampala, Uganda, killing nearly 80 people.¹⁸ Those bombings closely mirrored al Qaeda’s *modus operandi*.

6. Abu Talha al Sudani – Sudani, who was killed in 2007, “was al Qaeda’s ideological and strategic leader in East Africa.”¹⁹ Sudani was wanted for his role in the 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania as well as al Qaeda’s 2002 attacks in Kenya. Sudani was reportedly “close” to the aforementioned Ayro.²⁰ In fact, Nabhan announced Sudani’s death in an online video that also discussed the strike that killed Ayro.²¹

7. Issa Osman Issa – Issa is as a dual-hatted Shabaab and al Qaeda terrorist. Issa was one of three Shabaab leaders sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department in November 2008.²² The other two Shabaab leaders were Godane and Robow. Issa reportedly took part in al Qaeda’s 1998 embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, as well as the 2002 attacks in Mombasa, Kenya. Leaked Joint Task Force Guantanamo documents reference intelligence reports tying Issa to both al Qaeda and Shabaab. In one such memo, Issa is described as “a mobile commander for al Shabaab forces.”²³

8. Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys - Sheikh Aweys was co-leader of the Islamic Courts Union. In early 2009, he founded Hizbul Islam, a coalition of four Somali Islamic groups. Although the two organizations cooperated in attacks against their common enemies, Hizbul Islam became a rival of Shabaab after the two unsuccessfully attempted to merge forces. The two clashed in southern Somalia, including in Kismayo. Hizbul Islam was weakened by infighting and Sheikh Aweys eventually merged the group with Shabaab. Aweys is now a Shabaab commander.

¹⁶ *The Long War Journal*, September 2, 2008.

¹⁷ *The New York Times*, July 25, 2010.

¹⁸ *The New York Times*, July 25, 2010.

¹⁹ Bill Roggio, “Senior al Qaeda operative killed in Somalia,” *The Long War Journal*, September 1, 2008;

http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/09/senior_al_qaeda_oper_1.php.

²⁰ Obituary for Aden Hashi Ayro, *The Sunday Times* (UK), May 21, 2008;

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article3978645.ece>.

²¹ *The Long War Journal*, September 1, 2008.

²² Nick Grace, “Shabaab Leader Sanctioned as Zawahiri Responds to Group’s Oath of Loyalty,” *The Long War Journal*, November 21, 2008; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/11/shabaab_leader_sanct.php.

²³ JTF-GTMO Memo, “Subject: DAB Assessment of Guantanamo Detainee, ISN DJ9SO-0100127DP (S),” August 6, 2007.

Aweys is a longtime ally of al Qaeda and was trained in al Qaeda's pre-9/11 Afghan camps.²⁴ He was reportedly involved in the 1993 Battle of Mogadishu, more commonly known as the "Black Hawk Down" episode in which 18 American servicemen were killed. In November 2001, the U.S. State Department added him to its list of Specially Designated Terrorists. Aweys has long advocated suicide attacks, including the use of children as suicide bombers.

According to a leaked Joint Task Force Guantanamo file, Sheikh Aweys "sponsored" Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan in Mogadishu after Nabhan fled there following al Qaeda's November 28, 2002 terrorist attacks in Kenya.

9. Sheikh Hassan Turki - Sheikh Turki was a leader in the AIAI and then the Islamic Courts Union before forming his own organization, the Ras Kamboni Brigade. Sheikh Turki originally merged the Ras Kamboni Brigade into Sheikh Aweys' Hizbul Islam, but later broke from Aweys' group to join Shabaab in early 2010.²⁵ Shabaab's spiritual leader, Ahmed Abdi Godane, and Sheikh Turki released a joint statement announcing the merger. The statement read: "We have agreed to join the international jihad of al Qaeda ... We have also agreed to unite al Shabaab and Kamboni mujahideen to liberate the Eastern and Horn of Africa community who are under the feet of minority Christians."²⁶ Sheikh Turki operates terrorist training camps in southern Somalia and has trained suicide bombers close to the Kenyan border.²⁷

10. Bashir Mohamed Mahamoud – According to the United Nations, Mahamoud is a Shabaab "military commander" and "one of approximately ten members on al Shabaab's leadership council as of late 2008."²⁸ The UN notes that Mahamoud and "an associate were in charge of the 10 June 2009 mortar attack against the Somali Transitional Federal Government in Mogadishu."

A leaked Joint Task Force Guantanamo (JTF-GTMO) file notes that a current detainee, Abdul Malik Bajabu, has admitted to having "a close relationship" with Mahamoud.²⁹ The same file describes Mahamoud as an "EAAQ member." Mahamoud "planned to assassinate the Somali Prime Minister and conduct unspecified suicide attacks."

11. Abdul Malik Bajabu – Bajabu is currently held at Guantanamo and a JTF-GTMO threat assessment summarizing the intelligence on his activities alleges that he was a member of East Africa Al Qaeda (EAAQ) and the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), and also "has ties to the al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI)."³⁰ Bajabu has allegedly "admitted that he participated in the planning and execution" of the November 28, 2002 attacks on the Kikambala Paradise Hotel and an Israeli airliner in Kenya.

²⁴ Bill Roggio, "Somalia's Aweys calls for more suicide attacks," *The Long War Journal*, September 20, 2009; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2009/09/somalias_aweys_calls.php.

²⁵ Bill Roggio, "Shabaab absorbs southern Islamist group, splits Hizbul Islam," *The Long War Journal*, February 1, 2010; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/02/shabaab_absorbs_sout.php.

²⁶ *Reuters*, February 1, 2010.

²⁷ *The Long War Journal*, February 1, 2010.

²⁸ <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/sc9904.doc.htm>

²⁹ JTF-GTMO Memo, "Subject: Combatant Status Review Tribunal Input and Recommendation for Continued Detention Under DoD Control (CD) for Guantanamo Detainee, ISN US9KE-010025DP (S)" (Abdul Malik Bajabu), May 22, 2007.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

The details of Bajabu's career alleged in the threat assessment show a high degree of coordination between al Qaeda members and Shabaab leaders. The file cites intelligence reports that say Bajabu operated out of Mogadishu and conspired with Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, Fazul Mohammed, Issa Osman Issa, and Bashir Mohamed Mahamoud, as well as other terrorists working for al Qaeda, Shabaab, and the ICU.

The JTF-GTMO threat assessment also alleges that a member of a group called the "London Boys" was a "close associate" of Bajabu's. The "London Boys" allegedly received terrorist training under Fazul Mohammed and may have been recruited by al Qaeda to be "sleeper agents" for future attacks.³¹

12. Ibrahim al Afghani – Al Afghani is rumored to have been killed in a Predator strike in late June.³² (As of this writing, this report has not been confirmed.) Afghani previously served as Shabaab's regional governor of the Kismayo administration. The Somalia Monitoring Group, in a March 2010 report, said Afghani is one of the group's top leaders. Afghani was listed after Ahmed Abdi Aw Mohamed (aka Godane), Shabaab's emir.

Afghani received his nom de guerre because he waged jihad in Afghanistan for years. A leaked Joint Task Force Guantanamo (JTF-GTMO) threat assessment, dated Aug. 6, 2007, describes Afghani as "an al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) military commander known for his religious knowledge as well as loyalty and support for al Qaeda and the Taliban and for his continuing links to Afghanistan." The file continues: "[Afghani] was one of the first founders of al Qaeda affiliated AIAI cells and one of the instigators of terrorist attacks in Somaliland."

13. Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame – Earlier this month, the Department of Justice indicted Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame "on charges of providing material support to al Shabaab and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)."³³ The DOJ alleges that Warsame "received explosives and other military-type training from AQAP," "worked to broker a weapons deal with AQAP on behalf of al Shabaab," and provided explosives training.

Warsame's alleged role as an intermediary between AQAP and Shabaab is hardly surprising. Multiple recent reports have pointed to collusion between these two branches of the jihadist terror network.³⁴ For instance, the *Washington Post* reported in late June that two Shabaab leaders targeted in an U.S. missile strike had "direct ties" to AQAP cleric Anwar al Awlaki.³⁵

³¹ "London 'sleeper cell' told to carry out wave of terror attacks by Bin Laden before his death," *The Daily Mail* (UK), May 15, 2011; <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1387332/Osama-Bin-Laden-dead-London-sleeper-cell-told-carry-attacks-death.html>.

³² Thomas Joscelyn and Bill Roggio, "Senior Shabaab commander rumored to have been killed in recent Predator strike," *The Long War Journal*, July 9, 2011; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/07/senior_shabaab_comma_1.php.

³³ <http://www.justice.gov/cjs/docs/news-07052011.html>

³⁴ Thomas Joscelyn, "Alleged Shabaab operative to stand trial in New York," *The Long War Journal*, July 6, 2011; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/07/alleged_al_shabaab_o.php.

³⁵ Greg Jaffe and Karen DeYoung, "U.S. drone targets two leaders of Somali group allied with al-Qaeda, official says," *The Washington Post*, June 29, 2011; http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/national-security/us-drones-target-two-leaders-of-somali-group-allied-with-al-qaeda/2011/06/29/AGJFzrH_story.html.

Shabaab's Recruits and Al Qaeda

There is extensive evidence that Shabaab's recruiting in the West is not limited to "nationalistic" aims. While some recruits probably do travel to Somalia to take part in a "local" (civil) war, there is always the potential for these same recruits to become indoctrinated in Shabaab's al Qaeda-inspired ideology once they arrive there. Indeed, this has been al Qaeda's strategy, to fold "local" conflicts into an international jihad. Moreover, some Shabaab recruits are clearly radicalized before they even depart American soil.

Consider the case of Mohamoud Hassan, a Minneapolis man who was inspired to join Shabaab in Somalia. Hassan initially supported the Ethiopian invasion of Somalia – the event that some argue was the real driver of radicalization. But over time, Hassan began to change his views. The *New York Times* has reported that Hassan listened to al Qaeda cleric Anwar al Awlaki's lectures, which are filled with jihadist ideology. Hassan was also reportedly "incensed" by the U.S. air strike that killed Shabaab leader Aden Hashi Ayro, who is profiled above. It is especially curious that Hassan would lament Ayro's death because Ayro's ties to al Qaeda and extremist ideological beliefs were widely known. A friend of Hassan's made an astute observation in an interview with the *New York Times*. "They saw it as their duty to go and fight," the friend said. "If it was just nationalism, they could give money. But religion convinced them to sacrifice their whole life."³⁶

The willingness of some Shabaab recruits to commit suicide attacks, as Shirwa Ahmed did in October 2008, is another important indication that nationalism is not the sole driver of Shabaab's recruiting. The embrace of martyrdom is a central pillar of al Qaeda's ideology that was considered un-Islamic by many Muslim scholars until the last half of the twentieth century. Shabaab itself has carried out more than two dozen suicide attacks inside Somalia. While these suicide attacks have killed some foreigners, the main victims of Shabaab's suicide terrorism have been Somalis.³⁷

Shabaab's suicide attacks have begun to spill over into the surrounding countries – an unmistakable sign of al Qaeda's influence. The Shabaab cell that carried out the July 2010 attacks in Kampala, Uganda was named the Saleh Ali Nabhan Brigade. Nabhan, mentioned above, was a terrorist who served both Shabaab and al Qaeda.

Finally, Shabaab's recruits in the West have received training from senior al Qaeda operatives who are also members of Shabaab. Earlier this month, the Department of Justice agreed to a plea deal with a Minneapolis man named Omar Abdi Mohamed. According to a DOJ press release, Mohamed admitted that he helped Shabaab recruit Somali-Americans. The DOJ explains: "Upon arriving in Somalia, the men resided in al-Shabaab safe-houses in Southern Somalia until constructing an al-Shabaab training camp, where they were trained. Senior members of al-Shabaab and a senior member of al-Qaeda in East Africa conducted the training."³⁸

That is, Shabaab's Minneapolis recruits were delivered to a senior al Qaeda member for training.

³⁶ Andrea Elliott, "A Call to Jihad, Answered in America," *The New York Times*, July 12, 2009.

³⁷ Bill Roggio, "Shabaab suicide bomber kills Somali interior minister," *The Long War Journal*, June 10, 2011; http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2011/06/shabaab_suicide_bomb_1.php.

³⁸ <http://www.justice.gov/usao/mn/press/jul016.pdf>