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Committee on Homeland Security
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MAJORITY INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

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

The Majority staff of the Committee on Homeland Security has conducted an investigation into the threat by al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen in Somalia, Al Qaeda's major ally in East Africa, and its efforts to radicalize and recruit Muslim-Americans inside the U.S. The key finding is that there is a looming danger of American Shabaab fighters returning to the U.S. to strike or helping Al Qaeda and its affiliates attack the homeland. U.S. intelligence underestimated the Pakistani Taliban and Al Qaeda in Yemen's capability of launching attacks here; we cannot afford to make the same mistake with Shabaab. The Majority staff interviewed dozens of current and former counterterror officials, scholars, diplomats and other experts on Shabaab and Muslim-American radicalization to reach these conclusions:

1. Shabaab has an active recruitment and radicalization network inside the U.S. targeting Muslim-Americans in Somali communities. It also ensnared a few non-Somali Muslim-American converts, such as a top Shabaab commander:
 - At least 40 or more Americans have joined Shabaab;
 - So many Americans have joined that at least 15 of them have been killed fighting with Shabaab, as well as three Canadians;
 - Three Americans who returned to the U.S. were prosecuted, and one awaits extradition from The Netherlands;
 - At least 21 or more American Shabaab members overseas remain unaccounted for and pose a direct threat to the U.S. homeland.
2. Shabaab has the intent and capability to conduct attacks or aid core Al Qaeda and Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen with striking U.S. interests and the U.S. homeland.
3. Shabaab has not only openly pledged loyalty and support to Al Qaeda and AQAP in Yemen, but has cemented alarming operational ties to both groups.

1. SHABAAB'S RECRUITMENT AND RADICALIZATION NETWORK

The U.S. has become the primary exporter of Western fighters to al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen in Somalia, which exploits foreign fighters from the U.S. and Europe for specialized missions such as suicide bombings and for propaganda and recruiting tapes. At least 20 men who vanished from Canada also are believed to have joined Shabaab, including at least three Somali-Canadians who were subsequently killed.

The American recruits are the foreign fighters most touted by Shabaab in its propaganda, notably starring Shabaab field commander Omar Hammami, a Muslim-American convert from Daphne, Alabama.

The FBI, Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security are pursuing Shabaab's U.S.-based recruitment network of Somali-Americans who prey on fellow Muslims and converts to convince them to fund Shabaab operations or to directly take up arms, terrorism experts told the Committee's Majority staff.

COMMITTEE FINDING: Shabaab-related federal indictments account for the largest number and significant upward trend in homegrown counterterrorism cases filed by the Department of Justice over the past two years. At least 38 cases have been unsealed since 2009 in Minnesota, Ohio, California, New Jersey, New York, Illinois, Missouri, Alabama, Virginia and Texas.

Shabaab has recruitment mechanisms inside the large, tight-knit and culturally isolated Somali-American community, which core Al Qaeda based in Pakistan does not have inside the U.S., experts told the Committee's Majority staff.

No Al Qaeda-allied group, including core Al Qaeda or the Yemen-based Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), has attracted anywhere near as many American and Western recruits as Shabaab has over the past three years – a remarkably compressed timeframe.

Internet chatrooms frequented by the Somali diaspora – estimated at 1.5 million Somalis worldwide – are “full of Shabaab commanders” reporting news of warfare in southern Somalia and encouraging the Somali diaspora to come home to fight *jihād*, numerous experts told the Committee's Majority staff.

COMMITTEE FINDING: More than 40 Americans from Muslim-American communities across the U.S. have joined Shabaab since 2007, including two-dozen recruits from Minneapolis, Somalia experts told the Committee's Majority staff. Three who returned home have been charged in U.S. courts, one awaits extradition from The Netherlands, and 15 are believed dead, leaving as many as 21 American Shabaab fighters still at large or unaccounted for. At least 20 Canadians of Somali descent, many from Toronto, also have disappeared and are believed to have joined Shabaab, according to Canadian security officials.

The first confirmed suicide bomber in U.S. history, former Minneapolis resident Shirwa Ahmed, 27, blew himself up in October 2008 in an attack in northern Somalia.

It immediately raised serious fears among homeland security-focused officials that if an American Muslim could be radicalized to be a suicide bomber overseas, he could be convinced to do it back at home, U.S. counterterrorism officials told the Committee's Majority staff.

"The potential for Somali trainees to return to the United States or elsewhere in the West to launch attacks remains of significant concern," former National Counterterrorism Center Director Michael Leiter told the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee last year.

Since Shirwa Ahmed's death, two more suicide bomb attacks were carried out by Americans: Farah Mohamed Beledi, 27, from Minneapolis, and a Shabaab fighter from Seattle whose name has never been made public.

COMMITTEE FINDING: Former Minneapolis resident Shirwa Ahmed's 2008 suicide bombing – the first in history confirmed to have been perpetrated by an American – sent a shock wave through the U.S. intelligence community, raising fears that an American jihadi could commit such an atrocity on U.S. soil, officials told the Committee's Majority staff. Since then, at least two more Americans have committed suicide bombings.

"Since 2006, more than 12 U.S. citizens have been killed in Somalia while fighting for al-Shabaab," FBI Assistant Director for Counterterrorism Mark Giuliano said in an April speech at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. After Giuliano spoke last spring, Farah Mohamed Beledi of Minneapolis was killed in Mogadishu attempting a suicide bombing, the FBI has confirmed publicly.

The FBI and families have not publicly confirmed the deaths of several Americans fighting with Shabaab. Somalia experts say that most of Shabaab's suicide bombers have not been local Somali rank and file but were mostly foreign fighters, including three Americans, so far.

Others were killed in missile strikes, in battle – or by Shabaab itself. At least two radicalized Somali-Americans who joined the Shabaab were believed to have been executed by their comrades-in-arms sometime after joining the group. One key non-Somali slain in Shabaab's ranks was Muslim convert Troy Kastigar, 28, of Minneapolis.

COMMITTEE FINDING: The Committee's Majority staff has learned the identity of 11 of at least 15 Americans killed while fighting with Shabaab, including some whose names are not being publicly disclosed (see appendix). Nowhere near that number of Americans have been killed fighting with any other foreign terrorist group.

Some of Shabaab's recruiters, facilitators and fundraisers working between isolated Canadian and U.S. Somali communities have been known to operate on behalf of top Shabaab leaders, and in some cases these operatives used American mosques to cover and conceal their activities.

In San Diego's City Heights neighborhood, federal prosecutors accused al-Masjid Al-Ansar Mosque imam Mohammed Mohammed Mohamud and three other Somali-Americans of sending cash to top Shabaab leader Aden Hashi Ayrow, who was killed in 2008, reportedly by U.S. Special Operations Forces. A co-defendant in taped telephone contact with Ayrow instructed Mohamud to "hold back 20 or 30 trusted people at the mosque to tell them to contribute money," according to prosecutors.

In Minneapolis, recruiter Omer Abdi Mohamed pleaded guilty this month to federal terror charges that he and other Somali-American co-conspirators "met at mosques" in the city to discuss luring in Shabaab fighters, such as suicide bomber Shirwa Ahmed, prosecutors said.

Also in Minneapolis on July 5, a Saudi cleric who denounced Shabaab and other Somali combatants inside the Abubakr As-Saddique Islamic Center – where most of the city's missing Somali-American men once congregated – was allegedly assaulted by an angry mob shouting "Allahu Akhbar!" ("God is great!"). A recording and account of the assault were immediately posted on overseas-based *jihadi* chatrooms before most in Minneapolis knew it happened.

"They glorified Allah and showered him with hits and kicks," a *jihadi* wrote in a posting on the Shumukh al-Islam forum, which was obtained by the SITE Intelligence Group. "Next time, with permission from Allah, cut off the head of the likes of this filthy one."

COMMITTEE FINDING: Shabaab recruiters have used mosques as cover and as safe places to meet to discuss recruitment and radicalization efforts to send fighters to join a foreign terrorist group, as well as to recruit and raise money to support Shabaab.

2. THE THREAT POSED BY SHABAAB TO THE U.S. HOMELAND

There is considerable travel by Somali-Americans between enclaves of immigrants in Minneapolis, Boston, Seattle, Washington, D.C., San Diego, Columbus and Lewiston, Maine and their East Africa homeland. Shabaab recruiters operating in those cities' Muslim-American communities are targeting susceptible individuals for radicalization and recruitment, according to U.S. counterterrorism officials.

Most of these travelers go to Somalia on legitimate business, such as visiting relatives and checking on businesses they operate there.

It is extremely difficult for the FBI, Department of Homeland Security, CIA and Department of Defense to track suspicious activities in Somalia – which has not had a sovereign government in two decades and lacks immigration controls – by a minority of Somali travelers from the U.S. who link up with Shabaab for terror training or combat.

As was proven in terror plots hatched by Al Qaeda operative Najibullah Zazi, Pakistani Taliban operative Faisal Shahzad and accused AQAP operative Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, terrorists have slipped through the net of U.S. intelligence in the past two years.

COMMITTEE FINDING: Given the volume of travel of Somali-Americans between the U.S. and East Africa, some senior U.S. counterterror officials increasingly fear that they have not identified all the American travelers to Somalia who have come into troubling contact with or joined Shabaab, and that some of those individuals could return to the U.S. to recruit a cell or conduct a lone wolf attack inside the homeland.

One of Shabaab's rising combat commanders is Daphne, Alabama-raised Omar Hammami, a Southern Baptist convert to Islam who has become a star of Shabaab propaganda videos, and who swore blood revenge against his own homeland for the May 1 killing of Osama Bin Laden by U.S. Special Operations Forces.

"May Allah accept our dear beloved Sheikh and cause our swords to become instruments of his avenging," Hammami said in a communiqué Shabaab released on May 11.

Hammami poses a direct threat to the U.S. homeland with his ability to assist Shabaab, core Al Qaeda or AQAP with plots, but he also has become a source of inspiration for *jihadis*. Two terror defendants in New York, Betim Kaziu and Salujah Hadzovic, were inspired to travel to Egypt for violent Islamic *jihad* by watching Hammami tapes, according to press accounts of Hadzovic's trial testimony.

Other non-Somali Americans – who have *not* appeared on camera in propaganda or recruitment videos – have risen to key positions within Shabaab, terror experts told the Committee's Majority staff.

A Shabaab radio station has aired a recruiting tape by suicide bomber Farah Mohamed Beledi, who was fatally shot in May trying to detonate his bomb vest in Mogadishu.

"Brothers, come, come to *jihad*," Beledi said. "You know, in this world, everybody going to die one day. Every life goes. Some people dies in car accidents. Some people, you know, they die on a bed... Brothers, die like lions, you know, die for your religion."

COMMITTEE FINDING: American recruits in Shabaab are leveraged by the group in its propaganda to inspire Westerners to carry out violent jihad, including suicide bombings, thus raising the danger of attacks inside the U.S. homeland.

3. SHABAAB'S OPERATIONAL ALLIANCE WITH AL QAEDA

Omer Abdi Mohammed pleaded guilty this month to federal charges of recruiting and facilitating travel and terror training by Shabaab of the first confirmed suicide bomber in U.S. history, Shirwa Ahmed, and other Minnesotans from October 2007 to October 2009.

Mohammed and his co-conspirators conned local Somalis into donating funds for “relief” efforts in Somalia, such as building mosques, according to prosecutors. Instead, they used the donations to buy airfare for Shabaab recruits and phony travel itineraries to trick the Shabaab recruits’ families into believing their sons were traveling to Saudi Arabia for the Islamic *hajj*. In reality they were going to Somalia for violent *jihad*, prosecutors charged.

A relative of one of the Somali-American recruits, Khalid Abshir, was a top Shabaab leader overseeing the recruitment network, the Justice Department said in court filings.

Prosecutors said the first group of Minnesotans Mohamed aided built a desert training camp and were taught terror tactics by top Shabaab leaders including Saleh Ali Saleh al-Nabhan, a Kenyan who also was a senior Al Qaeda operative with ties to violent Islamic extremists throughout the Horn of Africa region. (In late 2009, U.S. Special Operations Forces killed Nabhan in Somalia, according to press reports.)

COMMITTEE FINDING: American Muslims recruited by Shabaab have been trained to commit terror by senior Al Qaeda operatives, including some with ties to AQAP in Yemen – now Al Qaeda’s most dangerous franchise targeting the U.S. homeland.

In 2009, Osama Bin Laden told Somalis, “You are one of the important armies in the Mujahid Islamic battalion,” and encouraged Somali diaspora “to rally around and help their brothers the honest Mujahideen.”

Shabaab pledged fealty to Bin Laden that year in a statement: “At Your Service, Osama.”

Ties between Shabaab, Al Qaeda and AQAP in Yemen are increasingly apparent:

- Shabaab also has pledged a public and ideological alliance with Anwar al-Aulaqi, an American atop the leadership ranks of AQAP in Yemen, and more recently cemented the relationship by forging operational ties with AQAP.
- Shabaab operative Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame was charged this month for providing support to AQAP including “personnel,” receiving explosives training from the Yemeni group, and for attempting to orchestrate a weapons deal between Shabaab and AQAP.

- Shabaab and the Islamic Courts Union harbored Al Qaeda operatives such as Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, who was in Mogadishu during the 1993 “Black Hawk Down” battle with U.S. Special Operations Forces, helped mastermind the 1998 U.S. embassies bombings and was reportedly an Al Qaeda middleman between Shabaab and AQAP in Yemen.
- Shabaab leader Saleh Ali Saleh al-Nabhan was also an Al Qaeda senior operative who orchestrated the 2002 Mombasa attacks on Israeli targets, personally trained recruits from Minneapolis, and reportedly had ties to Al Qaeda allies throughout the Horn of Africa. (Fazul Abdullah Mohammed and Saleh Ali Saleh al-Nabhan have both been killed since 2009.)
- Shabaab has flown the flag of Al Qaeda-Iraq at its rallies.
- Shabaab recently dispatched dozens, if not hundreds, of fighters to southern Yemen to help AQAP control areas it has seized from the weakened Yemeni government, according to Yemeni officials and the U.K.-based Quilliam Foundation.
- On May 17, Shabaab leadership eulogized Bin Laden by vowing revenge on the U.S.: “So, let them rejoice for a few moments since they will cry much afterwards, because the lion Osama left behind him huge armies of mujahideen.”
- Shabaab’s propaganda has increasingly been slicked up to resemble messages produced by Al Qaeda’s “As-Sahab” (“The Clouds”) media wing and AQAP’s “Inspire” magazine, including the release of rap songs by Omar Hammami.

COMMITTEE FINDING: Shabaab is cementing operational links with Yemeni-American AQAP leader Anwar al-Aulaqi and his growing terror network, which has claimed credit for attacking the U.S. homeland several times since 2008. U.S. counterterror experts fear the American Shabaab fighters could be taught by AQAP’s expert bombmaker to conduct attacks against the United States.

Individual		Description
 Shirwa Ahmed, 27 Hometown: Minneapolis, Minnesota	Left to fight for al-Shabaab in Somalia in late 2007. Confirmed to be the first American to carry out a suicide bombing. His attack occurred in Somalia in October 2008.	
 Ruben Shumpert (aka Amir Abdul Muhaimin) Hometown: Seattle, Washington	Fled Seattle for Somalia days before he was set to appear for sentencing in gun and counterfeit currency charges. Killed in a missile strike off the coast of southern Somalia in December 2008.	
 Burhan Hassan, 17 Hometown: Minneapolis, Minnesota	Left to fight for al-Shabaab in Somalia in 2008. His family believes Shabaab executed Hassan in June 2009 when he decided to leave Somalia.	
 Jamal Bana, 20 Hometown: Minneapolis, Minnesota	Left to fight for al-Shabaab in Somalia in 2008. His family found out about their son's death through the Internet in July 2009.	

	Zakaria Maruf, 30 Hometown: Minneapolis, Minnesota	Left to fight for al-Shabaab in Somalia in 2007. He was killed while fighting in Somalia in July 2009.
	Mohamoud Ali Hassan, 23 Hometown: Minneapolis, Minnesota	Left to fight for al-Shabaab in Somalia in 2008. He was killed in a clash between government forces and al-Shabaab in September 2009.
	Troy Kastigar, 27 Hometown: Minneapolis, Minnesota	He was a Muslim convert with no ties to Somalia. He was killed in September of 2009.
	(Name Withheld) Hometown: Seattle, Washington	Drove a stolen United Nations vehicle full of explosives into an African Union base in September 2009.

	Dahir Gurey Hometown: Columbus, Ohio	An American citizen who arrived in Somalia in early 2010 from Ohio. In September 2010 he was killed in a firefight between al-Shabaab and pro-government forces.
	Farah Mohamed Beledi, 27 Hometown: St. Paul, Minnesota	One of the young Somali-Americans who left the United States in 2009. In May 2011 he attempted to commit a suicide bombing but was shot before he could detonate his vest.
	(Name Withheld) Hometown: Seattle, Washington	Traveled to Yemen and Somalia, and was later executed by Shabaab after an internal dispute.