SOMALIA'S ISLAMISTS

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International **Crisis Group**
WORKING TO PREVENT
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Somalia's long civil conflict and lack of central governing institutions present an international security challenge. Terrorists have taken advantage of the state's collapse to attack neighbouring countries and transit agents and materiel. The country is a refuge for the al-Qaeda team that bombed a Kenyan resort in 2002 and tried to down an Israeli aircraft. Since 2003, Islamist extremists have been linked to murders of Somalis and foreigners. If governments are to counter the limited but real threat of terrorism in or from Somalia, they need to align closer with Somali priorities – the restoration of peace, legitimate and broad-based government, and essential services – and make clear that their counter-terrorism efforts are aimed at a small number of criminals, many of them foreigners, not the Somali population at large.

Somalis in general show little interest in *jihadi* Islamism; most are deeply opposed. Somali militant movements have failed to gain broad popular support, encountering instead widespread hostility. The most remarkable feature is that Islamist militancy has not become more firmly rooted in what should, by most conventional assessments, be fertile ground.

Nevertheless, since the collapse of the government in 1991, a variety of Islamist reformist movements have sprung up inside the country – some inspired or sponsored by foreign interests. The vast majority are non-violent and opposed to ideological extremism. The largest groups, notably *Jama'at al-Tabligh* and the *Salafiyya Jadiida*, practise missionary activism aimed at steering lax Muslims back towards the true path of their faith. A much smaller proportion, including *Harakaat al-Islah* and *Majma' 'Ulimadda Islaamka ee Soomaaliya*, are politically active but not extremist, struggling rather to influence the future of the Somali state and its political system. By far the smallest reformist groups are those composed of *jihadis*, such as the now-defunct *al-Itihaad al-Islaami* and the new, nameless one fronted by Aden Hashi 'Ayro.

Other, ostensibly Islamist entities have more complex origins and agendas. The *Shari'a* (Islamic law) courts that have sprung up across southern Somalia over the past decade began as essentially clan-based institutions intended to restore security and order in a stateless society. Attempts to unify and coordinate the court system, however, have been in large part politically motivated, and some courts have been hijacked by *jihadi* leaders. This kind of cooperation, combined with independent sources of funding, has allowed some courts to exercise greater independence from their clans, and since early 2005, the *Shari'a* court system in Mogadishu has been pursuing an aggressive political and social agenda.

The growth of courts, charities and businesses with an apparently Islamist character has sparked fears in some circles of a conspiracy to transform Somalia into an Islamic state. In reality, the Islamist activists are a diverse community, characterised more by competition and contradiction than cooperation, making a broad-based conspiracy implausible.

Islamist extremism has failed to take a broader hold in Somalia because of Somali resistance – not foreign counter-terrorism efforts. The vast majority of Somalis desire a government – democratic, broadly-based and responsive – that reflects the Islamic faith as they have practised it for centuries: with tolerance, moderation and respect for variation in religious observance. Ultimately, there is no better way to confront *jihadism* than to assist Somalis in realising such a government.

That is, of course, more easily said than done. Repeated attempts over the past fifteen years to rebuild the Somali state have ended in failure, and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) formed in October 2004 seems determined to repeat past mistakes. Somalia's international partners must resist the temptation to back one faction of the divided TFG and struggle instead to breathe life into the transitional federal charter, revive the defunct parliament and establish a broadly inclusive government of national unity. Unless they are prepared to take up this complex challenge, they may continue to score victories in their battles against terrorism in the Horn while losing the wider war.

Nairobi/Brussels, 12 December 2005

SOMALIA'S ISLAMISTS

I. ISLAMIC ACTIVISM IN SOMALI HISTORY

Somalis have practised Islam for over 1,000 years, since the faith reached the Horn of Africa from the Arabian peninsula before the ninth century. Closely linked to the genealogical myths that underpin their clan identity, most follow a Shafi'i version of the faith that has come to be characterised by the veneration of saints, including the ancestors of many Somali clans, and has traditionally been dominated by apolitical Sufi orders.[1]

Although some Sufi orders were actively involved in the anti-colonial resistance,[2] the emergence of a modern political Islamic consciousness really began to gather momentum in the 1960s, with the formation of the *Waxda al-Shabaab al-Islaami* and the *Jama'at al-Ahl al-Islaami* (known as the *al-Ahli* group), both of which were inspired by the example of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood and sought to apply Islamic principles in the context of a newly independent, modernising Somali state.[3] In 1969, a military coup led by General Mohamed Siyaad Barre brought in a "Scientific Socialist" regime that attempted both to accommodate and to control the influence of Islam in Somali society. But in 1975, the promulgation of new, controversial family legislation provoked an outcry from religious leaders; the regime responded by executing ten prominent sheikhs and jailing dozens of others. *Al-Ahli* disbanded and *al-Wahdat,* together with other Islamic organisations, was forced to go underground. Many religious leaders and their followers fled abroad to join the growing diaspora of Somalis who had emigrated to the Gulf states in the hopes of cashing in on the oil boom.

In the years that followed, some Somali exiles became closely aligned with the Association of the Muslim Brothers (*Jam'iyyat al-Ikhwaan al-Muslimiin*) and adopted its emphasis on political action. Others were exposed to more conservative Salafi ideas and the militant undercurrents associated with the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan. The Somali government had inadvertently given a crucial boost to the evolution of a burgeoning – albeit largely extraterritorial – Somali Islamist movement.[4] Within Somalia, despite the government ban, Islamist ideologies evolved in uneven and haphazard ways, in part as a function of globalisation, which the government clumsily tried to counter through prohibitions on foreign publications and religious literature.[5] The few Islamist groups kept a low profile but continued to function. Their affiliated student groups at the Somali National University, colleges and secondary schools lobbied for segregation of the sexes and pressured female students to wear the *hijab*; a small number of Islamist enthusiasts practised martial arts on college playing fields under the bemused gaze of fellow students.[6] Such activities attracted the attention of the regime, and several groups were infiltrated by officials and intelligence agents, but the government already faced an increasingly effective rebellion in different parts of the country and lacked the stomach for a confrontation with the Islamists as well.

With the government's collapse in 1991, Islamists experienced unprecedented freedom. A bewildering array of Islamic associations suddenly emerged, each

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[1] Notably the Qaadiriyaa, Ahmediyya and Saalihiyya. For an in-depth analysis of the origins and evolution of Islam in Somali society, see I.M. Lewis, *Saints and Somalis: Popular Islam in a Clan-Based Society* (Lawrenceville, 1998).

[2] Maria Brons, *Somalia: Sovereignty, Security and the State* (Utrecht, 2001), p. 141.

[3] Roland Marchal, "Islamic political dynamics in the Somali civil war", in Alex de Waal (ed.), *Islamism and Its Enemies in the Horn of Africa* (Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 119.

[4] Islamism is defined in Crisis Group reports as synonymous with "Islamic activism", the active assertion and promotion of beliefs, prescriptions, laws, or policies that are held to be Islamic in character. There are numerous currents of Islamism in this sense: what they hold in common is that they found their activism on traditions and teachings of Islam as contained in scripture and authoritative commentaries. The term "Salafi" refers to the founding fathers of Islam, the so-called "venerable ancestors" (al-Salaf al-Salih, whence the movement's name), notably the Prophet Mohammed and the first four "rightly-guided" Caliphs – al-Rashidun – of the original Muslim community in seventh century Arabia. Originally a movement for modernist reform, Salafiyya has become closely associated with the puritan and fundamentalist Wahhabi tradition of central Arabia, based on literalist readings of scripture. See Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005.

[5] Marchal, "Islamic political dynamics in the Somali civil war"*, op. cit.*, p. 120.

[6] Crisis Group interview, Hargeysa, August 2004

purporting to represent a discrete religious doctrine. Their common denominator was the desire for an "authentic" form of Islamic governance in Somalia.

To a certain extent, the differences between Somalia's Islamist groups were doctrinal: traditionalists resisted the encroachment of what they considered to be alien reformist strands of Islamic thought. Among the reformists, there was friction between modernist thinkers affiliated with the Muslim Brothers and conservative groups inspired by Salafism. And conventional Salafis disapproved of those from their ranks who embraced political and military action.

Such distinctions, however, were only part of the picture. As the French scholar Roland Marchal has observed, many Somali Islamist groups shared the same intellectual reference points, such as Mohamed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, Hassan al-Banna, and Sayyid Qutb:

> Therefore, there are no clear cut doctrinal or ideological boundaries between them and sympathisers may shift from one group to the other….What helps to explain the number of those groups are the many differences they have on mundane issues, like ablution, age of marriage, and so on. Rituals more than ideology have been the bone of contention.[7]

Arguably even more important in distinguishing one group from another has been the character of the leadership, the dominant clan affiliation of the members, and – in some cases – the agendas of their offshore partners. In this respect, the behaviour of the Islamist groups has differed little from that of the more "secular" and overtly political factions competing to fill the power vacuum left by the disintegration of the state: they cooperated little, entering into opportunistic and short-lived alliances; they quarrelled and split, often along clan lines; and members moved with relative freedom from one group to the other.

In spite of such centrifugal dynamics, some observers of the Somali scene believe they detect the makings of a grand conspiracy in which each Islamist group plays an assigned role: military, political, ideological or pedagogical. At the heart of this coalition are said to be the *jihadis* and the terrorists, the Somali chapter of the worldwide al-Qaeda network.

As elsewhere in the Muslim world, there are three main currents in Somali Islamic activism: missionary, political and militant (*jihadism*).[8] Despite communication (and sometimes even cooperation) within and between these categories, the behaviour of Somali Islamist groups is characterised by competition and disaccord hardly less severe than that which plagues the political factions. They are neither uniformly anti-Western, nor hostile to Somalia's neighbours, and only a tiny minority has been associated with terrorist violence.

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[7] Marchal, "Islamic political dynamics in the Somali civil war", op. cit., p. 127.
[8] For a fuller explanation of these categories, see Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit., pp. 3-4.

II. *JIHADI* ISLAMISM

Jihadi Islamism involves activists who are committed to violence because they are involved in what they consider to be the defence (or, in some cases, expansion) of *Dar al-Islam* (the "House of Islam" – that area of the world historically subject to Muslim rule) and the community of believers (*al-umma*) against infidel enemies.[9] In Somalia, *jihadism* is an unpopular minority trend whose fortunes have ebbed and flowed over the years.

A. *AL-ITIHAAD AL-ISLAAMI*

On 23 September 2001, less than two weeks after the 9/11 terrorism attacks in the U.S., President George W. Bush signed Executive Order 13224, which blocked the assets of 27 organisations and individuals linked to terrorism. Tenth on the list was a little-known Somali organisation, *al-Itihaad al-Islaami* (AIAI).

Much of what is believed to be known about *al-Itihaad* is in fact based on rumour, speculation and disinformation. The movement's origins, organisation and operations are so obscure that expert opinions differ not only as to its designation as a group with links to international terrorism, but also as to whether it even exists. Many Somalis and a number of foreign intelligence officials describe *al-Itihaad* to Crisis Group as either inactive or defunct; other sources, including a March 2005 report by a United Nations Panel of Experts, describe the organisation not only as intact, but also actively plotting chaos in Somalia, running at least fifteen terrorist training camps and procuring arms in order to acquire "ultimate control of the people and territory of Somalia".[10]

In fact, *al-Itihaad* did not start out as a *jihadi* organisation, and its gradual embrace of extremism and militancy proved divisive and – ultimately – self-destructive. From its formation in the early 1980s to its peak in 1992, the movement's failure to attain its objective of a pan-Somali, Salafist emirate resulted in its steady and involuntary decline. By 2005, *al-Itihaad* had essentially ceased to exist. A few "alumni" of the organisation, however, went on to establish a new and ruthless *jihadi* network with links to al-Qaeda and no clear political aims.[11]

Mounting an effective response to *al-Itihaad* and its offspring requires that the myths and mystery that shroud it be dispelled and that it be subjected to more disinterested, dispassionate examination and analysis. The following section provides a comprehensive profile of *al-Itihaad*, from its earliest origins to its current state of, in effect, dissolution.

1. The "Golden Age"

Despite the Barre regime's tight control of social and religious space, Salafism steadily acquired a growing body of adherents during the 1970s. One of the most successful Wahhabi centres emerged at 'Eel Hindi, a suburb of the capital, Mogadishu. The group, *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya*, considered itself a Salafi society concentrating on "purification of the faith".[12] "There was nothing political about it", recalled a former member, "[i]t was pure *Da'wa*".[13] Several of the 'Eel Hindi clerics became renowned for instruction in *tafsir* (commentary on the Koran) they offered after evening (*maghrib*) prayers, and their mosques were often full.[14] The growing Salafi movement also had centres at the Bakaaraha and Lafweyne mosques; its most prominent imams were Sheikh Dahir Indhabuur, Sheikh Abdullahi Ali Haashi and Sheikh Abdulqaadir Ga'amey – all prominent in later years as leaders of *al-Itihaad*.[15]

During the early 1980s, the leadership of *al-Jama'a* developed a relationship with *Wahdat al-Shabaab al-Islaamiyya*, a northern Somali Islamist group popular among secondary school teachers and students in Hargeysa and Bur'o. Although essentially Wahhabi in its outlook and teachings, *al-Wahdat* also drew inspiration from the Muslim Brothers – especially its emphasis on education and promotion of public social roles for women. Among the leaders was a Muslim cleric from the northern town of Bur'o, educated in Saudi Arabia, Sheikh Ali Warsame – known by the nickname Ali "Kibis-doon".[16] Like his counterparts from *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya*, he went on to become a key figure in *al-Itihaad*.

The merger of the two organisations at some point between 1982 and 1984 brought with it the new name

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[9] See Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit., p. 4.
[10] J.E Tambi, M.E. Holt Jr., C. Li and J. Salek, "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia pursuant to Security Council resolution 1558 (2004)", United Nations Security Council (S/2005/153), 8 March 2005, p. 7.

[11] See Crisis Group Africa Report N°95, *Counter-Terrorism in Somalia: Losing Hearts and Minds?*, 11 July 2005.
[12] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004.
[13] *Da'wa* is the religious mission of preaching and proselytising. Crisis Group interview, Hargeysa, July 2004.
[14] Crisis Group interview, Hargeysa, July 2004.
[15] Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, April 2004.
[16] Meaning "one who seeks his bread".

under which the group would later achieve notoriety: *al-Itihaad al-Islaami.* In practice, however, the organisations retained their identities, and towards the end of the 1980s *al-Wahdat* reemerged as a distinctly northern entity, with only a few members – Warsame among them – who retained their *al-Itihaad* affiliation.

In Mogadishu, *al-Itihaad* soon began to attract attention for both its growing popularity and its radical new message. The movement's visibility grew as its membership expanded to include faculty and students at secondary schools, colleges and the Somali National University. *Al-Itihaad* members were systematic and persistent in their recruiting efforts, engaging student leaders and academic achievers in the corridors and cafés between lectures and after class.

Al-Itihaad's assertion that Islam could not be separated from politics offered a bold challenge to the regime at a time when Barre's "revolution" had run out of steam. A close observer of the movement at that time told Crisis Group:

> *Al-Itihaad* offered an alternative to democracy, communism and man-made constitutions. Koran and Sunna would be the basis for the application of all political, social and other aspects of life.[17]

Al-Itihaad also challenged Somalia's Sufi orders, ridiculing their emphasis on spirituality and disparaging some of their traditional practices as un-Islamic. In return, Sufi leaders denounced *al-Itihaad* adherents as "innovators" (*bid'o*)[18] and labelled the movement "*al-Saruuriyyin*" – an epithet meaning the disciples of Sheikh Mohamed Zain al-'Abidin Saruur, a Saudi religious dissident expelled from the Kingdom for his radical teachings.[19] Members of *al-Itihaad*, however, acknowledged and appear to have been proud of their affiliation with Sheikh Saruur.[20] Towards the end of 1980s, tensions between the *Saruuriyyin* and the Sufis began to overflow from the mosques into the streets. Clashes between youths from the two groups, involving stabbings and beatings, were not uncommon and occasionally cost lives.

Towards the end of the 1980s, *al-Itihaad*'s burgeoning influence came to reflect not only its religious doctrine, but also its appeal as a platform for protest against a brutal and unpopular regime. In the mosques of Mogadishu, *al-Itihaad* preachers like Sheikh Abdullahi Ali Haashi mocked the dictatorship with apparent impunity, and cassette tapes of their sermons were available from sympathetic shopkeepers. Within the schools and colleges, the group's scholars and lecturers acquired sufficient prestige that the *bid'o* label fell into disuse. *Al-Itihaad*'s leaders interpreted the rise of their movement as confirmation that they had found the true path and enjoyed divine sanction for their work. It was a period that some still refer to as the "Golden Age" of *al-Itihaad*.[21]

2. From Da'wa to Jihad: The battle of Araare

Towards the end of the 1990s, events conspired to bring this "Golden Age" to an end and to transform the group into a revolutionary *jihadi* movement. The Barre regime was on the verge of collapse. Northwest Somalia[22] was embroiled in a brutal civil war in which most of the population – including *al-Itihaad*'s northern branch – had been displaced and dispersed. Sheikh Ali Warsame and many of his followers had become refugees in eastern Ethiopia, contributing mainly humanitarian efforts to the struggle of their kinsmen against the regime.

In southern Somalia, as rebel factions threatened to seize control of the capital, *al-Itihaad*'s leaders were confronted with hard decisions about their movement's place in a future national order. In late 1990, half a dozen Somali veterans of the anti-Soviet struggle in Afghanistan returned to Mogadishu, bringing with them an eagerness for armed jihad. Their efforts to persuade *al-Itihaad* to take up arms like other rebel factions met with scepticism and were initially rejected, but by the end of the year the movement's internal deliberations had been overtaken by events.

On 30 December 1990, the battle for Mogadishu began in earnest, and in late January, as the president abandoned Mogadishu for the last time, the regime collapsed. Fighters from the rebel United Somali Congress (USC), a faction drawn mainly from the Hawiye clan, exacted retribution against clans whom they associated with the former regime. The result was a mass exodus, mainly of the Darood clan, towards the southern town of Kismaayo – a strategic port and gateway to the fertile Jubba Valley.

Darood members of *al-Itihaad* were soon pressed into military service in defence of Kismaayo, which some of their clan elders had promised would be declared an

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[17] Crisis Group correspondence with a former *al-Itihaad* member, February 2005.
[18] Bid'o (the Arabic is *bid'a* for the abstract noun – "blameworthy innovation"; "blameworthy innovators" would be *(al-)abdâ'*) refers to innovation in Islam, a practice discouraged by the four established legal schools, and in this case implies heresy. Crisis Group correspondence with a former *al-Itihaad* member, February 2005.
[19] Sheikh Saruur is now based in London where he acts as leader of the controversial Salafi organisation *al-Muntada*.
[20] Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, February 2005.

[21] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004.
[22] In May 1991, the authorities in north west Somalia declared it the independent Republic of Somaliland.

Islamic emirate – in exchange for the Islamists' military support. They first occupied a military compound known as Guulwadde near the northern entrance of the city. Just weeks later, in April 1991, the main Darood force was routed by USC militias under command of General Mohamed Farah Aideed in a bitterly fought engagement at the strategic town of Afgooye. The approach to Kismaayo was left dangerously undefended, so the *al-Itihaad* militia, numbering roughly 300, were relocated to Araare, a strategic bridge some 60 kilometres north of Kismaayo on the road to Mogadishu.

The prospect of a battle threatened to divide *al-Itihaad*. The militants at Araare, led by a commander named Farah Hassan and his deputy Abdullahi Rabi Kahiin, welcomed the prospect of armed jihad. But more conservative leaders resisted the prospect of becoming an armed faction. A senior Darood member of the group, Sheikh Abdulqadir Ga'amey, reportedly visited the camp and unsuccessfully urged the militants to withdraw to Dobley, towards the Kenyan border, in order to avoid a military disaster. When Ga'amey realised that the militia were adamant about holding their defensive line, he abandoned his mission and eventually returned to his home region in northeastern Somalia.

Before launching his offensive against Kismaayo, General Aideed gave the militants a last chance to avoid battle, dispatching a delegation led by a former army colonel, Hassan Dahir Aweys. Through Aweys, Aideed proposed a deal: if the Islamists would stay in their camp, the USC forces would guarantee their safety and leave them unmolested during the advance to Kismaayo. When the *al-Itihaad* fighters rejected these terms, Aweys reportedly opted to join their cause, leaving the remainder of the delegation to return to Aideed empty-handed. In Aweys, the militant wing of *al-Itihaad* had won an important convert.

The subsequent battle was a rout, and Aideed's battle-hardened forces rapidly took control of Kismaayo. The *jihadi* Islamists loaded their wounded on a dhow bound for the northern port of Bosaaso, and the remaining fighters straggled first to Raas Kaambooni, then to Dobley, where they briefly established a new camp and began to reorganise. But disputes with the local population meant that the militants were soon on the move once again, trekking through Ethiopia's Somali-inhabited Ogaden region to join their wounded comrades in Bosaaso near Somalia's north eastern tip. A third group headed north along the coast to join the growing *al-Itihaad* presence in the port town of Marka.

The battle of Kismaayo was a crushing military defeat for *al-Itihaad*, but it was a decisive political victory for the militant wing of the organisation: a critical mass of the membership was now convinced that the success of

al-Itihaad's religious mission – indeed its very survival – could only be assured by taking up arms.[23] The next chapter would be one not of *da'wa*, but of jihad.

3.   Towards an Islamic emirate[24]

Following the collapse of the Barre regime, north eastern Somalia had fallen under control of the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), whose members were drawn principally from the Majeerteen sub-clan of the Darood. Thousands of Majeerteen and related Darood clans had been killed or displaced during Aideed's capture of Kismaayo, and SSDF forces were engaged in a bloody struggle against Aideed's forces in the central Mudug region as well. The seat of the SSDF administration was the torrid port town of Bosaaso, into which the remnants of *al-Itihaad*'s Araare force began to straggle in May 1991.

With the tacit blessing of the SSDF chairman, General Mohamed Abshir Musa, *al-Itihaad* took control of strategic facilities across the northeast, including Bosaaso port and hospital. They also established a large base near Qaw, some twenty kilometres west of Bosaaso. Modelled on training facilities in Afghanistan, it was known as Nasrudiin and rapidly became the hub of *al-Itihaad* activity in the region. By mid-1991 an estimated 1,000 *al-Itihaad* militia were based in the region.

In what appears to have been an attempt to win back control from the militants, in June 1991 *al-Itihaad*'s leadership convened its first major conference since the collapse of the Barre regime, under the chairmanship of Sheikh Ali Warsame. The leaders of the Araare force were censured for having disobeyed orders and thus suffering a catastrophic defeat.[25] The main outcome of the meeting was consolidation and restructuring of the movement into five divisions: chairman of the movement and head of its political wing was Ali Warsame; his deputy, Hassan Dahir Aweys, doubled as head of the military wing; Sheikh Abdulqadir Ga'amey, who had failed to talk the militants out of their futile stand at Araare, was assigned responsibility for *da'wa*.

The remaining two portfolios, relief and administration, involved handling the organisation's financial and material resources. *Al-Itihaad* derived part of its revenue from Bosaaso port charges but got much more from foreign donors, including – with or without their knowledge – the large Saudi charity, the Muslim World League

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[23] Crisis Group interview, Hargeysa, July 2004.
[24] An emirate is an Islamic state or territory led by a figure, an emir, who combines both religious and political authority: Afghanistan under the Taliban, for example, called itself an emirate.
[25] From documents made available to Crisis Group.

(*Rabitat al-Islam al-'âlamiyya*) and its subsidiary, the International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO). According to Djibouti government sources, both organisations were represented in the nearby Republic of Djibouti by a Saudi national known as Abdulrahman al-Qaidy, who had trained in Afghanistan and was by some accounts a serving Saudi intelligence officer.[26] According to one source in Bosaaso at the time, al-Qaidy was a regular visitor to the *al-Itihaad* base at Qaw and its primary source of funding.[27]

As *al-Itihaad*'s presence in northeast Somalia increasingly came to resemble a state within the SSDF's regional "state", relations between the two organisations became increasingly strained. In January 1992, militia wearing *al-Itihaad* uniforms fired on a group of aid workers at a tea-shop near Bosaaso's Ga'ayte Hotel, killing Martina Pumpalova, an expatriate doctor working with UNICEF, and injuring two of her colleagues. Less than a month later, *al-Itihaad* militia attacked a Bosaaso police station where one of their numbers from the south had been imprisoned. In the process of liberating their comrade, they killed a number of police and a local woman and injured two other officers and several bystanders.[28] Leaders from both the SSDF and local clans began to argue that *al-Itihaad* should be disbanded.

In mid-June 1992, the SSDF convened a senior leadership conference in Garoowe. On the agenda was a demand from the head of the Defence Committee, Colonel Abdillahi Yusuf, that Bosaaso port be restored to SSDF control.[29] On the morning of 19 June, *al-Itihaad* forces in Garoowe sealed the roads leading to and from the town and seized control of a former military compound on the outskirts where the SSDF leadership were in session. At the same time they attacked in three locations throughout the northeast, including Bosaaso. With the leadership of the SSDF and the key strategic towns of the region in their hands, they declared a new Islamic administration for the northeast.

Al-Itihaad's Islamic emirate was short-lived. SSDF forces, supported by hastily assembled militias from local Majeerteen clans, responded quickly and effectively. Hundreds of *al-Itihaad* militia and their leaders were killed, and the movement was routed. Taking their families with them, in a column that numbered in the thousands, the survivors straggled to safety in the mountainous terrain to

the west of Bosaaso inhabited by the Warsengeli clan. By 26 June 1992, over 600 AIAI militia had been killed,[30] and no *jihadi* fighters remained in SSDF-controlled areas of the northeast.[31]

The Islamists initially settled in Saalid, a mountainous areas with an abundant water supply and good natural defences. For nearly three months, SSDF forces struggled without success to dislodge them. Meanwhile, a group of *al-Itihaad* leaders met with Warsengeli elders in Djibouti, seeking to negotiate safe passage for the group to more secure destinations. In return, Sheikh Ahmed Mohamed bin Hodan, an *al-Itihaad* representative in Dubai, offered that all *al-Itihaad*'s heavy weapons would be left behind in the custody of the Warsengeli. But after consultations with Warsengeli leaders inside Somalia, the request for safe passage was denied. Bin Hodan was reportedly furious and warned that *al-Itihaad* fighters from across Somalia would converge to assist their brethren. He was correct: with the support of newly arrived fighters from Laas 'Aanod and other locations, the *jihadis* took control of the port town of Laas Qoray. Colonel Hassan Dahir Aweys was named commander of the new garrison.[32]

As a remote fishing port on the Red Sea, Laas Qoray had certain advantages, including easy access and egress to Yemen and the Arabian Gulf. But it was far from ideal as a permanent location, and even as Hassan Dahir Aweys and many of his fighters began marrying local girls, the movement's leadership was considering how to shift the group to a safer location. At the same time, the elders from the Warsengeli and the neighbouring Isaaq clans were exerting subtle pressures through a variety of channels to persuade the Islamists to move on. When Aweys refused, he was replaced – apparently on the orders of Sheikh Ali Warsame – by a more pragmatic figure with closer kinship ties to the local community. With a contribution of fuel from the Laas Qoray leadership, the *al-Itihaad* militia and their families mounted their vehicles and departed southwards across the border into Ethiopia.

Al-Itihaad's withdrawal from Laas Qoray was followed by a period of fragmentation and disorientation. According to a former sympathiser, "the movement just ran out of gas".[33] Soon after the fiasco, Sheikh Ali Warsame was replaced as chairman by Sheikh Mohamud 'Isse, a member of the Abgaal sub-clan of the Hawiye, from Mogadishu. Many members drifted towards their home areas where

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[26] Sources in Djibouti told Crisis Group that al-Qaidy enjoyed diplomatic status there until his recall to Saudi Arabia. Crisis Group interviews, October 2003 and April 2004.
[27] Crisis Group interview, Hargeysa, July 2004.
[28] Internal SSDF communication, 30 June 1992, obtained by Crisis Group.
[29] Crisis Group interview, Hargeysa, August 2004.

[30] Including the militant commander from Kismaayo, Mohamud 'Isse "Abu-Muhsin".
[31] Internal SSDF communication, 30 June 1992, obtained by Crisis Group.
[32] Crisis Group interview, Hargeysa, July 2004.
[33] Crisis Group interview, Hargeysa, July 2004.

they joined other religious groups, went into business for themselves, or worked for non-governmental organisations (NGOs). A large group of mainly Darood members headed south across Ethiopia's Ogaden region, where some undoubtedly took up the struggle of their kinsmen against Ethiopian control there.[34] The remainder continued southwards and crossed back into Somalia, settling in the Jubba Valley. One group, under the leadership of Hassan Turki, established itself near Kismaayo, at the coastal village of Raas Kaambooni. Another, far larger presence was established in the Gedo region, near the Ethiopian border. It was here that *al-Itihaad* made its second bid to establish an Islamic administration.

4.   Towards an Islamic emirate – Part 2

Al-Itihaad first established a presence in Luuq, the principal town of Gedo region, in August 1992. Over the next few years it emerged as the pre-eminent military and political force in Gedo, largely thanks to the order and discipline it represented in an otherwise lawless and chaotic environment. The new administration banned the carrying of weapons by private citizens, guaranteed a measure of security and persuaded a number of international NGOs and donors to carry out activities.[35] Ken Menkhaus, a specialist in Somali affairs, described the situation:

> The administration of Luuq under the Islamists was strict. An "Islamic Association" exercised overall authority, beneath which a district council, appointed by the Islamic Association, handled day-to-day management. A *Shari'a* court administered justice based on Islamic law rather than customary clan law or *xeer*; this meant that punishments included amputation, which is not at all customary in Somalia, though some other Somali *Shari'a* courts have imposed it, notably in north Mogadishu. The police force was composed of Islamic militia but kept separate from the security forces. Consumption of the mild narcotic leaf *qaat*, a popular habit, was forbidden, as was cultivation of tobacco.[36] Veiling was enforced on women. Free education was provided in schools, but courses were taught in Arabic and the curriculum was Islamic, not secular, in orientation.[37]

Al-Itihaad administration rapidly extended from Luuq to the border towns of Dolow and Buulo Haawa, where the

Kenyan police and military authorities were impressed by the improvement in local security.[38] But the Islamists' efficiency did not translate into popularity: edicts such as those calling for strict implementation of *Shari'a* law and the banning of *qaat* were unpopular, and the conduct of *al-Itihaad*'s militiamen – many of them more interested in drawing a salary than in building an Islamic utopia – left much to be desired.

Just as *al-Itihaad*'s influence in northeast Somalia had brought the movement into conflict with the SSDF, so its presence in Gedo antagonised the Somali National Front (SNF), a politico-military faction anchored in the Marehaan clan.[39] The SNF found an ally in the Ethiopian government, which had long sought to eliminate the *al-Itihaad* presence in the Somali-inhabited "Fifth Region" of Ethiopia. In communications with Addis Ababa, the SNF alleged that *al-Itihaad* camps near Luuq and Armo were training Islamist guerrillas from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya and Uganda in variety of activities, including small arms, guerrilla warfare, suicide bombing, mines and explosives, espionage and logistics.[40] According to the SNF, the camps were financed in part by an Islamic NGO based in Dublin, Mercy International Relief Agency (MIRA).[41] Although the SNF's accusations were politically motivated, subsequent events confirmed a linkage not only with MIRA, but also a continuing relationship with the broader al-Qaeda network.

5.   A transnational network

Al-Itihaad's campaign strategy relied upon highly structured regional and international networks, penetrating Somali communities in the diaspora, wherever they were found. Members of the movement have travelled freely between Kenya, Somalia, and elsewhere in the region. During the early 1990s, the movement fielded representatives, inter alia, in Uganda, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UK, Italy, Sweden and Canada.[42] It disseminated triumphal accounts of its exploits in Somali- and Arabic-language newspapers, and its fighters routinely captured video battlefield images to support fundraising.[43]

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[34] See Section II A 6 below.
[35] Basil King, "Security in Gedo – The AMREF view", unpublished letter, Nairobi, 3 September 1996.
[36] The mild, leafy stimulant known in Somalia as *qaad* is also variously referred to as *qaat*, *khat*, *jaad* and *mira*.
[37] Ken Menkhaus, "Somalia: State collapse and the threat of terrorism", IISS Adelphi Paper 364, p. 56.

[38] Ibid, p. 57.
[39] Intra-clan friction played a role in *al-Itihaad*-SNF rivalry. Whereas the SNF leadership was drawn mainly from Mareehaan clans from the distant Galguduud region, *al-Itihaad*'s drew chiefly upon the support of Mareehaan locals from Gedo.
[40] Somali National Front, "Mercy International Relief Agency", unpublished letter, 24 May 1996, p. 2.
[41] MIRA was subsequently found to be linked to al-Qaeda.
[42] It seems likely the movement exerted influence wherever a significant diaspora community existed.
[43] Matt Bryden, "Report on Mission to Haud Area, Region 5, 02-15 November 1994", Addis Ababa, United Nations Emergencies Unit for Ethiopia, 1994.

In Kenya, according to security sources, the movement "built considerable infrastructure for recruitment, fundraising and communication, among the Somali population in Nairobi, Mombasa, and the North Eastern province bordering Somalia".[44] Like their counterparts in Somalia, Kenyan members of *al-Itihaad* promoted an "agitative, radical version of Islam"[45] inspired by Wahhabi doctrine. The group has long been closely associated with the Sixth Street "Salaama Aleykom" Mosque in the Nairobi suburb of Eastleigh, which has at times reportedly done fundraising for it. An *al-Itihaad* leader from Kenya, nicknamed Boqolsoon, was killed at roadblock in Jowhar in mid-1992, while on a visit to Somalia. Another alleged *al-Itihaad* figure, Adan Garweyne, was the owner of the popular Ramadan Hotel in Nairobi's Eastleigh district, until he met his death at 'Eel Waaq in Somalia.

However, *al-Itihaad* is no longer an active force in Kenya, where, according to most observers, its public influence has diminished in recent years: "They've been discredited", a leading member of the Kenyan Somali community told Crisis Group. "People have become disappointed by them. They're not as strong as they were.…The term [*al-Itihaad*] now carries a kind of stigma".[46] But there is no way of determining with certainty whether the organisation's Kenyan cells have disbanded or definitively abandoned the group's original, militant ideology.

Al-Itihaad has also long had a quiet presence in Djibouti. In 1992, cells there served as a key link in the organisation's financial and logistical support chain and worked closely with its Saudi financier, Abdulrahman al-Qaidy. The Djibouti government acknowledges the presence of *al-Itihaad* members but believes the movement is no longer as active as it was in the early 1990s. A senior French military official concurred: "AIAI is in Djibouti but they are quiet…[although] there are AIAI leaders in Djibouti".[47] One explanation for *al-Itihaad*'s quiescence may be the government's relatively relaxed attitude: according to one official, "We try to engage them".[48] Another may simply be that the organisation is no longer active and that most of its former members – in Djibouti as elsewhere – have taken up new interests.

6.   From Jihad to terror: The Islamic Union of Western Somalia

The most virulent strain of *al-Itihaad* militancy emerged in Ethiopia, where the movement's armed struggle against Ethiopian control over Somali-inhabited territories in

the east culminated in a series of terrorist attacks in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa.

Europe's scramble for African colonies in the latter years of the nineteenth century divided the Somali people between five political jurisdictions.[49] The Ogaden, Haud and Reserve Area fell under the aegis of the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik. Generations of Somali irredentists have since dreamed of reunifying the entire Somali nation under a single flag, typically referring to the Ethiopian-controlled territories as "Western Somalia". Since Somali independence in 1960, a succession of liberation movements has sought to reverse Ethiopian sovereignty over the region.

In 1990 (or possibly earlier), *al-Itihaad al-Islaami ee Soomaaliya Galbeed* (the Islamic Union of Western Somalia) began to agitate for liberation of the Ogaden.[50] Like other guerrilla groups in the region, it drew its membership from the eponymous Ogaden sub-clan of the Darood and envisioned the reunification of all Somali territories within a single polity.[51] But – unlike other resistance forces – its objectives included an Islamic political order based on a narrow interpretation of the Koran and the Sunna. The organisation described itself as a front for "Da'wa and Jihad" and cast its struggle in terms of the liberation of Muslims from a Christian, highland oppressor.

In 1991, when the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) overthrew the dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam, *al-Itihaad* joined other segments of Ethiopian society in taking advantage of new political freedoms. It was registered as an official political party whose leaders were free to campaign and express their views in the media. But the organisation simultaneously continued to develop its military wing, building a fleet of gun-mounted four-wheel-drive vehicles (known as "technicals") and maintaining training facilities at various locations in the Ogaden, including Adhi Adheeye, Sagag and Fiiq.[52] *Al-Itihaad* fighters made their presence known

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[44] Unpublished memorandum, August 2003.
[45] Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, April 2004.
[46] Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, April 2004.
[47] Crisis Group interview, Djibouti, April 2004.
[48] Crisis Group interview, August 2003.

[49] The French Somali Coast (Djibouti), Italian Somaliland, British Somaliland, Kenya and Ethiopia.
[50] The date of the Union's inception in Ethiopia is given in "Nida'ul Islam interviews the spokesman for the Islamic Union of the Mujahidin of Ogad[e]n", *Nida'ul Islam*, no. 12, March-April 1996.
[51] Today, the pre-eminent guerrilla movement in Ethiopian Somali territory is the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), which was formed in 1984. Unlike those of its predecessors, the Somali-Abo Liberation Front (SALF) and Western Somali Liberation Front (WSLF), the ONLF political program is ambiguous as to whether "self-determination" should lead to outright union with Somalia.
[52] Omar Khatiib, "The Islamic factions in Somalia", in *Al-Mustaqbal*, no. 3, Toronto, 1994.

throughout the region by steadily escalating guerrilla actions. Relations with the EPRDF quickly soured, and Ethiopian forces unexpectedly attacked an AIAI encampment known as Tareq bin Ziyad and killed a number of the organisation's leaders.[53] In late 1992, Ethiopian government forces intercepted a large group of *jihadi* stragglers near Buuhoodle as they crossed the border following their retreat from Laas Qoray. In late 1993 and early 1994, Ethiopia reportedly stepped up ground and air attacks on AIAI along the Somali border. An *al-Itihaad* spokesman has claimed that U.S. forces were also involved.[54]

In December 1994, Ethiopian military pressure appeared to be paying off when *al-Itihaad* agreed to meet with ONLF[55] and EPDRF representatives for peace talks at Qabri Dhahar, a small, dusty town in the central Ogaden. The Islamists were represented by Deputy Chairman Abdillahi Omar. The EPRDF's principal demands, communicated via clan elders, were that *al-Itihaad* disarm and disavow all ties with the movement in Somalia. But the AIAI representatives claimed to have no relationship with movements in Somalia or elsewhere and agreed to hand their weapons only to clan elders, not the EPRDF. In March 1995, the talks broke down and intermittent hostilities resumed.

The collapse of the talks heralded a new phase in *al-Itihaad*'s campaign against Ethiopian rule. In May 1995, a grenade attack at a busy outdoor market in Dire Dawa, the country's second largest city, claimed fifteen lives. Eight men, all alleged members of *al-Itihaad*, were subsequently convicted by an Ethiopian court.[56] Less than a year later, bomb blasts at two hotels in Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa left seven dead and 23 injured. An *al-Itihaad* spokesman in Mogadishu, Abdulqadir Mohamud Dhaqane, subsequently claimed responsibility on behalf of the organisation.[57]

In July 1996, Ethiopian Minister for Transport and Communications Abdulmejid Hussein, an ethnic Somali, was shot while arriving at his office, though he survived. Once again, an *al-Itihaad* spokesman in Mogadishu claimed responsibility.[58] But this time, according to sources close to the investigation, the Ethiopian government had its own leads. According to an Ethiopian security official involved in the case, the ringleader of the cell – who had trained in Afghanistan – eventually surrendered, providing information on other members of the cell,[59] leading to additional arrests and convictions. At least one member of the group, however, a former lieutenant in the Somali army identified by the Ethiopian government only as Hassan "Yare", remained at large.[60]

Addis Ababa resolved to eliminate *al-Itihaad*, branch and root. On 9 August 1996, Ethiopia launched the first of two raids on *al-Itihaad* bases across the border in Somalia at Luuq and Buulo Haawa. The strike, which employed artillery, helicopter gunships and infantry, was limited and targeted: according to an independent report, "casualties were relatively few, and the destruction was mainly confined to the police station and administration buildings". Significantly, however, "the Ethiopians had failed in their major objective when attacking Luuq, having failed to find and destroy the fundamentalist leadership", which had gone into hiding.[61] In January 1997, Ethiopian forces returned, apparently determined to finish the job. Many of the Islamists – including foreigners – were killed or injured, the training camps were dismantled and *al-Itihaad*'s short-lived terror campaign in Ethiopia came to an end. Officially, at least, *al-Itihaad al-Islaami*, both in Ethiopia and Somalia, had ceased to exist.

7. *Al-Itihaad*'s twilight years

In the aftermath of the Ethiopian raids, some *al-Itihaad* leaders struggled to keep the movement alive. On 10 August 1996, the day following the first Ethiopian raid on Luuq, Hassan Dahir Aweys condemned the attacks, which he attributed to a coalition of Ethiopian and U.S. forces led by SNF collaborators.[62] According to Aweys, civilian neighbourhoods, markets and orphanages were deliberately attacked in both Luuq and Buulo Xaawo. He

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[53] Ibid. It is not clear from this account whether the attack in question took place before or after the 1991 change of government in Ethiopia, or whether *al-Itihaad* had already begun to conduct guerrilla operations.
[54] *Al-Itihaad* spokesman, quoted in *"Nida'ul Islam* Interviews the spokesman for the Islamic Union of the Mujahideen of Ogaden", published in the nineteenth issue of *Nida'ul Islam* magazine, July-August 1997, available at http://www.islam.org.au.
[55] See fn. 51 above.
[56] Matt Bryden, "No quick fixes: Coming to terms with terrorism, Islam and statelessness in Somalia", *The Journal of Conflict Studies*, vol. XXIII, no. 2, University of New Brunswick, Fall 2003, p. 32.
[57] David H. Shinn, "Ethiopia: Coping with Islamic fundamentalism before and after September 11", *Africa Notes*, no. 7, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, February 2002, p. 5.

[58] Ibid, p. 5.
[59] Crisis Group interview, Addis Ababa, 8 April 2004.
[60] From a circular to missions and representatives of international and regional organisations in Addis Ababa on the subject of international terrorism, from the Security, Immigration and Refugee Affairs Authority of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 6 June 2003. "Yare" is a common nickname in Somali meaning young or small.
[61] King, "Security in Gedo", op. cit.
[62] Hassan Dahir Aweys, "Baaq", 10 August 1996. Reprinted in the Mogadishu newspaper, *Panorama*.

labelled the U.S. the number one enemy of Muslims and accused its government of seeking to place the entire Horn of Africa under Ethiopian, Christian rule. In an unsuccessful attempt to internationalise the conflict, Aweys called on Muslims worldwide to show solidarity with *al-Itihaad* by resisting American aggression and sending aid to their suffering Somali brethren.[63] His statement was issued on behalf of a previously unknown organisation: *Jama'at al-I'tisaam Bil-Kitaab Wa Sunna.*[64]

The rebranding of *al-Itihaad* as *al-I'tisaam* apparently dates from a 1996 initiative to reunite and revive its fragments under a new umbrella.[65] Following the movement's disastrous 1992 defeat at the hands of the SSDF, former chairman Sheikh Ali Warsame returned to his native Bur'o and reconnected with *Wahdat al-Shabaab*, which had continued to thrive in Somaliland. This time, his offer of partnership resulted in the announcement of an Islamic Congress for Salvation (*Tajammu' al-Islaami li'l-Inqaad*).[66] Through Sheikh Ali, *Tajammu'* retained ties with Islamists throughout Somalia, and in 1996 he reportedly rejoined Hassan Dahir and his followers to form *al-I'tisaam*.

Most probably the name change was largely intended to deflect Ethiopian military pressure. In a mid-1997 interview with the Australian journal, *Nida'ul Islam*, a spokesman for the Islamic Union of the Ogaden, which continued to employ the name *al-Itihaad*, seemed eager to draw the distinction between his own movement and the Islamic Union in Somalia, which he called *al-I'tisaam*.[67] Likewise, Sheikh Mohamud 'Isse, a former chairman of both *al-Itihaad* and *al-I'tisaam*,[68] has claimed – inaccurately – that *al-Itihaad* fighters inside Ethiopia were exclusively from "Zone Five".[69]

By the time *al-Itihaad* attempted to change its name to *al-I'tisaam*, the movement's once-formidable administrative and military structure had crumbled, and the leadership was in disarray. Internal correspondence from that period reveals the distress of the leaders at their catastrophic defeat by Ethiopian forces.[70] In August 1998, *al-I'tisaam* signed a cooperation agreement with its former rival, the SNF, and two months later the leader of the movement's Gedo chapter, Sheikh Mohamed Ma'alim Nur, unsuccessfully sued for peace with Addis Ababa.[71] As an exercise in rebranding, *al-Itihaad*'s attempt to change its name was a signal failure. Few Somalis and even fewer foreigners have ever heard of *al-I'tisaam*, while the term *al-Itihaad* remains in everyday use.

Opinions are deeply divided as to whether *al-Itihaad* still exists and if so, in what form. "They realised that their strategy was not viable, and they dismantled themselves", a Mogadishu faction leader told Crisis Group, arguing AIAI had gone underground.[72] A 2002 study by the Ethiopian scholar, Medhane Tadesse, describes *al-Itihaad* as a major political and commercial force in Somalia and identifies a number of the group's putative leaders.[73] The U.S. in 2001 named *al-Itihaad* as a group linked to international terrorism, and as recently as April 2004 U.S. officials described it to Crisis Group as a kind of franchise of al-Qaeda (although there is no consensus within the U.S. government on this).[74] A United Nations Monitoring Group responsible for documenting violations of the Somalia arms embargo describes *al-Itihaad* as a significant military and commercial force.[75]

Others argue, in Crisis Group's view more persuasively, that *al-Itihaad* is "a spent force, marginal if not defunct as an organisation".[76] A close adviser to Djibouti President Isma'il Omar Guelleh told Crisis Group:

> *Al-Itihaad* once existed as a strong political force…but they showed their cards early – that they were after power – so they couldn't survive. A few individuals still wear the mantle, but we see them as free atoms circulating in the region, and we could arrest them very easily.[77]

The dissolution of *al-Itihaad* did not mean its total disappearance. In the terms of one U.S. official, AIAI had been transformed from a "noun" into an "adjective"

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[63] Crisis Group interview, Hargeysa, July 2004.
[64] Meaning "Group for Adherence to the Book [i.e. the Koran] and the Sunna".
[65] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004.
[66] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004
[67] "Nida'ul Islam interviews the spokesman for the Islamic Union of the Mujahideen of Ogadin", op. cit.
[68] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004. Tadesse also cites a letter written in February 1998 and signed by Sheikh Mohamud in his capacity as the leader of *al-I'tisaam*, and asserts that *al-Itihaad* has in fact been using the *I'tisaam* label since 1992. Medhane Tadesse, *Al-Itihaad: Political Islam and Black Economy in Somalia* (Addis Ababa, 2002), pp. 91,106.
[69] "Zone Five" is the former designation of the Ethiopian Somalia National Regional State. Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Mohamud 'Isse, Mogadishu, December 2004. Although true for the majority of cases, there is considerable evidence of *al-Itihaad* cross-border operations between Ethiopia and Somalia.

[70] Tadesse, *Al-Itihaad*, op. cit., pp. 90-93.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004.
[73] Tadesse, *Al-Itihaad,* op. cit.
[74] Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, April 2004.
[75] Tambi, Holt Jr., Li and Salek, "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia", op. cit.
[76] Menkhaus, "Somalia", op. cit., p. 63.
[77] Crisis Group interview, Isma'il Tani, Djibouti, April 2004.

– in other words, from an organisation into an idea.[78] *Al-Itihaad* leaders like Sheikh Abdulqadir Ga'amey in Garoowe, Sheikh Dahir in Bosaaso, Sheikh Ali Warsame in Bur'o and Sheikh Mohamud 'Isse returned to their communities as respected Salafi clerics and have continued to inspire followers with their beliefs.[79] Many other *al-Itihaad* alumni stepped into visible public roles as religious leaders, judges, elders and businessmen. Only a few, like Hassan Dahir Aweys and Hassan Turki, apparently remain committed to a revolutionary agenda and continue to be associated with militancy.

B. THE NEW *JIHADIS*[80]

Since 2003, evidence has emerged of a new, ruthless independent Somali *jihadi* network, whose most visible figure has been a young militia leader known as Aden Hashi Farah 'Ayro. Based in Mogadishu, the group has no known name or political agenda, and its core membership probably numbers in the tens rather than hundreds.[81]

Since August 2003, 'Ayro's group has been linked to the murders of four foreign aid workers and over a dozen Somalis believed to be working with Western counter-terrorism networks.[82] From 'Ayro's perspective, the murder of Somali counter-terrorism officers is probably entirely justified: they are collaborators with a "far enemy" – the U.S. – in a global war against Islam and can be killed legitimately in self-defence. Much harder for 'Ayro to justify, however, is his alleged involvement in the assassination of one of Somalia's pre-eminent peace activists, Abdulqadir Yahya Ali – an act he has publicly denied responsibility for.

'Ayro himself was in some respects a product of *al-Itihaad*: a protégé of the former vice chairman and military commander, Hassan Dahir Aweys, he appears to have inherited his mentor's affiliation with al-Qaeda. The young *jihadi* leader was reportedly trained in Afghanistan prior to the American invasion of 2001, and his militia has links to

al-Qaeda operatives in Mogadishu, notably a leader of the terrorist network's East African operations known as Tariq Abdullah (a.k.a. abu-Talha al-Sudani). In July 2005, soon after Yahya's murder, 'Ayro was appointed commander of the Ifka Halane court militia – a decision that almost certainly required Aweys's endorsement.

'Ayro's youth (he is believed to be between 28 and 30) and his lack of religious credentials make it seem unlikely that he is the senior leader of the new *jihadi* group. Ongoing investigations into the Somaliland killings have persuaded security sources that he may take his orders from another Afghan veteran and al-Qaeda associate, Ahmed Abdi Godane, and a former *al-Itihaad* leader known as Ibrahim al-Afghani – both natives of Somaliland.[83] Indeed, as more information about the new *jihadi*s comes to light, they are beginning to resemble not so much a hierarchical organisation as a network of networks, one component of which is composed chiefly of Somalilanders and is aimed at the destabilisation of Somaliland.

In Mogadishu, the new *jihadi*s appear to be becoming an alarming new player on the Somali stage. 'Ayro's appointment as Ifka Halane militia commander establishes a disturbing link between *jihadi* Islamists, the Islamic court system and the former *al-Itihaad* movement personified by Aweys.[84] Signs of support for 'Ayro's militia from businessman Abokar Omar Adaani reinforce the perception that the *jihadis* are no longer as isolated as they once were and may be set to assert themselves even more boldly.

For Somalia's neighbours and concerned Western powers, the new face of Somali *jihadism* resembles less the *al-Itihaad* of the 1990s than the many other local extremist groups worldwide inspired by al-Qaeda and its offshoots. Its adoption of fluid organisational structures and unconventional and terrorist tactics may eventually pose a greater menace to regional and wider international security than the old *al-Itihaad*.

Attempts to break up 'Ayro's network and apprehend the foreign *jihadi*s to whom it provides protection have so far foundered on the protection afforded by Aweys and other leading members of the powerful Habar Gidir 'Ayr clan. Any move against 'Ayro could be construed by his patrons as an attack on 'Ayr interests, rather than a strike against extremism. Unless the 'Ayr – and other clans with similar problems – can be persuaded that their own interest lies in eliminating the extremist presence in their

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[78] Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, July 2005.
[79] U.S. intelligence officials believe that Sheikh Mohamud Isse remains active in militant circles. Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, April 2005.
[80] For a full description of this group, see Crisis Group Report, *Counter Terrorism in Somalia*, op. cit.
[81] Some U.S. counter terrorism officials refer to it as the "Special Group". Crisis Group interviews, Djibouti, July 2005.
[82] In November 2005, a Somaliland court convicted fifteen Somali men of responsibility for the killings and sentenced eight of them to death. An investigation into the death of a fourth aid worker, Annalena Tonelli, was reopened in light of new evidence, and the court ordered investigations into the roles of Aden Hashi 'Ayro and Ahmed Abdi Godane to continue.

[83] Crisis Group interviews, Hargeysa, October 2005.
[84] The courts had previously denied any link to 'Ayro, when his militia had disinterred corpses from a colonial era Italian cemetery in early 2005. See Crisis Group Report, *Counter-Terrorism in Somalia*, op. cit., p. 5.

midst, the new *jihadis* will continue to act with relative impunity, lending credence to largely exaggerated foreign fears about the "Talibanisation" of Somalia.

C.   AL-TAKFIR WAL-HIJRA[85]

The original *al-Takfir wal- Hijra* was formed in Egypt in the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war with the name *Jama'at al-Muslimiin* and under the leadership of Shukri Mustafa, a member of Egypt's Muslim Brothers who acquired his revolutionary views through exposure to Sayyid Qutb's writings and his own experience of detention in Egypt's prisons. The original *al-Takfir wal-Hijra* was responsible for the kidnapping and murder of a former government minister. Shukri Mustafa was subsequently executed but militants inspired by Takfiri ideas, including Osama bin Laden's deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, have been associated with extremist violence ever since.[86]

Very little is known about the Somali *al-Takfir wal-Hijra*, except that its presence first became apparent after the collapse of the Barre regime, when small *takfiri* communes appeared in Mogadishu, Bosaaso and a number of other towns. They were secretive and shunned unnecessary contact with other Somalis, but had no known links to *al-Itihaad* or other *jihadi* groups and no known record of violence. Some observers have nevertheless described the Somali *al-Takfir wal Hijra* as the most militant of Somali Islamist groups: one observer calls it "an extremist group within *al-Itihaad*" and alleges that it also ran terrorist training camps in Raas Kaambooni under the leadership of Hassan Turki.[87] A member of *al-Islah* likewise described the *takfiris* to Crisis Group as "real hard core. They don't even consider the rest of us to be Muslims".[88]

In mid-2005, reports in the Kenyan media claimed that U.S. and Kenyan intelligence had identified a terrorist coalition of *al-Takfir*, al-Qaeda, and the al-Qaeda-affiliated Iraqi organisation led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi

operating between Somalia and Kenya.[89] Not only were the reports implausible, but they also cited sources close to the leadership of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG), which has consistently overstated the terrorist threat in order to attract foreign assistance. Crisis Group enquiries were unable to substantiate the reports.

The confusion surrounding the Somali *takfiri* movement is understandable. The obscurity of the group's membership, aims and beliefs lend themselves to speculation and rumour. Furthermore, like Shukri Mustafa's original group, it is quite possible that members of the group do not refer to themselves as "*takfiris*" or identify themselves as such. The term *takfir* relates more to a system of Islamist belief and conduct (*takfir* is the practice of denouncing infidels or the impious) than it does to membership in a given group, so it is quite plausible that some members of other organisations share *takfiri* beliefs. The little that is known about Somali "*takfiris*", together with the extremist ideology and the violent character of *takfiri* groups elsewhere, however, suggests that the movement merits further research and close monitoring.

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[85] The original Egyptian group did not call itself *al-Takfir wal-Hijra* but rather *Jama'at al-Muslimiin*, "the Congregation [or Society] of the Muslims"; the ATWAH name was given it by the Egyptian media, presumably on government instructions. For further information on the group, see, for example, John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* (New York, 1992), pp. 134-136, and Gilles Kepel (trans. Anthony F. Roberts), *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (London, 2002), pp. 83-85.
[86] For a fuller description of *al-Takfir wal-Hijra*, see Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°13, *Islamism in North Africa II: Egypt's Opportunity*, 20 April 2004, pp. 3-4.
[87] Tadesse, *Al-Itihaad*, op. cit., p. 100.
[88] Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, May 2005.

[89] *The East African Standard*, "Security alert", Nairobi, 15 June 2005, at allafrica.com/stories/ 200506060753.html.

III. POLITICAL ISLAM

Insofar as Islam is inherently interested in matters of governance, all forms are to some extent political. This section, however, concentrates on Somali movements that to one degree or another explicitly give priority to political action over religious proselytism, seek power by political rather than violent means and typically organise themselves as political parties.[90]

A. *HARAKAT AL-ISLAH*

After *al-Itihaad*, Somalia's most controversial Islamist organisation is arguably *Harakat al-Islah* (the Reform Movement), which borrows its vision from the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwaan Muslimiin*) movement that has powerful chapters in Egypt, Jordan and numerous other parts of the Arab world. *Al-Islah*'s membership includes many urban professionals and students, and the organisation espouses the reformation/revival (*Islah*) of Islam to meet the challenges of the modern world.[91]

Al-Islah was formed in 1978 and grew slowly during the 1980s, eschewing a formal structure in favour of a loose, club-like network.[92] Leading figures included Sheikh Mohamed Garyare, Dr Ali Sheikh and Dr Ibrahim Dusuqi. During this formative period, the movement was obliged to remain clandestine because of the repressive nature of the Barre regime but with the collapse of the Somali government in 1991, it began to operate openly. Today, *al-Islah*'s principal leaders make no attempt to conceal themselves: Dr Ali Sheikh (President of Mogadishu University) is the chairman, Abdirahman Baadiyo is vice chairman, and Dr Ibrahim Dusuqi is secretary general.[93]

During the 1990s, *al-Islah* devoted much of its energy to humanitarian activities and the restoration of basic social services. Today, its most important contribution is widely considered to be in education. Its leaders have played key roles in the organisation of the Formal Private Education Network in Somalia (FPENS) educational network and in the establishment of Mogadishu University (one of four post-secondary educational institutions in the city) although they are keen to point out that these are independent institutions – not organs of *al-Islah*. FPENS schools educate more than 120,000 students in Mogadishu alone;

Mogadishu University, which describes itself as a non-sectarian institution, instructs several thousand students in seven faculties – four taught mainly in English and three in Arabic. Ultimately, the university administration expects roughly 70 per cent of all courses to be taught in English.[94] A significant proportion of the student body is female.

1. An Islamist democracy?

Many Somalis, as well as concerned governments, feared that a Somali government dominated by Islamists would rapidly evolve into a totalitarian Islamic state. In interviews with Crisis Group, *al-Islah* leaders appeared anxious to put such fears to rest by fundamentally rejecting the use of violence to achieve political goals and professing a core belief in democracy:[95]

> We do not believe that power can be preserved for one group or individuals in the name of religion. Power is for the people….We are Muslims and our core Islamic values must be preserved and protected by that democratic state. We strongly oppose any kind of authoritarianism or dictatorship, with or without religion. We believe in the power of the people to elect their rulers, to control them, change them. We believe in pluralism, freedom of expression and the rotation of power.[96]

In a number of important respects, *al-Islah* appears to practise the values it preaches. Traditionalist Somali leaders testify to the movement's pacific and tolerant conduct. "*Al-Islah* are unarmed", one of Mogadishu's traditionalist Sufi sheikhs told Crisis Group. "They don't incite violence and they are more proactive. We have only slight suspicions, we have some differences. But of the new groups, they are the closest to us".[97]

The organisation's internal structure, such as it exists, functions in an ostensibly democratic fashion. Members of *al-Islah*'s "High Council" are elected by a "parliament" (*Majlis al-Shura*) for five years and limited to two terms; the movement is in the third leadership phase since its inception.[98]

Al-Islah's democratic credentials, however, have so far failed to translate into broad public support. In effect, it remains a relatively small organisation dominated by a highly educated urban elite whose professional, middle

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[90] Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism*, op. cit., and fn. 4 above.
[91] See Crisis Group Africa Report N°45, *Somalia: Countering Terrorism in a Failed State*, 23 May 2002, p. 13.
[92] Andre Le Sage, "Al-Islah in Somalia: An analysis of modern political Islam", unpublished manuscript, pp. 7-8.
[93] Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, April 2004.

[94] Crisis Group interview with management of Mogadishu University, Mogadishu, April 2004.
[95] Le Sage, "Al-Islah", op. cit., p. 21.
[96] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004.
[97] Crisis Group interview with member of the Ahmediya sect, Mogadishu, April 2004.
[98] Crisis Group interview with member of *al-Islah*, Mogadishu, April 2004.

class status and extensive expatriate experiences are alien to most Somalis. As a close observer of the movement told Crisis Group, "to be in the inner circle of *al-Islah*… you already have to be rich, educated in order for them to even want to talk to you".[99]

Critics also allege a narrow clan bias in the leadership, which they describe as being heavily dominated by the diminutive Sheikhal sub-clan of the Hawiye, especially the Qutb sub-clan. *Al-Islah* leaders refute these allegations, asserting that the organisation is "based on particular Islamic principles and a set of criteria for the selection of its membership and election of its leadership".[100] Clearly, however, the organisation has far to go before it will have the opportunity to apply its political principles on the national stage.

2. Two sides of the same coin?

In February 2005, police in Kenya's remote northeastern province stopped a vehicle that had recently crossed the border from Somalia. According to news reports, the car's occupants – two Somalis and a Sudanese – were in possession of an explosives training manual, pamphlets celebrating the assassination of a British journalist in Mogadishu several weeks previously, and literature linking them to "a terrorist cell known as *al-Isla[h]*".[101] Two of the vehicle's occupants were subsequently released but the incident served to underscore the widespread perception that *al-Islah* is an extremist group aligned with *al-Itihaad*.

Many Somalis and foreign analysts – especially in the security services – regard *al-Islah* with suspicion. Some believe that *al-Islah* and *al-Itihaad* are simply different names for the same organisation,[102] or that *al-Islah*'s relationship with *al-Itihaad* is analogous to Sinn Fein's links with the Irish Republican Army.[103] Ethiopian intelligence officials claimed to Crisis Group that *al-Islah* provides ideological leadership, while *al-Itihaad* acts as the movement's "military wing".[104] Djiboutian security officers endorse this view:

> *Islah* and *al-Itihaad* are a single political party with one moderate wing and one fundamentalist wing.

It's difficult to distinguish between them. *Al-Itihaad* is the more Salafist/Wahhabist, and has a relationship with al-Qaeda. *Al-Islah* has modified Wahhabism to make it acceptable to Somalis. This is tactical.[105]

There is much to suggest, however, that *al-Islah* is in fact *al-Itihaad*'s rival rather than its partner. The two organisations are ideologically incompatible and have a history of mutual antagonism. The differences stem in large part from divergent interpretations of Islam. *Al-Islah*'s leaders consider Salafism – the religious tradition from which *al-Itihaad* draws its inspiration – to be a "form of extremism, an introverted system of belief".[106] A recent paper by an *al-Islah* leader describes *al-Itihaad* and *Takfir wal-Hijra* as extremist groups whose armed revolutionaries believe in "exclusivity and absolutism"[107] – or what one *al-Islah* member described disparagingly to Crisis Group as "'Allahu Akhbar' with a gun".[108]

"There is a radical difference between *al-Islah* and *al-Itihaad*", the former's leaders insisted to Crisis Group. "The only shared things between us are that we are Somalis, they are Somalis; they are Muslims, we are Muslims. Period.…We, *Islah*, would prefer to live in a democratic, secular state [rather] than under a religious dictatorship of *al-Itihaad*".[109]

Differences between the two organisations were on public display during the early 1990s. In mid-1991, the two groups clashed over a Sudanese proposal that they organise an Islamist revolution.[110] In mid-1992, when *al-Itihaad* launched its military bid to wrest control of northeast Somalia away from the SSDF, *al-Islah* issued a communiqué in Mogadishu, implicitly criticising AIAI and calling for an end to the conflict.

In December 1992, another Sudanese initiative strained relations between *al-Islah* and *al-Itihaad* to the point of rupture. At the invitation of the Khartoum government, four Somali Islamist groups met in Khartoum to coordinate their response to U.S. intervention in Somalia. According to Dusuqi, *al-Islah* objected to *al-Itihaad*'s participation on the grounds that the Islamist coalition should have no armed militia: "I told the conference, 'The place of *al-Itihaad* is not here; it is among the armed factions'". When the conference failed to reach an agreement, Hassan al-

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[99] Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, June 2004.
[100] Letter to Crisis Group from member of *al-Islah*, 16 May 2005.
[101] Stephen Mbogo, "Terrorists, militias pose survival challenge to Somalia's new gov't", at www.crosswalk.com.
[102] See Tadesse, *Al-Itihaad*, op. cit.
[103] Andre Le Sage, "Somalia and the War on Terrorism: Political Islamic movements & U.S. counter-terrorism efforts", unpublished PhD dissertation, Cambridge University, June 2004, p. 151.
[104] Crisis Group interviews, Addis Ababa, April 2004.

[105] Crisis Group interviews, Djibouti, April 2004
[106] Crisis Group interview with member of *al-Islah*, Mogadishu, December 2004
[107] Abdurahman M. Abdullahi, *"Recovering Somali state: The Islamist factor"*, unpublished draft.
[108] Crisis Group interview with member of *al-Islah* April 2004.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid.

Turabi, then chief ideologue of Sudan's ruling National Islamic Congress, reportedly blamed *al-Islah* for its failure.[111]

In 1999, Dusuqi was invited to lecture to Somali NGOs in Mogadishu on human rights from an Islamic perspective. In attempting to illustrate the diversity of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) on such matters, he pointed out that some Islamic scholars have argued that women should enjoy equal political rights to men, and that legal arguments assigning women only half the *diya* value of men are "juridically weak".[112] *Islah* leaders recall a similar lecture (possibly the same one), at which Dusuqi discussed marriage rights:

> …Dusuqi noted that despite the historical precedent of the Prophet Mohammed marrying a pre-teenage girl, that Dusuqi himself would not personally accept such a practice and believed it to infringe on the rights of women.[113]

Members of *al-Itihaad* subsequently denounced Dusuqi "as an 'infidel' who promoted imperialist Western values, described him as the Salman Rushdie of Somalia, and threatened to kill him".[114] Dusuqi has since taken enhanced security precautions in Mogadishu.

Recent years have served to sharpen the ideological differences between *al-Islah* and *al-Itihaad*, transforming their early rivalry into mutual hostility. "They don't sit together, they even attack each other verbally", a senior official from a Mogadishu NGO told Crisis Group. "*Al-Itihaad* says that *al-Islah* gives a bad name to Islam, and *al-Islah* says the same of *al-Itihaad* – they even say they are no better than ordinary *mooryaan* (bandits)".[115]

3. International relations and the war on terror

More so than other Somali Islamist organisations, *al-Islah* appears eager for good relations with the country's neighbours and with the West. The organisation's leaders are especially keen to advocate peaceful coexistence with Ethiopia, which views *al-Islah* as an extremist group. An *al-Islah* leader blames Addis Ababa's antipathy on the establishment of the TNG:

> Ethiopia before the Arta process had no *anti-Islah* sentiment but after Arta they created a distorted image of *al-Islah* and they exaggerated the role of

al-Islah in the Arta process. They opposed the TNG and we [*al-Islah*] fell victim to that policy. We are pleased that the new Ethiopian constitution gives rights to Somalis and other groups.[116]

Al-Islah has gone even further in its efforts to build bridges with the U.S. In 2002, when the first U.S. government delegation since 9/11 arrived in Mogadishu, *al-Islah* presented it with the crest and flag stolen by looters from the U.S. embassy following its evacuation in 1991 – a gift made all the more symbolic by the fact that the items had to be tracked down and purchased from a dealer in Mogadishu's sprawling Bakaraha market. The U.S. has reciprocated by providing some support to Mogadishu University.

Al-Islah leaders are, nevertheless, deeply critical of American counter-terrorism efforts. "We need to find commonality", one said in April 2004. "We may agree that we don't need terrorists, but we need to agree on a common approach".[117] *Al-Islah* is especially disappointed by U.S. reliance on militia leaders as counter-terrorism partners and argues that support for the peace process and good governance in Somalia would produce better results in the long term.

Despite its antipathy towards Salafism, *al-Islah* worries that the American preoccupation with this puritanical sect may be counter-productive: "When the United States targets Salafism, many people, because of anti-Americanism, may come to believe that Salafism is something good".[118]

Somalia's neighbours and other international partners will no doubt judge *al-Islah* by its actions, rather than its words. But by that measure, attempts to label it an extremist organisation appear to be misplaced: although *al-Islah* is by no means representative of mainstream Somali Islam, it is a moderating influence in Somalia's Islamist community and a potential partner in combating extremism.

B. AHLU SUNNA WAL JAMA'A

Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a (ASWJ) brings together traditional Somali Sufi leaders in an attempt to resist the encroachment of reformist Islamist groups. The group originated in 1991 as an offshoot from *Majma'*, in response to a request for cooperation from General Mohamed

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[111] Ibid.
[112] *Diya* is compensation for injury or death. Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004.
[113] Horn of Africa Centre for Information and Studies, pp. 5, cited in Le Sage, *Al-Islah*, op. cit., p. 22.
[114] Le Sage, *Al-Islah*, op. cit., p. 22.
[115] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004.

[116] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004.
[117] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004.
[118] Crisis Group interview with member of *al-Islah*, Mogadishu, December 2004.

Farah Aideed. While some *Majma'* leaders resisted what they perceived as an essentially political initiative, others felt that extraordinary measures were required to defend "traditional" Somali Islamic practices from foreign, and especially Islamist, encroachment. ASWJ's perceived political allegiance, however, was widely seen as inappropriate for religious leaders, and despite initial popularity in Banaadir and Lower Shabelle, it eventually lost influence to other, better funded Islamic groups. Aideed himself "subsequently switched allegiances, associating himself with *al-Itihaad* in his confrontation with U.S. forces, but *Ahlu Sunna* has remained active".[119]

By its own account, ASWJ has continued to provide unified leadership for Sufi *turuuq*, mainly across southern Somalia.[120] But the organisation remained little known until 2002, when it reinvented itself as "a modern political umbrella group where politically motivated sheikhs from the [Sufi] brotherhoods can join and espouse a 'traditionalist' interpretation of Islam".[121] According to the ASWJ leadership, the most important activity of the revived organisation "is to preach a message of peace and delegitimise the beliefs and political platform of [*al-Itihaad*] and any other fundamentalist movements".[122]

On this basis, the group's leadership began to play an active role at the Somali peace talks in neighbouring Kenya, where it campaigned vigorously against the inclusion of reformist Islamic groups who "started misinterpreting or preaching in the wrong way the religion while they had relation[s] with the International Network of Terrorists".[123] Such transparently opportunistic tactics risk undermining ASWJ's credibility as a platform for the re-invigoration of traditional Somali Islamic belief and practice.

C.   MAJMA' 'ULIMADDA ISLAAMKA EE SOOMAALIYA[124]

Immediately following the fall of the Barre regime on 2 February 1991, a group of some 30 Somali religious leaders *(Ulama)* came together to discuss how to fill the vacuum. The result was a militia force named *Horseed*,[125] whose primary functions were to provide security in certain neighbourhoods of the capital and some embryonic *Shari'a* courts. It may also have tried to assert authority

as a kind of "Supreme Islamic Council".[126] Sensing a challenge to their own authority, faction leaders soon aborted the initiative but it served as the foundation for the emergence of the group that would eventually become *Majma'*.

Within months, the leader of southern Somalia's most powerful militia faction, General Aideed, apparently decided that the *jihadi* fighters of *al-Itihaad* posed a greater threat to his authority than a modest group of Islamic scholars and sought an alliance with *Majma'*. His overtures split the organisation: those who rejected Aideed's offer of partnership retained the name *Majma'*; those responsive broke away to establish *Ahlu Sunna wal-Jama'a*.[127]

The declared purpose of *Majma'* is "to protect the proper understanding and practice of Islam",[128] ideally through establishment of a Somali government that will govern in accordance with the Shafi'i *madhhab* (legal school) of *Shari'a*.[129] In the early 1990s, *Majma'* became involved in a variety of peace initiatives, including the mediation efforts of U.S. Special Envoy Robert Oakley in 1992. Since then, it has concentrated more on basic social functions, such as religious education, engagement and marriage services.[130] The founding chairman, Sheikh Mohamed Ma'alim Hassan, died in 2001, and Sheikh Ahmed Abdi Dhi'isow was elected to replace him.[131] He heads an executive committee of eleven members, many of them clerics who served in government mosques under the previous regime.[132] The group's total membership is estimated at between 200 and 300 religious leaders from most clans and regions of Somalia.[133]

Although *Majma'* has remained aloof from politics, its commitment to the realisation of *Shari'a* is manifest in its support for Mogadishu's *Shari'a* courts. That is sometimes interpreted as support for Islamic extremism, since the courts are associated with militant leadership. Ethiopian analyst Medhane Tadesse, for example, appears to accept the assertion by some Somali faction leaders that *Majma'*

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[119] Bryden, "No quick fixes", op. cit.
[120] *Turuuq* (sing. *tariiqa*) are Sufi communities or brotherhoods.
[121] Lesage, "Somalia", op. cit., p. 234.
[122] Ibid, p. 234.
[123] ASWJ statement cited in Bryden, "No quick fixes", op. cit. p. 38.
[124] "The Assembly of Islamic Scholars of Somalia".
[125] Meaning "vanguard".

[126] Marchal, "Islamic political dynamics in the Somali civil war", op. cit., p. 125.
[127] The name is a Somali derivation from the Arabic: *Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama'a*. Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Ahmed Abdi Dhi'isow, Mogadishu, December 2004. For more on the group, see below.
[128] Lesage, "Somalia", op. cit., p.231.
[129] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, February 2005. Shafi'ism is a comparatively liberal interpretation of Islam, vis-à-vis Wahhabism and its antecedent, Hanbalism.
[130] Lesage, "Somalia", op. cit., p. 233.
[131] Sheikh Dhi'isow told Crisis Group he was re-elected as *Majma*'s Chairman in 2004.
[132] Cited in Lesage, "Somalia", op. cit., p. 231.
[133] Ibid, p. 232.

is an "extremist group".[134] Likewise, the group's rhetoric can at times suggest a propensity for militancy – or even violence. In an interview with Crisis Group, for example, Sheikh Dhi'isow railed against the regular surveillance flights over Mogadishu which most Somalis believe American aircraft conduct:

> …if we had the power to shoot them down, we would, because they are just roaming around without permission. But since we can't, we will keep it in our hearts until the time comes for revenge.[135]

The Sheikh's wrath, however, was echoed by numerous Mogadishu residents interviewed by Crisis Group, who associate U.S. aircraft with the air strikes of mid-1993 that destroyed parts of the city and killed hundreds of civilians. Instead of inciting its members to anti-Western jihad, *Majma'* advocates "friendship with neighbouring countries" and – under the right circumstances – cooperation with U.S. counter-terrorism objectives. If terrorists can be found in Somalia, in the absence of a functioning government, a *Majma'* leader told Crisis Group:

> [The U.S.] has the right to hunt them down – but they must be sure. We wish no harm on anyone, not the U.S. or any other country. But we would like them to reciprocate. We do not want them to harm us for a pretext….We understand the feelings of the Americans since 9/11, but they must distinguish between the perpetrators of that act and ordinary Somalis struggling to survive.[136]

So far there is no evidence that *Majma'* is anything other than what it appears to be: an association of professional Shafi'i scholars, designed to affirm their religious authority and to secure the interests of its members – including their recognition and employment under a future Somali government.

IV. MISSIONARY ACTIVISM

Missionary Islamists typically eschew explicit political activism, and neither seek political power nor describe their groups as parties.[137] Such groups are not necessarily wholly without political objectives, but seek to influence the power-holders rather than secure power for themselves and tend to reject party politics, elections and other forms of political action in favour of the religious mission of preaching and proselytising (*al-da'wa*). Their missionary activities are focused principally on the "conversion" of nominal Muslims to what they regard as correct Islamic belief and practice rather than of non-Muslims to Islam. Prime examples of missionary activism in Somalia include followers of the Tablighi sect and the "*Salafiyya Jadiida*" (new Salafis).

A. AL-ANSAR AS-SUNNA

Al-Ansar as-Sunna was the product of internal divisions within the early *al-Itihaad al-Islaami* movement. The April 1991 battle of Araare, the first military action fought by *al-Itihaad al-Islaami,* had strengthened two emerging trends within the movement. First, it aided the *jihadis* in their determination to militarise the movement. Secondly, it gave the impression that *al-Itihaad* placed the interests of the Darood clan (the defenders of Kismaayo) above those of the Hawiye (the forces of General Aideed).

Disillusioned by these developments, a group of mainly Hawiye clerics broke away to form their own association. The result was *al-Ansar as-Sunna*, a Mogadishu-based association of Wahhabi religious leaders led by Sheikh Hassan Alasow, who had preached *al-Itihaad*'s message in the pre-war period at the city's Lafwyene Mosque. According to one account, many members were traders with links to Saudi Arabia and used aid from Saudi institutions to encourage conformity with Wahhabi-style religious conduct and dress.[138]

Al-Ansar's lifespan was brief. Within months its leaders abandoned the project in favour of a brand of Salafism that they referred to as "*lâ Jama'a*"[139] and began to denounce *al-Itihaad*. A number of *al-Ansar*'s members belonged to the Abgaal sub-clan of the Hawiye; by 1993

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[134] Tadesse, *Al-Itihaad*, op. cit., pp. 190-191.
[135] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, December 2004.
[136] Ibid.

[137] For a more extensive discussion, see Crisis Group Report, *Understanding Islamism,* op. cit., pp. 24-25.
[138] Marchal, "Islamic political dynamics in the Somali civil war", op. cit., p. 125.
[139] Meaning that they refuse to set up an organised community (*jama'a*) distinct from and tacitly opposed to the broader community of believers in Somalia, thus adopting or reverting to mainstream Salafi practice.

several had drifted into the orbit of Musa Sudi Yalahow, an emerging Abgaal faction leader in Mogadishu's Madina district, where they established the city's first Islamic court.

One of the group's founders, Sheikh Ali Wajis, has remained active. An early leader of *al-Itihaad,* he played a key role in both the formation of *al-Ansar* and its dissolution. Viewed today as a leading figure of the *Salafiyya Jadiida* movement, he emerged post 9/11, as a prominent Salafi critic of *al-Itihaad* and is considered by some observers to embody the ideological tension between the new Salafis and *jihadi* Salafis.[140]

B. JAMA'AT AL-TABLIGH

Jama'at al-Tabligh first emerged in 1926 as a fundamentalist movement aimed at preservation of the faith within India's minority Muslim community. It has expanded into a worldwide movement, with millions of followers in roughly 100 hundred countries, including Somalia. Tablighi adherents are expected to fulfil their responsibility for *da'wa*, often through long travels in distant countries in small, multinational groups. In Somalia, Tabligh commands probably the largest following of any single religious organisation and owns by far the largest mosques and centres of instruction, but its reputation is primarily one of "quietist proselytism".[141]

Tabligh usually convenes several well-attended conferences each year in Somalia and Djibouti. These tend to be large, high profile affairs involving thousands of participants. A meeting in Mogadishu in April 2004 attracted between 7,000 and 10,000 to the Huriwaa Mosque. Described by a Mogadishu faction leader with close ties to U.S. intelligence as a meeting of "terrorists", it seems more likely to have been a routine Tablighi meeting in which a small number of extremists may have taken part.[142]

Likewise, a Tablighi conference in Hargeysa, 15-18 September 2002, included nearly 7,000 Somalis and over 300 foreigners mainly from Djibouti, Ethiopia and Yemen, but also Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kenya, Eritrea, Qatar, Sudan and South Africa. The venue was the Tablighi mosque in eastern Hargeysa (the largest mosque in Somaliland and the only one capable of hosting such an event), and the proceedings were led by Sheikh Isma'il Mohamed 'Elmi, the leader of Tabligh's Somaliland chapter. His opening address was followed by a keynote speech by former *al-Itihaad* leader Sheikh Ali Warsame. Conference conclusions reportedly included commitments to oppose Western (secular) democracy and pursue full implementation of *Shari'a* and solidarity among Muslims.[143]

Tabligh's vast membership, its broad appeal and its missionary activities certainly open the movement to abuse. In Somalia alone, there are reportedly between 500 and 700 foreign sheikhs or Islamic teachers, many linked to Tabligh. The vast majority are of Arab origin, but there are also many Afghans, Pakistanis, Chechens and other distant nationalities. Tabligh lacks any system of screening its members for prior involvement in *jihadism* and so is poorly equipped to respond to allegations that some may be involved in fomenting extremism and violence.

Strategic Expert and Consultant on Terrorism to the United Nations Security Council Roland Jacquard argues that Tablighi institutions have long been involved in recruiting *jihadi*s and arranging for their travel to war zones and routinely call for support of Osama bin Laden.[144] A Tablighi office near Baku, Azerbaijan, headed by a Somali, helped to send mujahidin to fight in Chechenya, and the "American Taliban", John Walker Lindh, was also reportedly recruited by Tabligh before travelling to Afghanistan.

There are grounds for concern that, in the Horn of Africa, some Tablighis harbour militant agendas and that extremist groups may infiltrate Tabligh as a cover for their movements and contacts. A former general in the Somali security services told Crisis Group, "Tablighis as Tablighis are no threat....Most Tablighis are good, they just provide [religious] orientation. But since 9/11, the *al-Itihaad* are afraid, and they try to mingle with Tabligh and other groups".[145] Consequently, Tablighis have come under increasing scrutiny by security services: in Puntland, for example, they are routinely questioned by immigration officers, and copies of their passports are often retained by the intelligence services. In August 2003, the Puntland Intelligence Service (PIS) detained a group of Pakistani Tablighis but found no evidence that they were anything but missionaries and was obliged to release them.[146]

In Somaliland, fears about extremist infiltration of Tabligh appear to have become a reality: one member of the team of *jihadi*s responsible for killing foreign aid workers was

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[140] Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, April and December 2004.
[141] Marchal, "Islamic Political Dynamics in the Somali Civil War", op. cit., p.126.
[142] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, 14 April 2004.

[143] Accounts of the meeting made available to Crisis Group, September 2002. One foreign intelligence source claims the conference ended with declarations of support for al-Qaeda.
[144] Roland Jacquard, *In the Name of Osama bin Laden* (Durham, 2002), pp. 49, 61.
[145] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, 14 April 2004.
[146] "Foreign terror suspects freed in Puntland", IRIN, 28 August 2003.

a former student at a Tablighi school in Mogadishu, and several other members of the same *jihadi* group, arrested in September 2005 after a gun battle with Somaliland security forces, were allegedly recruited through Tablighi networks.[147] Given the size of the movement, the heterogeneity of its membership and its fundamentalist message, the emergence of such extremist linkages is hardly surprising – perhaps inevitable; more disturbing, however, is the failure of the Somali Tablighi leadership to accept responsibility for these problems and take measures to prevent their reoccurrence.

V. ISLAMIST SERVICES: COURTS, CHARITY AND COMMERCE

Since the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, many formerly public services have been necessarily privatised. Water supply, health care, education, transportation, telecommunications and financial services are among the most visible examples. Charities and businesses with an explicitly "Islamic" character are among those which have become the most effective service providers. Throughout much of southern Somalia, Islamic courts have also played a lead role in the restoration of security after years of anarchy.[148]

The enhanced profile and importance of Islamic services is perceived by some observers as evidence of a deliberate strategy by Islamist organisations and their sponsors to take power in Somalia. While some Islamist groups, including former leaders of the *al-Itihaad* movement, may indeed harbour such objectives, most Islamic agencies reflect pragmatic reactions to state collapse and the absence of alternatives.

A. COURTS

The steady rise of *Shari'a* courts across much of southern Somalia is widely touted as the most visible evidence of the creeping influence of Islamist groups. Most courts, however, are less a product of Islamist activism than of Somalia's two most common denominators: clan and the traditional Islamic faith. Authority is invested in the courts by the decision of the lineage elders who establish the institution and therefore derives primarily from Somali customary law (*xeer*). *Shari'a* is applied by default, since no other legal system has functioned since the collapse of the government, and there are very few judges or lawyers left in the country. This effectively limits the jurisdiction of each court to its own sub-clan and means that the most severe Islamic punishments (*xudud,* from the Arabic *hudûd*) that contradict Somali *xeer* are rarely imposed. Nevertheless, the courts have provided a platform that Islamist groups have been quick to exploit.

Mogadishu's earliest Islamic court was established in the Madina district by former members of the *al-Itihaad* splinter group, *al-Ansar as-Sunna*, in 1993. The following year, a puritan Sheikh, Ali Dheere, with alleged links to *al-Itihaad*, achieved notoriety when he presided over the establishment of Islamic courts in north Mogadishu whose draconian sentences, including amputations, were captured on film by the international press. Dheere was a

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[147] See Crisis Group Report, *Counter-Terrorism in Somalia*, op. cit.

[148] Ibid, pp. 12-13.

member of the Abgaal sub-clan of the Hawiye, and his courts only had jurisdiction among the Abgaal, the most populous clan in north Mogadishu. Public opposition soon put an end to *xudud* sentences. Nevertheless, the Islamic courts had effected a dramatic improvement in security, and Abgaal political leaders began to fear his influence, militia and conservative Islamic agenda. In February 1998 they secured the dissolution of the courts.

The effectiveness of the Abgaal Islamic courts did not escape notice, and other communities began to emulate them. According to the chairman of the Siisii *Shari'a* court in Mogadishu, "the courts were established to provide security, a place where people could go to obtain justice. The best solution was the *Shari'a* court".[149] In 1996 the Xawaadle clan of Beledweyne established an Islamic court, and the same year a number of clan-based *Shari'a* courts opened in Mogadishu. In 1998, Hassan Dahir Aweys was a central figure in the establishment of an Islamic court in western Mogadishu known as Ifka Halane and another in Marka, the principal town in Lower Shabelle region. In the absence of a police force, each court maintained its own militia, usually paid for by contributions from the clan's businessmen. In comparison with the various clan and factional forces in the anarchic Somali capital, the court militia acquired a reputation for discipline and good conduct. Even the court's critics paid grudging respect: "People like them because they don't chew *qaad*, they don't rape, and they are more disciplined", a member of an unrelated Islamist group told Crisis Group.[150]

1. The *Shari'a* Implementation Council (2000-2003)

Since each court had jurisdiction only over members of a given sub-clan, it soon became apparent that in a large and heterogeneous city like Mogadishu, a degree of inter-court coordination would be necessary. In early 2000, a group of court leaders took the initiative to form the "*Shari'a* Implementation Council" (*Golaha Fulinta Sharee'ada Islaamka*) in order to unify the efforts of the various courts. Its assembly (*Majlis*) of 63 members elected as its chairman Sheikh Ali Dheere; Hassan Dahir Aweys was appointed secretary general.[151]

The Council's primary functions included prisoner exchanges and occasional joint militia operations, but it also served as a political vehicle for the ambitions of Aweys and other court leaders. In September 2000,

when the Transitional National Government (TNG) returned to Mogadishu from Djibouti, the Council lost no time in making its demands known.

Although they represented only some of the clans in the area, the collective leverage of the courts was formidable: their influence extended throughout much of Mogadishu and the Lower Shabelle region; their militia numbered in the thousands, and they physically controlled many major courts and prisons, including Aweys's compound at Ifka Halane, which resembled less a court than an armed camp, bristling with gun-mounted "technical" vehicles. Few people shared the courts' puritanical religious views but they were popular for their ability to provide security.

While some members of the TNG argued that the courts should simply be absorbed wholesale into the new judicial system, others argued for a more selective approach based on qualifications and merit. Eventually the dispute was resolved in favour of examinations, which many judges refused to stand for. But the decision had little impact, since the TNG never became a functional administration. By the expiration of its mandate in 2003, it had lapsed into near irrelevance and the *Shari'a* Implementation Council with it.

2. The Supreme Council of Islamic Courts of Somalia

In 2004, a new umbrella organisation was established for Mogadishu's *Shari'a* courts: the Supreme Council of Islamic Courts of Somalia (*Golaha Sare ee Makhamaddaha Islaamiga ee Soomaaliya*). The chairmen of ten courts either participated or named a representative. The Council members elected as its chairman Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, a cleric previously associated with the traditionalist Sufi association *Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a* (ASWJ)[152] who had played a leading role in the establishment of the judicial system in Middle Shabelle.[153] Several other members represented the traditionalist Shafi'i organisation *Majma'*. Prior to his appointment, Sheikh Sharif had been a key aide to Mohamed Dheere, a faction leader in the Ethiopian-backed Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC).

Under the leadership of the new Council, and in collaboration with voluntary "neighbourhood watch" committees, the *Shari'a* court system in Mogadishu experienced unprecedented expansion.

> By May 2004, when five *Shari'a* courts had been reestablished in Mogadishu, the decision was taken

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[149] Crisis Group interview with a *Shari'a* court leader, Mogadishu, December 2004.
[150] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, December 2004.
[151] Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, February 2005. See also Andre Lesage, *Stateless Justice in Somalia: Formal and Informal Rule of Law Initiatives*, unpublished draft, p.28.

[152] See Section III B above.
[153] Crisis Group interview with a member of the Supreme Council, Mogadishu, February 2005.

to pool a proportion of the courts' militias within the Joint Courts administration. According to interviews, each court contributed 80 militia [members] to create a 400-strong militia for the Joint Courts. Meanwhile, each court determined to retain direct command over an additional 40 militia[men] within their own system as a reserve. In addition, each court agreed to contribute between 3 and 5 "technical" battlewagons, giving the Joint Courts an initial security force of 19 technicals. Since that time, the number of *Shari'a* courts in Mogadishu has continued to grow. At present, eleven different courts exist across the city….[154]

The courts' promise of order and security appeals to Somalis across the religious spectrum. Their heterogeneous membership and the diversity of their supporters mean that attempts to label the *Shari'a* system "extremist", "moderate" or any other single orientation are futile. In reality, the courts are an unwieldy coalition of convenience, united by a convergence of interests: only two courts – Ifka Halane and Shirkoola[155] – have been consistently associated with militancy. Others, including Xararyaale and Towfiiq, appear to represent a counterweight to extremist influence.

3. Confrontation and cooption

Towards the end of 2004, it appeared as though the Council was under some strain. Court militia had been involved in a growing number of violent clashes and were increasingly viewed as simply one more faction in the city's chaotic politics. Two of the less ideological courts, Xararyaale (Murosade sub-clan) and Towfiiq (Abgaal/ Wa'eysle sub-clan), were threatening to assert greater independence. Even at Aweys's home base of Ifka Halane, under the leadership of a militia commander named Hirsi Lugeeye,[156] power was said to be shifting away from the *jihadis*, and the court leadership took pains to distance itself from the militant group led by Aden Hashi 'Ayro.[157] Aweys himself headed to his home region of Galguduud to establish a new string of Islamic courts among his kinsmen. In early 2005, having relinquished any visible role in the Mogadishu *Shari'a* system, he declared Galguduud secure for the UN and international NGOs to begin operations in.[158]

The formation of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in October 2004 gave a new lease on life to the Mogadishu court system. Interim President Abdillahi Yusuf's anti-Islamist credentials were anathema to hardliners within the court leadership, while his close affiliation with the Ethiopian government offered Islamists an easy foil against which to mobilise support. Yusuf's plans to bring foreign forces into the country, especially troops from Somalia's neighbours (including Ethiopia), pushed the courts into a tactical alliance with other Islamic leaders, Yusuf's political rivals and Somali nationalists.

TFG supporters and many media observers were quick to brand opponents of the deployment plan as "extremists", insinuating that the court system had been hijacked by former members of *al-Itihaad* and other *jihadi* groups, but the position of the courts resonated with a large segment of public opinion across southern Somalia. Mogadishu residents who subsequently took to the streets in mass demonstrations were from a broad cross section of society. A young professional told Crisis Group:

> From Ethiopia's perspective it will be a war between Ethiopia and the Islamists (*Ikhwaan*). But for we Somalis, it is not so simple. I have to fight side by side with anyone who is fighting Ethiopia….People do not want to join the Islamists (*wadaado*)…but if it comes to that, how can you refuse a coalition with them? It won't matter who chews *qaad* and who doesn't when the enemy is just over the horizon.[159]

Other court leaders appear to have been gradually adopting more militant views, although this cannot be attributed solely to Aweys's influence. On 31 December 2004, for example, the Supreme Council issued a judgement that celebration of the New Year was an offence punishable by death on the grounds that the event was not sanctioned as an Islamic holiday. In a subsequent interview with Crisis Group, the Council's chairman explained that the penalty could only be applied after due process, but stood by the ruling.[160] The court leadership has also argued that any terrorist suspects found on Somali soil should be tried by Somali courts rather than extradited to countries against whom they may have committed crimes – a position reminiscent of the Taliban's with regard to bin Laden.[161]

In July 2005, the court system accepted the appointment of Aden Hashi 'Ayro as commander of the Ifka Halane militia without a whisper of protest – despite having denounced him and his group just months earlier for their role in desecrating an Italian cemetery. In November 2005,

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[154] Lesage, *Stateless Justice in Somalia*, op. cit., p. 30.
[155] Also spelt "Circolo".
[156] Lugeeye was killed on 12 July 2005.
[157] Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, February 2005.
[158] Crisis Group interviews with United Nations officials, Nairobi, July 2005.

[159] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, February 2005. "*Wadaado*" literally means "religious men" but has increasingly come to be applied in common usage as a label for Islamists.
[160] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2005.
[161] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, December 2004.

militia from several courts took part in operations to shut down cinemas in northern Mogadishu that they accused of screening immoral Western and Indian films; the raids led to heavy fighting resulting in dozens of casualties.

Notwithstanding the influence of an extremist minority, most courts appear to exist for chiefly pragmatic purposes. Rather than imposing an Islamist agenda on a new Somali government, most are likely to be absorbed willingly into any future judicial system. However, as the courts acquire steadily increasing confidence, influence and resources, it is not inconceivable that they will begin to advocate an increasingly ideological agenda – one that *jihadi* Islamist elements in the court system will no doubt attempt to define.

B.   CHARITIES

Under the Barre dictatorship, Islamic charities were subject to the same restrictions as other kinds of NGOs. Following the collapse of the regime and the onset of humanitarian crisis in the early 1990s, Islamic charities – both foreign and domestic – expanded dramatically.

The finding of a recent study on the phenomenon estimates that there are "literally dozens" of Islamic charities in Mogadishu alone, most notably the Africa Muslims Agency (based in Kuwait); the Red Crescent Society of the United Arab Emirates (UAE); the World Association of Muslim Youth (WAMY, based in Saudi Arabia); the *al-Islah* Charity, linked to *Harakat al-Islah*; the Muslim World League (*Rabitat al-Islam al-'âlamiyya*) and its subsidiary, the International Islamic Relief Organisation (IIRO), both based in Saudi Arabia; *Dawa al-Islamiyya*; and the Al Wafa Charitable Society, which is listed as a "specially designated terrorist entity" by the U.S. government.[162]

Some of these, and others not listed here, have been linked to militant Islamist groups inside and outside Somalia. As described above, the Muslim World League, the IIRO and the now-defunct Mercy International Relief Agency (MIRA) were all used to channel funds to *al-Itihaad* during the early 1990s. As part of the wider investigation into the Saudi-based al Haramayn Islamic Foundation's links to international terrorism, the U.S. cited the Somali offices of al-Haramayn as directly linked to terrorism, persuading Riyadh to suspend their operations and recall their staff in 2003. In April 2005, an employee of the al-Haramayn

office in Bur'o, Somaliland, was arrested for involvement in the assassination of several foreign aid workers.[163]

The vast majority of Islamic charities in Somalia have no such links with extremism; they are private NGOs that provide essential services to the public. In Mogadishu alone, Islamic charities either manage or support three universities, a major management training institute, two hospitals, and schools that furnish education for over 100,000 students. Many Islamic charities also support work in other regions of the country.

The term "Islamic charities" implies a distinction from NGOs assisted by Western donors that is in reality not so clear-cut. Many Somali Islamic organisations are simply committed to providing a service that is consistent with their beliefs and practices as Muslims and have little or no qualms about partnerships with non-Muslim organisations or donors. The Somali Institute for Management Administration and Development (SIMAD) is a highly respected training school that receives most of its backing from the Africa Muslims Agency (AMA). The institute's heavy reliance on an Islamic source of funding is not entirely by choice: SIMAD's management initially also sought the help of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the State University of California and UNESCO, but received negative replies. When the UN Development Program (UNDP) finally agreed to provide a satellite link for SIMAD's computer students, the Institute was delighted. AMA was also pleased that SIMAD was diversifying its donor support base and contributed additional computers to equip two new labs.[164] SIMAD's management resists the suggestion it is beholden to anyone's agenda: "SIMAD was not created by some Arab funds, but by the commitment of some Somalis who feel that it is…their institution".[165]

Arafat Hospital was established during the early 1990s as an institution for internal medicine at a time when other Mogadishu hospitals were focused on surgery for treating casualties of war, crime and insecurity. It was initially built with money from the Islamic Development Bank but for three years remained inactive due to lack of staff and funding, until a Somali NGO, Zamzam, helped to persuade a prominent Somali doctor to return from Saudi Arabia to run the hospital, and its fortunes improved.[166] Far from having discovered affinities with the Arab world, the new director had tired of being a guest worker in the Kingdom: "The Saudis treat you as though they have

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[162] Andre Lesage, "The rise of Islamic charities in Somalia: An assessment of impact and gaendas", unpublished draft paper presented to the 45th Annual International Studies Association Convention, Montreal, Canada, 17-20 March, 2004, p. 9.

[163] See Crisis Group Report, *Counter-Terrorism in Somalia*, op. cit., pp. 5-6.
[164] Crisis Group interviews with SIMAD management, Mogadishu, December 2004.
[165] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, December 2004.
[166] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, December 2004.

purchased you and your services", he said, "so I wanted to come home".[167]

Both Arafat and Zamzam represent the pooling of support from Islamic and Western donors. UNDP has recently joined Zamzam as an Arafat benefactor. Zamzam is an Islamic NGO, established in Mogadishu in 1992, whose director says it owes much of its success to close collaboration with U.S. and UN forces during the early 1990s.[168] Its management systems were recently overhauled with assistance from the Dutch NGO, NOVIB.

Some Islamic charities in Somalia do indeed use social services as a platform for proselytising, political activism and promotion of an Arab national identity.[169] Most ordinary Somalis resent such activities as religious and cultural interference and are resistant to their messages. But many Islamic charities seem to lack any parallel agenda. Much of the instruction in Islamic teaching institutions is in Somali or English, not Arabic, and is focused on academic or vocational skills rather than religious education.

Likewise, as a close observer recently noted, "Islamic charities are doing some of the most practical and intensive work in Somalia to promote the education, advancement and empowerment of women".[170] Women constitute a significant proportion of the students in Islamic learning institutions at all levels, and classes are often mixed.

The expansion of Islamic charities in Somalia in recent years is primarily a response to need and the availability of funding. Most Islamic NGOs profess a belief that their faith offers a way out of the crisis that has engulfed their country for nearly fifteen years and perceive their missions and actions in that context. Islamic social activism is not necessarily a sign of growing radicalism, nor is it inherently anti-Western; on the contrary, the endeavours of many Islamic NGOs are a pragmatic response to a crisis for which all support is welcome.

C.   COMMERCE

The emergence of private enterprises in Somalia with an explicitly Islamic character has given rise to fears in some quarters that extremists enjoy inordinate control over what one analyst has termed the "black economy".[171] Numerous Somalis in Mogadishu told Crisis Group that Islamists ("*wadaado*") controlled as much as 80 per cent of the economy.[172]

Such allegations typically rely upon the influence of key individuals or businesses in the post-war private sector. Members of *al-Itihaad* were especially well placed to take advantage of opportunities for self-enrichment, given the organisation's early role as both recipient and conduit for funding from overseas Islamic charities. A number of prominent *al-Itihaad* figures later emerged as leading merchants and entrepreneurs. In Bosaaso, for example, a wealthy militant survived the 1992 battle between *al-Itihaad* and the SSDF to establish one of Somalia's largest money transfer companies; as his representative in Nairobi, he appointed *al-Itihaad*'s former spokesman in London, Mohamed Sheikh Osman.

Other important Islamists have also acquired leadership roles in business. Abukar Omar Adaani, a central figure of the consortium that controls Mogadishu's 'Eel Ma'aan port, is known for his radical views, support for militant causes and affinity with *al-Itihaad*'s Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys. The former chairman of the al-Barakaat Group of Companies (see below), Sheikh Ahmed Nur Jim'aale, has denied alleged links with al-Qaeda, but is widely perceived as a patron of local Islamist groups.

The religious views of several leading business figures, however, do not necessarily amount to an Islamist conspiracy. Many Somali companies are now headquartered in the United Arab Emirates – one of very few countries that still accept the Somali passport – where fluent Arabic and outward religiosity can be assets in building investment partnerships. Inside Somalia, many businesses exhibit a religious character and engage devout employees in order to instil confidence in their customers and overcome clan or regional divisions. Islamists may believe that business can advance the cause of Islam; many Somali entrepreneurs, however, simply recognise that Islam can be good for business.

1.   Al-Barakaat

The ambiguities of the Islamic business establishment are well illustrated by al-Barakaat – a Somali remittance company accused by the U.S. of direct links to al-Qaeda. Al-Barakaat was established in the early 1990s by a former banker, Ahmed Nur Jim'aale, as a conduit for money transfers between members of the Somali diaspora and their relatives at home – a business estimated at $300

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[167] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, December 2004.
[168] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, December 2004.
[169] See Crisis Group Report, *Somalia: Countering Terrorism in a Failed State*, op. cit., p. 12.
[170] Lesage, "The rise of Islamic charities in Somalia", op. cit., p. 19.

[171] Tadesse, *Al-Itihaad*, op. cit.
[172] Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu, April 2004, December 2004 and April 2005.

million annually.[173] It also permitted customers to deposit cash for safekeeping and set up chequing accounts. Many international NGOs and UN agencies in Somalia used it to finance their operations; before the end of the decade, al-Barakaat had become Somalia's pre-eminent remittance company and largest provider of telecommunications services.

All that came to a shuddering halt on 7 November 2001, when the U.S. placed al-Barakaat, its chairman, Jim'aale, and managing director, Abdillahi Hussein Kahiye, on its list of individuals and groups linked with terrorism. The same day police and security forces raided the company's offices in the UAE. According to Washington, business was not all that al-Barakaat was doing. It stood accused of passing funds to the al-Qaeda network, allegedly a percentage of its handling and transfer fees, amounting to $25 million annually.[174] Assets, including the savings of tens of thousands of Somalis, were frozen, and the company folded.

The U.S. government has given no public evidence in support of its claim, which many Somali analysts consider "questionable".[175] Instead, al-Barakaat is actively promoting its own version of events. According to Jim'aale, FBI and U.S. Treasury investigators conducted two very thorough investigations of the Dubai premises and office records.

> They didn't find any money going to terrorist organisations, but we couldn't block someone sending $10,000 or $15,000 from somewhere to somewhere else. I later heard some of the money for the [attack on the] Twin Towers went from the UAE through another bank. If it had gone through ours, they would have had a case.[176]

According to Jim'aale, the investigators took copies of all documents to Washington, promising a response within 45 days, and gave al-Barakaat a contact name in the Treasury Department. Several months elapsed with no reply, and the contact was reportedly unreachable, so he approached lawyers. Two made no progress and a third dropped the case, "because people probably told him: 'do you know what you're doing? Barakaat? These people are terrorists'".[177]

In the absence of a transparent legal process, many Somalis view the case against al-Barakaat as persecution of an ostensibly Salafi business enterprise. The management's hiring policies apparently favoured conservative Muslims, and there were no female employees or shareholders.[178] Many Somalis distrusted these Salafi tendencies, which they associated with *al-Itihaad*,[179] but there is little doubt that this same religious aura inspired confidence and trust in al-Barakaat's clientele.

2. Cross-border contraband

Another lucrative trade associated with former *al-Itihaad* members and sympathisers is cross-border contraband between Somalia and Kenya. According to regional security sources, commodities – particularly sugar – are imported via the port of Kismaayo by a consortium of businessmen that includes a prominent financial backer of *jihadi* causes based in Mogadishu. From Kismaayo, the goods reportedly enter Kenya via Ifo and Ijara refugee camps, before onward transport to Garissa, Wajir and Nairobi's Eastleigh district. Kenyan security sources identified a number of key figures in this trade as members of *al-Itihaad* but initially seemed content to monitor rather than stop it.

In 2003, however, investigations revealed that terrorist attacks the previous year on a resort hotel on the coast and the unsuccessful attempt to shoot down an Israeli charter aircraft near Mombasa may have been carried out with weapons smuggled cross-border from Somalia.[180] Kenya swiftly sought U.S. assistance in patrolling its land and sea boundaries with Somalia and began tightening up procedures at ports and airports. The contraband trade, which has fuelled lively black markets in places like Nairobi's Eastleigh neighbourhood, seems likely to become an early victim of the new security policy.

[173] Figures denoted in dollars ($) in this report refer to U.S. dollars.

[174] Judy Pasternak, "Emirates looked other way while Al Qaeda funds flowed", *Los Angeles Times*, 20 January 2002.

[175] Menkhaus, "Somalia", op. cit, p. 67.

[176] Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, April 2004.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Marchal, "Islamic political dynamics in the Somali civil war", op. cit., p. 141.

[179] Bryden, "No quick fixes", op. cit.

[180] See Crisis Group Report, *Counter Terrorism in Somalia*, op. cit.

VI.   ISLAMIST NETWORKS: CONVENIENCE OR CONSPIRACY?

Somalia's Islamist networks overlap, intersect and occasionally cooperate. To the extent that they share common values and goals – including a more authentic, Muslim society in Somalia – some observers are tempted to "connect the dots" and conclude that they share a common political project. But as shown above, Somalia's Islamists are by no means monolithic, and their visions of an Islamic society or state in Somalia are diverse, if not divergent. Certainly, they represent a latent political, economic and social force with the potential to transform the political landscape; whether they share the desire and intention to do so is much more questionable.

1.   Conspiracy

For anyone seeking to prove the existence of a broad Islamist conspiracy to seize power in Somalia, the formation of the Transitional National Government in August 2000 offered an opportunity. Although the TNG never evolved beyond an ineffectual state shell, it provided a point of convergence in which Islamist militants, moderates, business interests and clan networks became woven together in complex ways.

From the moment of its inception, the TNG was widely perceived as a platform for Islamist groups. One observer noted that as many as one quarter of the new parliament's members were linked in one way or another to *al-Islah* and a dozen others to *al-Itihaad*.[181] Although the government had no clear Islamic agenda, for some the mere presence of such groups in it was evidence enough. "We consider…the entire TNG of Somalia to be *al-Itihaad*", an Ethiopian government official told Crisis Group. "They are al-Qaeda".[182] A more balanced assessment was that the TNG was a "paper state" that lacked the capacity to govern but provided an environment in which criminality and terrorist groups could thrive.[183]

The tasks facing the new administration were formidable, and it was soon clear that the TNG was not equal to the challenge. The country had had no central government for over a decade and had in effect dissolved into a patchwork of regional administrations, city-states and clan fiefdoms. Public infrastructure had been ransacked during years of civil war, and local administrations and militia factions had laid claim to strategic assets like ports and airports. A

generation had been raised knowing neither education nor government. Moreover, the TNG had been formed "on the basis of a very incomplete peace process" and lacked the support of a number of important political constituencies.[184]

It was only sporadically visible on the streets of Mogadishu, and even then in very limited areas. In order to establish its authority, the TNG moved quickly to assimilate the *Shari'a* courts, suggesting to many an alliance between President Abdiqasim and Hassan Dahir Aweys.[185] In the post-9/11 context, Abdiqasim's association with a figure accused by the U.S. of links to terrorism was a significant liability. An Aweys protégé, Sheikh Yusuf "Indh'adde", was installed as governor of Lower Shabelle region where he had long managed a system of Islamic courts. Abdiqasim later brought into his cabinet another figure with a reputation for militancy: Abdulqadir Mohamud Dhaqane, a man who allegedly was a spokesman for *al-Itihaad* in Mogadishu in the mid-1990s.[186]

2.   Kinship

What appeared to some observers as an alliance of Islamist activists was perceived by others in the context of the familiar pattern of clan politics. Abdiqasim, Aweys and Indh'adde were all members of the Habar Gidir 'Ayr clan, as were the president's most trusted military adviser, his principal business ally and the owner of the presidential residency. Six of the seven district commissioners initially appointed by Indh'adde in Lower Shabelle were 'Ayr as well, despite the clan's minority status in the area. In Lower Juba, 'Ayr militia led by Yusuf Seerar joined with Mareehaan clan militia to form the Juba Valley Alliance and seize the strategic port town of Kismaayo.

To the many Somalis who did not accept the TNG, Abdiqasim's leadership represented above all the capture of the state by a clan elite concerned with preserving its territorial conquests and consolidating its commercial advantages. The relationship between the TNG and Islamist militants was at best ambiguous. Aweys and his *jihadi* followers no doubt benefited from TNG patronage but were also a component of the military strength it needed to project power.

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[181] Marchal, "Islamic political dynamics in the Somali civil war", op. cit., p. 15.

[182] Crisis Group interview, Addis Ababa, 9 April 2004.

[183] See Menkhaus, "Somalia", op. cit.

[184] Crisis Group Report, *Somalia: Countering Terrorism in a Failed State,* op. cit.

[185] Supporters of the TFG formed in 2004, however, have described the move as an attempt to dismantle the *Shari'a* court system. Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu and Nairobi, December 2004.

[186] Crisis Group interviews, Nairobi, April 2004. For Dhaqane as *al-Itihaad* spokesman, see Section II A 6 above.

Flirting with *jihadi* Islamists almost earned the TNG the U.S. label of state sponsor of terrorism in 2004 – a move that could have meant devastating political and economic restrictions on its leadership and commercial sponsors. Although the TNG no longer exists, the link between *jihadism* and kinship-based politics has survived largely intact: 'Ayro and his associates are from a broad cross section of Somali clans, but their base is located in a largely 'Ayr quarter of Mogadishu and the Ifka Halane court to which 'Ayro belongs is an 'Ayr institution.

Few of his kinsmen support 'Ayro: many fear and resent him. In November 2005, the Supreme Council of *Shari'a* courts denounced HornAfrik Radio-Television – a respected Mogadishu media house among whose owners are several influential 'Ayr business leaders – raising the spectre of a confrontation with 'Ayro's militia (HornAfrik and Ifka Halane court are immediate neighbours).[187] But taking action against him could ignite a conflict within the clan and possibly draw in other clan or court forces. 'Ayro and his *jihadis* are well aware of this ambivalence, and their masterful manipulation of kinship ties has become their most important source of security.

Other clans with charismatic *jihadi* leaders face similar dilemmas. *Al-Itihaad*'s Ethiopian operations historically drew heavily upon certain sub-clans of the Ogaden clan. Both *al-Itihaad*'s Mogadishu spokesman during the mid-1990s, Abdulqadir Mohamud Dhaqane, and the leader of a roving *jihadi* militia in Somalia's Lower Juba region, Hassan Turki, are from the same sub-clan. Turki appears never to have abandoned the notion of a radical Islamic army and has wandered the hinterland between Ras Kaambooni and Badaadhe for over a decade with a retinue of some 200 militiamen, mainly from his own Ogaden sub-clan.[188] The involvement of Turki's militia in the murder of a young American woman in 1999 led to clashes between his forces and those of local Ogaden sub-clans.

The Warsengeli sub-clan of the Abgaal includes the prime minister of the Transitional Federal Government, which has been eager to portray itself as a partner in the war on terror, as well as some of the U.S. government's closest operational counter terrorism partners. At the same time, thanks to the patronage of Aboker Omar 'Adaani, the number of *jihadi* militia among the Warsengeli is widely perceived as being second only to the 'Ayr and

appears to have grown considerably during the course of 2005.[189]

Most clans across Somalia face similar – albeit less acute – tensions among their members. Their desire to maintain internal peace and solidarity in the face of external threats can be exploited by extremists seeking cover and protection for their actions. 'Ayro, Turki and their fellow travellers may be despised, resented or feared by other Somalis, but at the end of the day, they remain confident that they can rely upon kinship ties to shield them from the hostile attention of foreign governments or their Somali partners.

3. Convenience

Ambivalent attitudes towards the *jihadis* produce awkward marriages of convenience between ostensibly incompatible groups. The coalition of diverse interests opposed to TFG President Abdillahi Yusuf is a prime example. It has unified – albeit temporarily – not only his factional rivals, but also a wide variety of religious and civic groups.

In the last week of September 2005, some 250 civic and religious Somali leaders, as well as a number of foreigners, held in Mogadishu the first meeting of the Somali Union and Salvation Council (*Golaha Midnimada iyo Badbaadada Soomaaliyeed*). Participants included traditional religious leaders, representatives of various Islamist groups, civil society leaders, poets and members of parliament.

For three days the conference debated the reasons for the collapse of the Somali state, the obstacles to its restoration, and the optimum form of government. Other points on the agenda included definitions of terrorism and terrorists and how Islam could contribute to a solution of the Somali crisis. The conclusion was that the main reason for the Somali crisis was the failure to act in accordance with *Shari'a* law, giving rise to injustice, corruption, clanism and other ills. Among the fourteen resolutions passed was a call for a comprehensive reconciliation conference to take place somewhere in the country – essentially denying the legitimacy of the Transitional Federal Government established in Kenya in 2004.

For many participants, the aim of the conference was to present an ultimatum to the two factions of the TFG that unless they overcome their differences and establish a functioning government, they will face a concerted challenge from a broad range of dissatisfied groups.[190] But the conference also affirmed the place of Islamists,

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[187] The statement issued by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed accused HornAfrik of anti-Islamic activities, including disseminating "infidel ideas" and "inciting adultery" by advertising the use of condoms. See "The Islamic courts in the Somali capital Mogadishu have issued warning against HornAfrik", www.HornAfrik.com, 9 November 2005.
[188] Security sources, Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, March 2005.

[189] Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu and Nairobi, April and November 2005.
[190] Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, September 2005.

including the *jihadis*, in the mainstream of Mogadishu civic activism.

A resolution endorsing the role of the Islamic courts in providing security implicitly accepted 'Ayro's appointment as chief of the Ifka Halane court militia and avoided raising his responsibility for multiple assassinations and the desecration of a cemetery. A declaration that the term "terrorism" has been used to undermine Islam and deprive people of their rights – while a belief widely shared among Muslim communities worldwide – echoed recent statements by Hassan Dahir Aweys to the international media. Likewise, in rejecting any deployment of a foreign peace support operation on Somali soil, the conference not only expressed a widely held view among Somalis, but also extended tacit endorsement to a call for jihad against such foreign troops made by Aweys in a press interview the previous month.[191]

VII. CONCLUSION

The growth of Islamic activism in Somalia is synonymous with neither extremism nor terrorism. The activism in its various forms is a widespread response to the multiple challenges posed by protracted civil conflict and state collapse; the extremism is driven by the efforts of a tiny minority to exploit the same conditions. The vast majority of Somalis, including Islamic activists, are resistant to extremism and revolted by indiscriminate violence in Islam's name.

This does not mean that foreign security interests in Somalia can be advanced by engaging "good" Muslims and isolating "bad" ones. Many ordinary Somalis, both activist and traditionalist, resent Western influence in their lives and are deeply suspicious of the intentions of neighbouring governments. They are profoundly opposed to the prosecution of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and view the "war on terror" as a thinly disguised assault on their faith.

Nor will foreign counter-terrorism objectives be served by backing one faction of the TFG in the hopes that it will replicate the success of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan and reverse the "Talibanisation" of Somalia. On the contrary, a partisan intervention of this nature would forge a common cause between Islamist extremists, moderates and rival political factions, expanding and entrenching the *jihadi* threat rather than eliminating it.

Successfully countering extremism and terrorism in Somalia requires that foreign governments align themselves to a certain extent with Somali needs and aspirations. For most Somalis, the threat of terrorism pales in comparison with the challenges of daily survival in the world's most comprehensively collapsed state. The restoration of peace, legitimate and functional government, and essential services are for them among the many priorities that trump foreign security concerns. Counter terrorism strategies must be tailored to accommodate Somali perspective and concerns if they are to succeed.

This includes, inter alia:

❑ positive, impartial engagement in the Somali peace process aimed at the emergence of legitimate, accountable governmental institutions. It is far more important that these be broadly acceptable to Somalis than to regional or Western governments;

❑ public diplomacy to explain international security concerns, interests and actions and to make clear that the targets of counter-terrorism initiatives are a handful of criminals – many of them foreigners – not the Somali population at large;

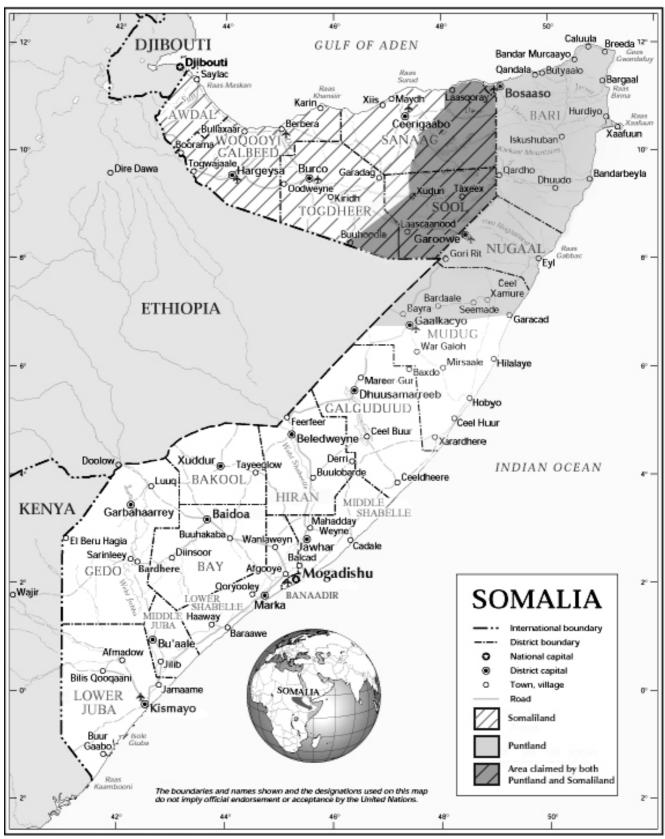[191] "Militia leader calls for Islamic rule in Somalia", *Sudan Tribune*, 12 October 2005.

❑ engagement with Somali organisations and leaders irrespective of whether they are perceived to have an Islamic character, except those associated with ideologies of intolerance or militancy (i.e. some of the more reactionary Salafi clerics and schools);

❑ engagement with political, professional and commercial leaders from clans with significant *jihadi* elements, to seek their guidance and cooperation in addressing the problem;

❑ investment in social services and the training of professionals, such as lawyers, jurists, doctors and teachers through existing institutions including universities, colleges and hospitals; and

❑ where counter-terrorism measures unavoidably cause "collateral damage", prompt action to mitigate the effects, such as supporting other NGOs to take in orphans abandoned by al-Haramayn or building the capacity of remittance companies to comply with international financial standards.

Islamist extremism has failed to take a broader hold in Somalia because of Somali resistance – not foreign counter-terrorism efforts. The vast majority of Somalis desire a government – democratic, broadly-based and responsive – that reflects the Islamic faith as they have practised it for centuries: with tolerance, moderation and respect for variation in religious observance. Ultimately, there is no better way to confront *jihadi* Islamism than to assist Somalis in realising such a government. Unless foreign governments are prepared to embrace that simple fact, they may continue to score victories in their battles against terrorism in the Horn while losing the wider war.

Nairobi/Brussels, 12 December 2005

APPENDIX A

MAP OF SOMALIA