

The Historical Odyssey of Somalia's Al-Shabaab Terrorists



By [Brian Frydenborg](#) September 27, 2013

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In order to understand how the [failed state of Somalia's](#) misery came to an upscale Nairobi mall, the sad story of [modern Somalia](#) must be told.

Well into the 20th century, virtually all of Africa was [dominated](#) by [rapacious](#) Western [colonial](#) powers. Somalis put up a vigorous fight but eventually fell to British and Italian imperialism. [Britain took control of](#)

[Italy's portion of what is now Somalia after WWII, giving away parts of Somalia to Ethiopia](#) in 1948, just before the UN allowed Italy to resume control with a [trusteeship](#).

As Africa [decolonized](#), France, controlling “French Somaliland” (later [Djibouti](#)), rigged a [referendum](#), expelling [thousands of ethnic Somalis](#) to prevent a result in favor of it joining Somalia. In addition, four days before it granted independence to its Somali holdings in 1960, Britain allowed the [Northern Frontier District \(NFD\) of Kenya](#), then a British colony, to be run by Kenyan nationalists despite a vote that had showed the overwhelming desire of the region's population — mostly ethnic Somalis — to join the new Somalia.

Throughout the 1960s, [Somalis in Kenya's NFD rebelled and faced harsh, violent repressions](#), Kenyan forces killing and relocating many. The rebellion ended after a few years, but violent Kenyan state repression against ethnic Somalis persisted heavily until 2000. When Italian Somaliland was freed just days after British Somaliland was freed they united to form a [Somali Republic](#) that only last until 1969, when its president was assassinated and General [Mohamed Siad Barre](#) took over in a coup d'état.



(Source: CIA)

Gen. Barre morphed Somalia over several years into an [Islamic communist state](#). As part of a [Pan-Somalism](#) vision, in 1977 [Somalia initiated a war with Ethiopia](#) to take the regions that Britain had given to away to Ethiopia, taking much territory. The Soviet Union was patron of both countries as [Ethiopia was newly communist](#), but when Soviet

mediation efforts failed, about 1,500 Soviet military advisers and 18,000 Cuban troops arrived to help push the Somalis back in 1977-1978.

After being abandoned by the Soviets, Somali became partners with the U.S., which helped Somalia to build the largest army in Africa. Yet over the 1980s, the government became more totalitarian and oppressive, and [both militia and political resistance movements arose](#), partly encouraged and supported by Ethiopia. When Barre's government collapsed in 1991 along with any form of central government, northern Somalia became autonomous and the rest was fought over by various militias.

[Civil war erupted](#), which continues today and has led to [about 500,000 Somali deaths](#), many from starvation.

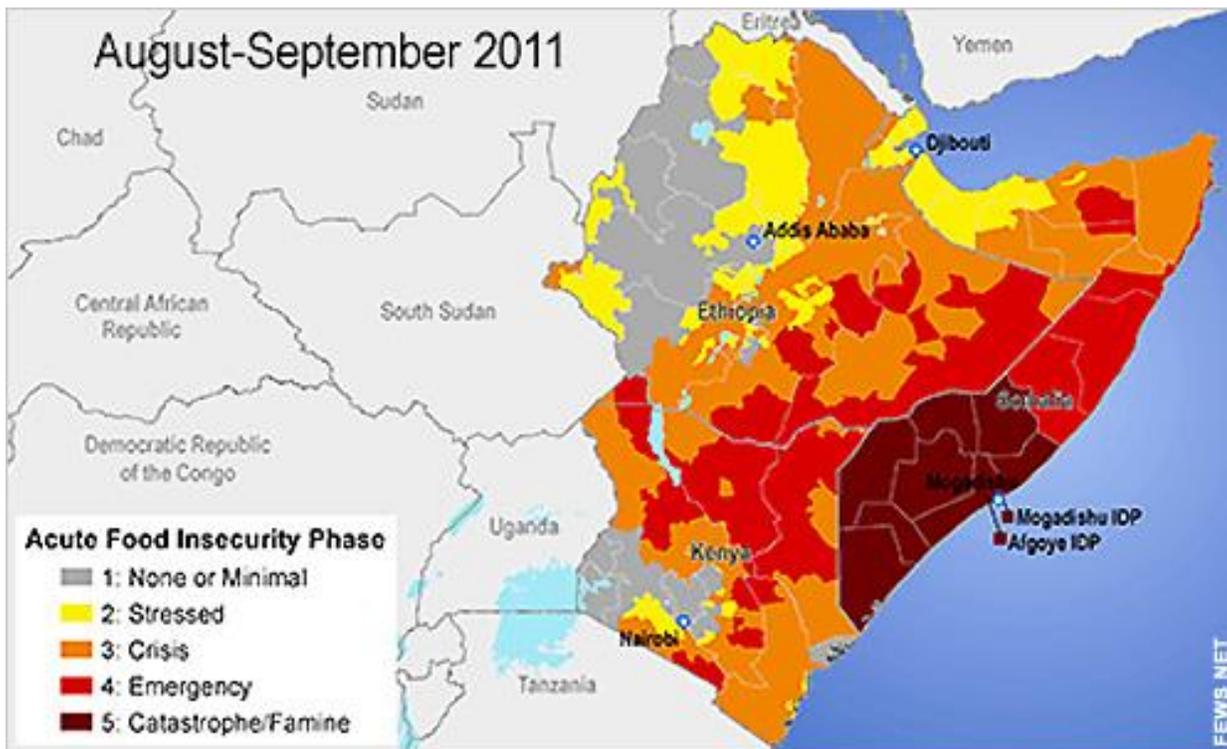


As Somalia became totally destabilized and a humanitarian crisis ensued, three [UN](#) peacekeeping [missions](#) — [UNOSOM I](#), [UNITAF](#), and [UNOSOM II](#) — were deployed from 1992-1995, the last of which saw the

infamous [Black Hawk Down](#) incident in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, in which 18 American servicemen were killed (that's what people remember today, but the missions still [saved hundreds of thousands from starvation](#) and [shouldn't be called a failure](#)).



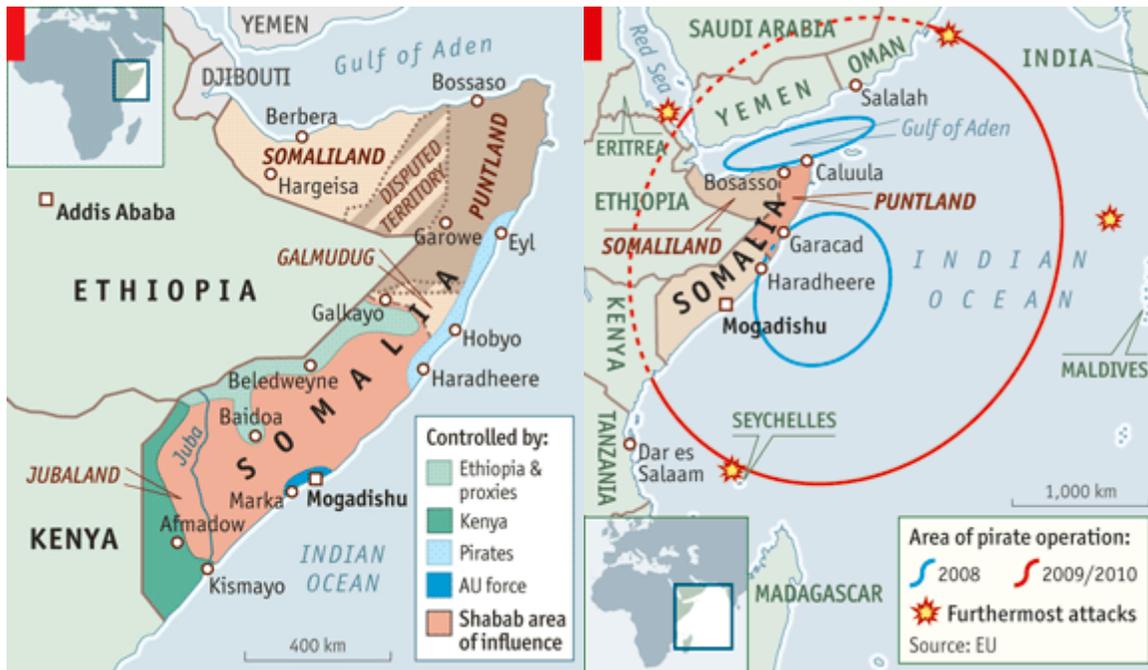
As the state wholly disintegrated, [a variety of local forms of government filled the vacuum](#), and in many areas, Islamic sharia law courts arose, providing justice governance and militias. As they spread they started integrating, forming the [Islamic Courts Union \(ICU\)](#) in 2000. Over time they came into conflict with secular warlords, from May to June of 2006, ICU [took complete control of Mogadishu](#). In just a few months, [ICU controlled most of southern Somalia](#), prompting a [Bush-Administration-backed Ethiopian invasion of Somalia](#) that drove ICU out of power that December.



Young [extremists from ICU](#) gradually [broke away after this defeat](#) and formed [al-Shabaab](#). [Starting in January 2007, the U.S. began drone, air, and sea-based strikes against terrorists](#)(including al-Shaabab) in Somalia and [pirates](#) off the [coast, strikes](#) which are [still ongoing](#). Al-Shabaab and ICU carried out a bloody insurgency ([including suicide bombers](#)) against Ethiopian troops, subsequently deployed [African Union \(AU\) forces](#), and the [fledgling Somali government](#). But after Ethiopia withdrew, al-Shabaab rose to control most of Somalia's south by 2010.

In retaliation for Ugandan participation in AU operations, al-Shabaab [carried out suicide bombings](#) in July 2010 against crowds [watching the World Cup Final in Kampala, Uganda's capital, killing 74 people](#). Al-Shabaab even [banned many aid groups in its territory during a catastrophic famine](#), making its [effects](#) far [worse](#). After al-Shabaab cross-border raids inside Kenya, [Kenya](#) [invaded](#) a [neighbor](#) for [the first time](#) in its [history](#) in October 2011 [to go after al-Shabaab in Somalia](#), while [al-Shabaab pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda](#), even as it was driven out of Somalia's major cities. By June

2012, independent operations were over and remaining Kenyan units became part of the African Union force.



Knowing all this, is it [any surprise](#) that al-Shabaab struck outside of Somalia again, [even recruiting Americans](#) and maybe [Brits](#) to take part [in an attack](#) on a posh [Kenyan](#) mall [in response](#)? Already since that attack, al-Shabaab has [attacked Kenyan towns on the Somali border](#).

