



# SOMALIA

## Quick Facts

Population: 11,757,124 (July 2020 est.)

Area: 637,657 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Somali 85%, Bantu and other non-Somali 15% (including 30,000 Arabs)

GDP (official exchange rate): \$20.44 billion (2017 est.)

*Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated August 2020)*

## INTRODUCTION

*The U.S. State Department has noted that, despite experiencing significant military pressure in recent years, al-Shabaab has proven resilient. The group has “maintained control over large portions of the country” and “retained the ability to carry out high-profile attacks” aimed at both delegitimizing the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and weakening the resolve of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). In pursuit of these goals, al-Shabaab uses asymmetric tactics against AMISOM and Somali security forces, as well as attacks soft targets in Somalia and in neighboring AMISOM troop-contributing countries, mainly Kenya.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the group has had to grapple with the death of several key leadership figures as a result of U.S. aerial strikes, the loss of strongholds in parts of south-central Somalia, and, in the view of U.S. authorities, increasing factionalism and defections “as the appeal of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) created divisions within al-Shabaab’s core leadership.”<sup>2</sup> One reason for the group’s resilience is the weakness of the FGS, whose authority is not widely accepted by Somalis. Hampering the U.S. response to this threat is not only the absence of a capable partner government in Mogadishu but also Washington’s failure to creatively engage effective Somali authorities, including those in the unrecognized Republic of Somaliland.<sup>3</sup>*

## ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

Islamists active in Somalia fall roughly into one of seven principal groups:

*Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (“Movement of Warrior Youth,” al-Shabaab)*

Known colloquially as al-Shabaab, this movement arose out of the militant wing of the Islamic Courts Union. When the latter was defeated during a 2007 Ethiopian intervention, al-Shabaab broke with other Islamists who regrouped under the sponsorship of Eritrea, instead forming the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) to oppose the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) then installed in Mogadishu.

Founded in large part due to the efforts of Aden Hashi Ayro, a militant who had trained with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan prior to September 11, 2001, al-Shabaab’s schism with other Islamists reflects

Ayro's adherence to a more radical *jihadist* ideology that does not cooperate with the non-Muslim Eritrean regime, even against a common enemy. Although divided into several factions even before Ayro was killed by a U.S. aerial strike in May 2008, al-Shabaab was an effective fighting force overall. Senior al-Shabaab leadership has included veteran *jihadists* with experience on battlefields abroad, including in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Kashmir.<sup>4</sup> It seized large sections of southern and central Somalia, including parts of Mogadishu, where it has installed a strict Islamist regime that has carried out a number of harsh punishments—among them the stoning of a 13-year-old rape victim for the crime of “adultery” in 2008.<sup>5</sup>

Over time, al-Shabaab's leadership split into two principal currents. The first consists primarily of foreign or foreign-funded *jihadists* and follows a transnational *jihadist* agenda. It carried out the attack on Kenya's Westgate Shopping Mall in 2013, the subsequent April 2015 attack on Garissa University in Garissa, Kenya, and the January 2018 attack on Nairobi's DusitD2 hotel complex—incidents which collectively left over 200 people dead and scores injured. Ahmed Abdi Godane, also known as Mukhtar Abu Zubair, initially led this faction and proclaimed the group's formal allegiance to al-Qaeda and to Osama bin Laden's successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, in February 2012. The other faction renamed itself the “Islamic Emirate of Somalia” in early 2011. It rejected al-Qaeda's branding and objectives while it focused primarily on domestic challenges with a “nationalist agenda.”

Al-Shabaab's internal divisions facilitated its loss of control over Somalia. Since Kenyan and Ethiopian troops joined African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Transitional Federal Government forces to expel al-Shabaab from major cities beginning in late 2011, the group has surrendered its strongholds in numerous regional capitals. Al-Shabaab defections have increased substantially. In December 2012, Godane admitted major defeats, but pledged to continue a guerrilla war against Somali and AMISOM forces.<sup>6</sup>

In 2013, Godane moved against the nationalist faction of the organization, killing or forcing into hiding most of its senior leadership.<sup>7</sup> While Godane himself was killed by a U.S. aerial strike in September 2014, al-Shabaab still adheres to transnational *jihadism*. Under the leadership of Godane's successor, Ahmed Omar, al-Shabaab focuses less on controlling territory and more on launching successful attacks both within Somalia and in neighbouring countries. Targets have included Ugandan and Kenyan-run AMISOM bases in the southern Somali towns of Janale and El Adde, hotels and FGS figures in Mogadishu, and soft targets in neighbouring AMISOM troop-contributing countries, including Kenya and Djibouti.

The rise of the Islamic State in the Middle East has created another challenge to the organizational unity of al-Shabaab. Several al-Shabaab factions in Puntland and Southern Somalia have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, which sparked a crackdown on defectors in late 2015 by al-Shabaab's senior central leadership.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the Islamic State's media offices continue to encourage *al-Shabaab*-affiliated fighters in Somalia and members of the Somali diaspora abroad to support the group.

Clashes between factions loyal to the Islamic State and those loyal to al-Qaeda escalated in 2018.<sup>9</sup> In October of that year, the deputy commander of the self-styled Islamic State in Somalia (ISS) was killed by a suspected al-Shabaab death squad and, in December, al-Shabaab launched an offensive to get rid of ISS militants in Somalia.<sup>10</sup> On November 3, 2017, the United States conducted its first airstrikes against Islamic State in Somalia, proving the group's resilience following the defeat of its parent organization in Iraq and Syria and underlining the ongoing challenge posed by ISS to al-Shabaab.<sup>11</sup>

### *Hizbul Islam (“Islamic Party”)*

Led by Hassan Dahir ‘Aweys, previously the military commander of Somali Muslim Brotherhood offshoot al-Itihaad al-Islamiyya (AIAI, the “Islamic Union”) and subsequently the chairman of the *shura* of the Islamic Courts Union, Hizbul Islam is the product of several groups. Hizbul Islam does not place as much emphasis on global *jihadist* objectives; rather, its two principal demands are the strict implementation of *sharia* as the law in Somalia, and the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the country.

Hizbul Islam draws its membership and support primarily from ‘Aweys’ Habar Gedir sub-clan.<sup>12</sup>

By and large, Hizbul Islam has cooperated with al-Shabaab, although the two groups have come into occasional conflict over the division of spoils. Hizbul Islam lost control of Beledweyne to al-Shabaab in June 2010, retaining only some territory in the Bay and Lower Shabelle regions. Subsequently, during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, the two groups cooperated on a joint offensive against TFG and AMISOM forces in Mogadishu. Reports of a merger between the two groups surfaced at the end of 2010; however, in September 2012, a spokesperson from Hizbul Islam announced its split with al-Shabaab, citing ideological differences and al-Shabaab's weakened regional position.<sup>13</sup>

Hizbul Islam's stance with respect to the Somali government is unclear, as is the current state of the group. While 'Aweys reportedly declared war against the regime after Sheikh Hassan Mohamud was elected president in September 2012, the group's spokesman, Mohamed Moalim, welcomed the new president and parliament as a "positive development."<sup>14</sup> In fact, 'Aweys came to Mogadishu in June 2013 for talks with government officials, but was arrested and reportedly roughed up.<sup>15</sup> With 'Aweys in custody since then, very little has been heard from his followers.

#### *Mu'askar Ras Kamboni ("Ras Kamboni Brigades")*

Founded by Hassan Abdullah Hersi ("al-Turki"), a former military commander for the Islamic Courts, the Ras Kamboni Brigades is based in Middle and Lower Jubba Valley, where it controlled towns with access to the Kenyan border. The group was aligned with *Hizbul Islam* until late 2009, when al-Shabaab took control of the port of Kismayo. A faction of Ras Kamboni, led by al-Turki, announced in early 2010 that it was joining forces with al-Shabaab and proclaimed its adherence to "the international *jihad* of al-Qaeda."<sup>16</sup>

The rest of the Ras Kamboni Brigades follows Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed Islam (Sheikh Ahmed Madobe) who served as the governor of Kismayo from 2006 until the fall of the Islamic Courts Union.<sup>17</sup> Ras Kamboni played a key role in helping the AMISOM, Kenyan, and Somali government forces push al-Shabaab out of Kismayo in October 2012, although some Mogadishu-based Somali government officials denied cooperating with the "competing militants."<sup>18</sup> In 2013, while continuing to lead the Ras Kamboni Brigades against al-Shabaab forces in the region, Madobe was elected president of the newly established autonomous region of Jubaland.<sup>19</sup>

A spokesperson for the Somali government forces in Juba reported that Ras Kamboni allied with Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) to fight for control of the port city, leading to clashes with government troops in February 2013.<sup>20</sup> However, in August 2013, Madobe signed an Ethiopian-brokered "national reconciliation agreement" with the FGS that allowed him to maintain control of Kismayo as the head of an "interim administration" that would preside over the police forces in Jubaland, while military forces were gradually integrated into the national army.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Ahlu Sunna wal-Jama'a (roughly, "[Followers of] the Traditions and Consensus [of the Prophet Muhammad]")*

The original Ahlu Sunna wal-Jama'a (ASWJ) was an umbrella group of traditional Somali Muslims organized by General Muhammad Farah 'Aideed as a counterweight to his *Wahhabbi*-inspired opponents in AIAI.<sup>22</sup> In mid-2009, the excesses of al-Shabaab led to a revival of the movement to oppose the al-Shabaab ideology. Loosely organized into armed militias, Ahlu Sunna wal-Jama'a fighters stopped the seemingly relentless surge of al-Shabaab forces in 2010. Trained and assisted by Ethiopian defense forces, Ahlu Sunna wal-Jama'a emerged as a force in southern and central Somalia. However, the group's opposition to al-Shabaab should not be confused with support of the TFG; the group's formal alliance with the TFG in 2010, formed under tremendous international pressure, has largely fallen apart.

Ahlu Sunna wal-Jama'a has its own Islamist agenda. The group has conducted operations against those who it felt were not properly observing the fast of Ramadan—something that may put it at odds with the more secular elements of Somali society.<sup>23</sup>

The group took control of several towns and villages in Galgadud and Hiran.<sup>24</sup> After assisting the

Somali government fight al-Shabaab for two years, in December 2012, Ahlu Sunna wal-Jama'a troops were officially integrated into Somali government forces.<sup>25</sup> In February 2013, the chairman of the executive committee of Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a, passed away in a hospital in Mogadishu; ever since, relations between the militia and the FGS have frayed.<sup>26</sup> ASWJ and Somali government forces clash sporadically, most notably in a February 2015 clash in Guricel that left nine dead.<sup>27</sup>

#### *Al-Islah al-Islamiyya ("Islamic Movement")*

Al-Islah emerged as an offshoot of the Somali Muslim Brothers alongside al-Itihaad al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Union) in 1978 and the early 1980s, respectively. In 2004, the U.S. Department of State described al-Islah as an "organized Islamic group whose goal is the establishment of an Islamic state," but termed it "a generally nonviolent movement that operates primarily in Mogadishu."<sup>28</sup> Largely displaced when the Islamic Courts Union rose to power, al-Islah underwent something of a revival in Mogadishu when Sharif Ahmed returned as the head of the TFG in 2009. al-Islah's chief role was as the administration of schools in the capital which were supported by the group's foreign benefactors. Given how spectacularly state institutions have collapsed in Somalia, it is not surprising that "this naturally promoted fundamentalist trends (such as al-Islah) in local Islam, which had previously been largely Sufi in character, and these were encouraged by financial support from Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern centers."<sup>29</sup> Hassan Sheikh Mohamed, who served as the elected head of the Somali government from September 2012 to February 2017, has links with al-Islah.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Al-Qaeda*

While its earlier foray into Somalia did not prove particularly successful, al-Qaeda remains interested in Somalia both as a theater of operations and as a jumping-off point for terrorist activities in the nearby Arabian Peninsula and elsewhere in Africa.<sup>31</sup> Osama bin Laden released an audio statement in 2009 praising the Islamist insurgency in Somalia and calling upon Muslims to support it.<sup>32</sup> More recently, Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's successor, endorsed Ahmed Omer as the current leader of al-Shabaab.<sup>33</sup>

Analysts who previously discounted al-Qaeda's involvement in Somalia now acknowledge that, since at least early 2008, al-Qaeda advisors have played a critical role in al-Shabaab operations.<sup>34</sup>

In September 2009, U.S. Special Operations Forces killed Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan in Somalia. Nabhan was a Kenyan national wanted in connection with the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya. At the time of his death, Nabhan was running terrorist training camps while bringing in foreign trainers and fighters to support al-Shabaab on behalf of al-Qaeda.

In February 2012, al-Shabaab leadership formally pledged its allegiance to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri.<sup>35</sup> That affiliation has persisted; in a statement claiming responsibility for the January 2019 attack on the DusitD2 hotel complex in Nairobi, Kenya, al-Shabaab referred to the guidance of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri and justified the attack within the parameters of al-Qaeda's transnational vision of *jihad*.<sup>36</sup>

#### *The Islamic State in Somalia (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, Daesh)*

Although its success has been limited, the Islamic State has made efforts to co-opt al-Shabaab forces demoralized by their recent battlefield losses. Led by Abdulkadir Mumin, a group of fighters in Puntland broke away from al-Shabaab and pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, calling themselves the Islamic State in Somalia. Official recognition of ISS by the Islamic State has been limited, and Somalia has not been officially designated a province (*wilayat*) of the group.<sup>37</sup>

In March 2016, ISS claimed its first attack in Somalia (the bombing of an African Union vehicle in Mogadishu) and subsequently released a video showing what it claimed was its first Somali training camp. The group has reportedly attracted several hundred al-Shabaab defectors, as well as a number of prominent *imams*.<sup>38</sup> Islamic State activities in Somalia have spiked in recent years.<sup>39</sup> In May 2018, the

Islamic State claimed an attack that killed five security officers in Puntland.<sup>40</sup> The Islamic State's growing influence in Somalia has posed a threat to al-Shabaab, which launched an offensive against Islamic State-affiliated groups in December 2018.<sup>41</sup>

## ISLAM AND SOCIETY

Somali people traditionally subscribe to Sunni Islam and follow the Shāfi'ī school (*mahdab*) of jurisprudence, which, although conservative, is open to a variety of liberal practical views.<sup>42</sup> Until Somalia's independence in 1960, there were different movements within the Sunni Islam in Somalia. The most dominant were the Sufi brotherhoods (sing., *tarīqa*, pl. *turuq*), especially that of the Qadiriyya order (although the Ahmadiyya order, introduced into Somali lands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was also influential).<sup>43</sup> While traditional Islamic schools and scholars (*ulamā*) played a role as focal points for rudimentary political opposition to colonial rule in Italian Somalia, historically their role in Somali clan politics was neither institutionalized nor particularly prominent. *Sharia* has never historically been especially entrenched in Somalia: being largely pastoralists, the Somali people relied more on customary law (*xeer*) than on religious prescriptions.<sup>44</sup> Hence, Somali Islamism was strengthened by the collapse of the state in 1991, the ensuing civil war, international intervention, external meddling, and efforts by Somalis themselves at political reconstruction. Absent this chain of events, it is doubtful that militant Islamism would be much more than a marginal force in Somali politics.

Although its adherents often appeal to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century anti-colonial fight of the “Mad Mullah” Sayyid Muhammad ‘Abdille Hassan,<sup>45</sup> Somali Islamism is, at its origins, an import dating back at most to the 1950s. The 1953 establishment in Mogadishu of an Institute of Islamic Studies run by Egyptian scholars from Cairo's al-Azhar University introduced both Arabic language curriculum and contact with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwān al-Muslimoon). Unlike the Sufis who emphasize socialization, moral education, and spiritual preparation, the Muslim Brothers stress organization, activism, and the socio-political dimension of change directed toward the creation of a modern Islamic state. After Somalia's independence in 1960, Egyptians opened secondary schools in many of the country's towns. In the 1960s and 1970s, Saudi religious and educational institutions—especially the Islamic University of Medina, the Umm al-Qura University in Mecca, and the Imam Muhammad bin Saud Islamic University in Riyadh—joined al-Azhar in offering scholarships to graduates of these institutions. This development has parallels with the entrenchment of radical Islam in nearby Sudan via the establishment of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood, the precursor to the currently-ruling National Congress Party (formerly the National Islamic Front).

By the 1970s, the nascent Somali Muslim Brotherhood was so visible that the dictatorial regime of Siyad Barre took measures to suppress it, driving its adherents underground. When the group split into al-Islah and al-Itihaad, their memberships and leadership network overlapped considerably. The differences between them were, at least initially, largely circumstantial. Both sought an expansive “Islamic Republic of Greater Somalia” and eventually a political union embracing all Muslims in the Horn of Africa.<sup>46</sup>

When the Siyad Barre regime collapsed in January 1991, internecine warfare laid waste to Somalia. AIAI was forced to withdraw after heavy fighting, which allowed Somali Islamists to regroup in the Somali region of Ethiopia. AIAI tried to seize control of strategic assets like seaports and crossroads. Although it temporarily held the northern port of Bosaso and the eastern ports of Marka and Kismayo, the only area where it exercised long-term control was the economically vital intersection of Luuq, where it imposed harsh *sharia*-based rule from 1991 until 1996. From its base in Luuq, the Islamists of AIAI encouraged subversive activities among ethnic Somalis of Ethiopia and carried out a series of terrorist attacks. The exasperated Ethiopian regime finally intervened in Somalia in August 1996, wiping out AIAI bases in Luuq and Buulo Haawa and killing hundreds of Somali extremists and scores of non-Somalis

who flocked to the Horn of Africa under the banner of *jihad*. From this period emerged the cooperation between Somali Islamists and Ethiopian groups like ONLF, which continue to struggle against the newly established government of Ethiopia.

From its inception, AIAI rejected the non-confessional nature of the Somali state and sought to establish an Islamic regime based on a strict *Wahhabbi* interpretation. When it found the direct road to power blocked by Muhammad Farah ‘Aideed, it adopted a subtler approach based on the establishment of economic and other social programs, together with Islamic courts.<sup>47</sup>

Some Somali people see Islam as an alternative to both the traditional clan-based identities and the emergent criminal syndicates led by so-called “warlords.” The increased influence of religion has been largely a phenomenon of small towns and urban centers, although increased adherence to its normative precepts is a wider trend. Islamic religious leaders have helped organize security and other services; businessmen in particular were supportive of *sharia*-based court installation throughout the south, which was a precursor of the Islamic Courts Union established in June 2006. The Islamists attempted to fill certain voids left by state collapse; in doing so, they also made a bid to supplant other identities, offering a pan-Islamist one in lieu of other allegiances.<sup>48</sup>

Given their previous experiences with Somali Islamism, it was not surprising that, after many of the same extremists emerged in positions of authority in the Islamic Courts Union, the Ethiopians would intervene to support Somalia’s internationally-recognized but weak TFG as they did in 2006.<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, while the intervention ended the rule of the Islamic Courts Union, it also provoked an insurgency spearheaded by the even more radical al-Shabaab. Even after Ethiopian troops withdrew in early 2009, the al-Shabaab-led insurgency against the TFG has continued; AMISOM deployed to protect the transitional regime as the conflict drew longer; over time the number of AMISOM casualties increased. On September 17, 2009, seventeen peacekeepers were killed and forty others were wounded in a suicide car bombing.<sup>50</sup> On December 3, 2009, three TFG ministers and sixteen other people were killed while attending a graduation ceremony within the small enclave of Mogadishu.<sup>51</sup>

With the end of the TFG’s mandate in August 2012, the Somali Federal Government (SFG) was formed. Depending on how one counts them, it is either the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> interim regime since the collapse of the Siyad Barre dictatorship in 1991. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, an educator and civil society activist with ties to al-Islah as well as the earlier Islamic Courts Union, was selected to head the new government, which was formally recognized by the United States in January 2013. It is the first Somali regime to be accorded that status in more than two decades. While the Federal Government of Somalia, with the help of AMISOM, has rolled back al-Shabaab territorial control in southern Somalia, the group strikes SFG-affiliated targets in Mogadishu; an attack on the Nasa Hablod hotel in June 2016 killed a serving government minister, among other victims. On October 14, 2017, al-Shabaab was blamed for a double truck-bombing that killed an unprecedented 512 civilians.

Somalia elected Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed – better known as ‘Farmajo’ – president on February 8, 2017. Despite accusations of vote-buying and corruption in the run-up to the polls,<sup>52</sup> the election was marked by the peaceful transfer of power.<sup>53</sup> Despite some praise for Mohamed’s previous experience in the Barre regime, the new Somali government has had difficulty in establishing legitimacy in the country and remains vulnerable to attacks by al-Shabaab.<sup>54</sup> The October 2017 attack highlighted the limitations of the Somali Federal Government and its international allies in countering Islamist terror groups on Somali soil.

Islamists within the state apparatus are becoming increasingly influential. Buoyed by financial support from outside backers such as Qatar and Turkey, who themselves are locked in competition with Gulf State rivals for bases and resources in the Horn of Africa, a cabal with an Islamist agenda has apparently pushed the Federal Government of Somalia into siding with more Islamist foreign allies.<sup>55</sup> The ascendancy of such a faction within the state would undermine its ability to counter the plethora of Islamist militants within Somalia’s borders.

## ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Somali governmental policy toward Islamism is muddled, compromised by the complicity of the government in Islamist thought and activity. While Somali Islamism was damaged by the military defeat dealt to the Islamic Courts Union following the Ethiopian military intervention in late 2006 and early 2007, Somali territories (outside Somaliland) sunk into chaos under the aegis of the TFG, especially given some of the historical linkages between Islamism and pan-Somali identity.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, Islamists will maintain a strong presence in Somali politics.

In March 2009, a unity government was established between the TFG and elements of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS). The number of seats in the country's parliament expanded to 550, and former ICU leader Sharif Sheikh Ahmed was elected president. Both demonstrated the inclusion of a broader spectrum of Islamic ideology in government.<sup>57</sup>

The election of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed to the presidency of the Federal Government of Somalia in September 2012 and February 2017, respectively, represents movement toward more moderate, albeit mildly Islamist, leadership.<sup>58</sup> Though Mohamud's tenure was characterized by slow improvement in Somali national security, events under the Mohamed administration prove that extremist elements in Somalia continue to influence and threaten political order. This situation is exacerbated by the withdrawal of AMISOM forces (due to the respective domestic security needs of contributing countries and a decrease in international support for their deployment in Somalia).

At the same time, two governmental response topics require elucidation and governmental response: those relating to 1) Somaliland and 2) piracy.

### *Somaliland*

Although Somaliland's sovereignty has yet to be formally recognized by any other state, more than a decade and a half have passed since Somaliland proclaimed the dissolution of its voluntary union with the central government. Perhaps most important to the rising tide of Islamist militancy is Somaliland's reliance on the older political systems. Clan elders and the respect they command "has served as something of a mediating force in managing pragmatic interaction between custom and tradition; Islam and the secular realm of modern nationalism... Islam may be pre-empting and/or containing Islamism."<sup>59</sup>

The consequence of an organic relationship between Somali culture and tradition and Islam appears to play a stabilizing role for religion, society, and, particularly, politics. In Somaliland, for example, the population is almost exclusively Sunni Muslim. The *shahada*, the Muslim profession of the oneness of God and the acceptance of Muhammad as God's final prophet, is emblazoned on the flag. Yet *sharia* is only one of the three sources of the jurisprudence in the region's courts, alongside secular legislation and Somali traditional law. Unlike the rest of the Somali lands, the region is governed by a democratic constitution which was approved by 97 percent of the voters in a May 2001 referendum.

The constitution provides an executive branch of government, consisting of a directly elected president, a vice president, and appointed ministers; a bicameral legislature consisting of an elected House of Representatives and an upper chamber of elders, the *guurti*; and an independent judiciary. Somaliland has held presidential elections in 2003 and 2010 and parliamentary elections in 2005. All three were judged "free and fair" by international observers. Initially postponed due to drought, Somaliland held presidential elections on November 13, 2017, in which the incumbent Ahmed Mohamed Mahamoud did not seek a second term. In an election that the international community claimed, "preserved the integrity of the electoral process." Mahamoud's successor in the Peace, Unity, and Development Party (KULMIYE), Muse Bihi Abdi, was elected president with 55 percent of the vote.<sup>60</sup>

The relative success of Somaliland has drawn the ire of Islamists in southern and central Somalia. In

2008, on the same day that Shirwa Ahmed, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Minneapolis, Minnesota, blew himself up in an attack on the headquarters of the Puntland Intelligence Service in Bosaso, other suicide bombers from *al-Shabaab* hit the presidential palace, the UN Development Programme office, and the Ethiopian diplomatic mission in the Somaliland capital of Hargeisa.<sup>61</sup>

Since suffering defeats in south and central Somalia, al-Shabaab fighters have established footholds in Puntland, posing a major threat to the region's governing institutions and its overall stability.<sup>62</sup> In the past, semi-autonomous Puntland has criticized Somaliland for ignoring the threat posed by al-Shabaab militants in northern Somalia.<sup>63</sup> However, a number of developments—including the effective use of a small coast guard to keep Somaliland largely free of piracy, as well as the 2009 transfer of two Guantanamo Bay detainees to Hargeisa, rather than the less secure Mogadishu—indicate that Somaliland is seen as less vulnerable to militant Islam than south and central Somalia.<sup>64</sup> In February 2013, local authorities arrested approximately eighty al-Shabaab members, including the son of a Somaliland politician.<sup>65</sup>

### *Islamism and Piracy*

Piracy has dramatically decreased since 2012 thanks to increased international patrols and maritime security improvements; however, there was no evidence of anything other than opportunistic cooperation between Somalia's Islamists and pirates. In early 2011, al-Shabaab reportedly reached a deal with one of the larger piracy syndicates; they would receive a 20% of all future ransoms from piracy. Al-Shabaab would even open an office to specifically liaise with the pirates in the port of Xarardheere where the Islamist group would permit hijackers to anchor seized ships while awaiting ransom payments.<sup>66</sup> A 2011 U.S. Congressional Research Service report cited testimony suggesting that Somali pirates were not directly allied with al-Shabaab, but did maintain many of these mutually beneficial financial arrangements.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, al-Shabaab's loss of control of key ports including Xarardheere, Marka, Baraawe, and Kismaayo, to the Somali military and AMISOM further limit opportunities for cooperation between the Islamists and piracy networks.

## ENDNOTES

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