Media Strategies of Radical Jihadist Organizations:
A Case Study of Non-Somali Media of al-Shabaab

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I. Introducton

Al-Shabaab is a radical Jihadist organization in Somalia, designated by a part of the international community as a terrorist organization and sometimes blamed for its close relations with global Jihadist terrorist groups like al-Qāʻida (Tanẓīm Qāʻida al-Jihād, Jamāʻa Qāʻida al-Jihād or al-Qaeda etc.).[1] It has special and unique media strategies suitable for a country like Somalia, devastated by long civil wars and foreign interventions.

Media strategies of Jihadist groups have held the attention of many scholars, specialists and journalists interested in the media, security and Middle Eastern affairs, because they are very unique in their use of the media as a tool for information and communication. Their use of the media seems different from traditional opposition groups or political parties especially in the Middle East and Muslim countries.

Al-Shabaab, despite being an African organization, is no exception. It said in a statement published in July 2010 that the media battle being waged by the Mujāhidīn is now at one of its fiercest and the most important stages.[2] But, its media strategies are, at the same time, different from those of other groups mainly due to the special situation of Somalia as being the No.1 failed state. Al-Shabaab's usage of the media has common characteristics with other Jihadist groups in, for example, their use of the Internet, websites, discussion forums, videos and file hosting services. They post text-based statements onto threads of radical Internet forums. They propagate their ideology; boasting of terrorist attacks executed by their members, or praising suicide bombers as great martyrdom-seekers. They produce video files showing off their activities and upload them to online storage provided freely by file hosting services, usually using temporary links between the texts written in their statements and their video files stored online.

This process is shared by almost all the Jihadist groups, including al-Qāʻida and al-Shabaab. Most of the previous studies investigating al-Shabaab have recognized the importance of the media activities of the group, but failed to analyze its polyglot aspect. In their research scholars have almost exclusively used the statements written in English and Arabic, sometimes through English translations. Most previous studies have ignored the

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　1　Al-Shabaab's official name is Xarakada Mujaahidiin al-Shabaab in Somali and Ḥaraka al-Shabāb al-Mujāhidīn in Arabic, both of which mean the Movement of the Youth who fight Jihad, or the Young Mujahidin Movement.

　2　http://www.as-ansar.net/vb/showthread.php?t=25224 (retrieved on July 26, 2010)

differences of the languages al-Shabaab has used, putting them all together or often bi-passing the Somali language. In the present article, the author is going to try to cast light on a hidden aspect of al-Shabaab's media activities as a global Jihadist organization, focusing on why it is speaking in different languages depending on whom it is speaking to.

II. Jihadist Organizations and Media

1. Media as a Battlefield

For radical Jihadist organizations like al-Qāʿida, the media is one of the most important battlefields. Ayman al-Ẓawāhirī, who became al-Qāʿida's new leader after Usāma bin Lādin (Osama bin Laden) was killed by the US Forces in Pakistan on May 2011, once clearly stated the importance of the media in an alleged letter to Abū Muṣʿab al-Zarqāwī, a Jordanian leader of al-Qāʿida's Iraqi branch.

> [W]e are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.[3]

Historically speaking, most of the traditional opposition organizations in the Middle East, including al-Ẓawāhirī's al-Jihād, have aimed at destroying the existing regimes and replacing them. They have usually had their own media organs to justify their causes. These organizations propagate their ideologies and publish statements indicating their attacks against the targeted regimes. The Muslim Brotherhood, for example, as well as using websites, publishes a lot of books, magazines and brochures by using their considerable funds. Extremist Jihadist organizations are no exception. Of course, as most of the Arab governments severely control the information flow, these organizations cannot issue their statements as they like.

Opposition organizations or movements in general have sent out their political messages from countries where freedom of expression is fully protected or from countries which have politically hostile relations with their home countries. As for the opposition organizations of Arab countries, they often dispatch information from free and democratic Western countries like the United Kingdom, France, or the United States until the 1990s. In fact, London and Paris were the most important information bases for Arab opposition groups. London, for instance, had five Arabic dailies at that time and the number of magazines published in Arabic and other Middle Eastern languages was too numerous to be counted.

Even anti-Western radical organizations like al-Qāʿida understood the special position of the former colonialist and suzerain states of Europe. While Usāma bin Lādin was in Khartoum in 1994, in the Sudan, he established its London office, called the Advice and Reform

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3 http://www.fas.org/irp/news/2005/10/letter_in_english.pdf (retrieved on August 25, 2011)

Committee, named Khālid al-Fawwāz as its chief, and issued a lot of statements from there. This must have been due to the strategic importance of London, where a lot of Arabs were living and staying for business, on vacation or in exile.

During the 1990s, the Internet was underdeveloped in Arab countries. Most of the statements and documents of al-Qāʿida were distributed by hard copy or by fax even in London, as they thought the main target of their readership was Arabs living in Arab countries. In addition, some of the anti-Saudi mass media like *al-Quds al-ʿArabī*, an Arabic daily published in London, or Aljazeera, Qatar's satellite news channel, had also been used by these organizations as effective tools for communication with non-political and ordinary Arabs. For example, al-Qāʿida's very basic documents justifying their terrorism, like *the Declaration of Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Mosques* and *Fatwā Calling for Killing Americans*, were both published first in *al-Quds al-ʿArabī* in 1996 and 1998 respectively.

But, since the end of the 1990s, such costly paper-based propaganda has declined gradually and been limited only to wealthy organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood or Ḥizb Allāh of Lebanon. The case of the bankruptcy of a Saudi opponent, Muḥammad al-Masʿarī, is a good example. He started by just using emails for the propaganda of his ideology, but he had to continue to use facsimiles to send information to Saudis in Saudi Arabia where the Internet was not available at that time. The costs, including the renting of an office, must have been enormous and became a major (but not the only) reason for his bankruptcy.

The development of the computer generated a wide variety of information and communication technologies. It also contributed to diversifying the tools used by political organizations for their propagation from text and paper to digital and audio-visual files. DVDs or low cost VCDs which recorded the activities of radical organizations were sold at small newsstands in London, and even in general stores in rural areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan where the Internet was not available. From out of these circumstances, al-Saḥāb, the official media organ of al-Qāʿida, emerged and became a standard for radical Jihadist organizations' media strategy in the Internet era.

2. Jihadist Media Strategy during the Internet Era

The Internet spread rapidly in Arab countries from the mid-1990s, especially when Saudi Arabia approved commercial Internet Service Providers (ISP) in 1999. The Internet and PC became familiar home appliances, particularly in the oil-rich Gulf countries, not only for Gulf nationals, but also for expatriates living there. Already at this point, the Internet and HTML-based information technology were used as common tools of communication by extremist Jihadist organizations.

On September 11, 2001, nineteen Arab-Muslims of various nationalities hijacked four

airplanes in the United States and made suicide attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., killing about 3,000 people. At the end of 2001, shortly after the 9/11, al-Qāʿida started its new media strategy on the Internet, setting up its own website, al-Nidāʾ (alneda.com). Alneda.com distributed statements, speeches and articles by leaders of al-Qāʿida like Usāma bin Lādin and Ayman al-Ẓawāhirī and also published news from a Jihadist point of view [Hoffman 2006: 215–217]. However the website, was severely attacked, hijacked by Western hackers with anti-Jihadist sentiments, and finally ceased to exist on the Internet.[4]

With these attacks, Jihadist organizations or individuals interested in Jihadi activities gradually moved their footholds from vulnerable websites to Internet forums, or message boards, to avoiding frequent hackings. In the early stages, special threads or boards for radical Islamist movements in the general Internet forums were usually occupied by Jihadists and sympathizers, but later these threads were spun off from the parent bodies and became independent radical forums focusing only on Jihadist movements and their ideologies and terrorist attacks. These forums usually have many threads divided according to themes, areas, organizations or languages. However, these forums have also been attacked and brought down by anti-Jihadist hackers. The forums have to frequently change their URLs in order to survive. Furthermore, as popular forums were taken down, new ones would emerge, one after another. Thus, the favorite forums of Jihadists have been changing, for instance, from al-Ḥisba and al-Ikhlāṣ to al-Fallūja and al-Shumūkh, the last of which is now believed to be the most popular and authentic among Jihad's fans and Jihadist organizations at the time of this writing (August 2011).[5]

III. Media in Somalia

1. Somali Orthography

The Somali orthography was established in Somalia in 1972. That year, the Somali Language Commission (Guddiga Af Soomaaliga) officially adopted the Roman alphabet styled Somali writing system based on Af-Mahaa, a Somali dialect, which, later became an official language of the Somali Democratic Republic and was used by newspapers, radios and televisions and also spoken in education [Mukhtar 2003: 31].[6] Therefore, media for Somali speaking Somalis came into full swing after the establishment of the Somali orthography.

Of course, Somali people had been obtaining information by a variety of ways before

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4 You can see the trace of alneda.com at http://wayback.archive.org/web/*/http://www.alneda.com.

5 The latest URL of al-Shumūkh is http://www.shamikh1.info/vb/index.php (August 10, 2010). These forums are often protected by passwords and do not allow unauthorized persons to log in.

6 Af-Mahaa is spoken mainly in the north and northwest of the Shabelle River. On the other hand, south of the river, a dialect called Af-Maai is spoken. These two dialects are considered as main dialects of Somalia. "Af" at the beginning of the terms means "mouth" and then "dialect" in Somali.

establishing the orthography and radio had played a central role in enabling Somalis to get various types of information. Radio had played an important role in media even during the British and Italian reigns and continued to do so under the military dictatorship and even after its collapse. According to *CIA World Factbook*, there are 11 FM stations, most of which are located in Mogadishu, while Somaliland and Puntland have also their own radio stations.[7]

In Somalia, the establishment of the orthography was delayed and literacy rates were and still are very low.[8] Moreover, differences in dialects are also very large. These elements are considered as negative factors that hinder media development. As a result, besides the official Somali, foreign languages like English, Italian and Arabic have been playing an essential role in Somali media.

As for television, two private television channels re-broadcast the programs of Qatar's Aljazeera and CNN even in Mogadishu, which is still a war-zone, and there is one official television channel in Somaliland and one private television channel in Puntland. In addition, Radio Mogadishu also broadcasts television programs, though it seems to be internet television.[9] Besides these local broadcasting companies, BBC and VOA broadcast a range of programs in Somali and some private companies in Europe and America broadcast mainly for the Somali Diaspora.

2. The Internet in Somalia

The Internet is beginning to play a much more significant role in Somali societies. Even before 9/11, the Internet was important, but the U.S. Government accused Somalia's major telecommunication company, the Somalia Internet Company (SIC), of alleged involvement in terrorist activities [Weimann 2006: 199–200]. The company, in consequence, had to stop operating and Internet access in the whole Somalia was cut off, including Internet cafes, but now the Internet is available again, and has become essential for daily business in Somalia. According to Internet World Stats, Somalia had 106,000 Internet users as of June 2010, which comprises 1.1% of the whole population; and 24,080 Facebook users on June 30, 2011, which is a 0.2% penetration rate.[10]

I have no figures indicating the saturation level of PCs in Somali homes, but I think it must be very low. However, this does not mean that most of the Somalis inside Somalia cannot use the Internet. Internet cafes, in which people can enjoy relatively high speed

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7 https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html (retrieved on August 20, 2011)

8 According to *CIA World Factbook*, literacy rate of Somalia is 37.8% (male 49.7% and female 25.8%, est. 2001). The figures are one of the lowest in the world (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html, retrieved on August 20, 2011).

9 http://radiomuqdisho.net/, retrieved on July 13, 2011.

10 http://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#so, retrieved on August 10, 2011

connections with relatively cheap prices, have spread throughout major cities in Somalia, mainly because of the lack of governmental regulations and taxes, the entrepreneurship of ambitious young Somalis, and the fierce competition among them. Though the statistics show a very small number of people using the Internet in Somalia, the actual figure might be much higher if we take into consideration the diffusion of internet cafes and the rapid spread of mobile phones.

Somalia's population is estimated at 7.4 million, of whom more than one million (approximately 14%) are said to live outside the country [Sheikh, Healy 2009: 4, 6–7]. The Somali Diaspora still have contacts with their relatives inside the country and for them, the Internet is an indispensable tool in their daily lives. The Somali Diaspora is concentrated in the following three areas; the Horn of Africa and Yemen, the Gulf States, Europe, and North America. The Horn of Africa and Yemen are relatively poor areas surrounding Somalia and accessibility to the Internet is also limited. The Gulf States and the Western countries are wealthy and access to the Internet is much easier than in the poor areas. So, if you take this 14% of the population into consideration, especially those who live in the Gulf and the West, the number of Somali Internet users could be much bigger than 1.1%. This means we may not judge the role of the Internet only by this limited number and we should not underestimate the importance of the Internet to Somalis living both inside and outside Somalia.

Now, the numbers of websites published in Somali or related to Somali affairs are increasing day by day [Issa-Salwe 2006: 58, 62]. However, taking the relatively small number of the Internet users in Somalia into consideration, most of these Somali websites must be intended not for local Somalis, but primarily for the Somali Diaspora in the Gulf and the Western countries.

3. Somalia and Arabs
The official language of Somalia is Somali and most of the population is Somali, but nevertheless Somalia joined the Arab League (the League of Arab States) in 1974, becoming the first non-Arab country that joined the League.[11]

The Somali language didn't have a written form up until the adoption of the Roman alphabet in 1972. However, historically speaking, Arab-Islamic cultures have penetrated deeply into Somali societies. Somalis are Muslims, though not Arabs, but it seems that most Somalis feel a deeper sympathy with Arabs than with their fellow Africans. The relations between the Arab culture and Somalia however, have often been political and closely connected with Somali nationalism, especially since the end of the 19th century.

I just mentioned that Somali had no scripts, but some intellectuals did try to introduce

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11 Mauritania, where the Ḥassānīya language, a variety of Arabic is spoken, joined the League of Arab States in 1973.

the Arabic script for transcribing the Somali language, and since the 1920s new efforts of orthography like Cismaanya (ʿIsmānīya or ʿUsmānīya in Arabic) script were made. The Cismaanya script was invented by a famous Somali poet and ruler, Cusmaan Yuusuf Keenadiid, in the early 1920s as an indigenous writing system different from Arabic and Roman scripts. This indigenousness might have been perceived as reflection of Somali nationalism or tribalism respectively by colonial powers and by rival tribes or clans. As a result, all such efforts to invent a new writing system suitable for Somali language failed and finally the secular, socialist and military government of Maxamed Siyaad Barre adopted the Roman script [Lewis 2002: 216–217].[12]

The relationships between Siyaad Barre and Arab countries were naturally not based on history, culture or religion. Rather, they were politically and economically very mercenary and contradictory. For example, Egypt provided a wide range of support to Somalia, including the building of schools, even before its independence. But Siyaad Barre's government drew a clear line between Arab and Somali nationalisms, cautiously avoiding any political influence from Gamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir, the President of Egypt.

Moreover, Siyaad Barre expected financial aid from the wealthy Gulf countries and, in fact, Kuwait provided huge financial assistance to build a power station in Mogadishu, but at the same time, he strengthened relations with socialist countries and oppressed the religious people. This anti-Islamic policy ought to have promoted confrontations with conservative Gulf countries, but after breaking off relations with the Soviet Union, as financial support from Saudi Arabia increased, the influence of Saudi Arabia or so-called Wahhabi Islam also expanded rapidly. Moreover, the huge amount remitted by Somali expatriates working in the oil-rich Gulf countries became an important financial foundation for the poor country.

I described the relations between Somalia and Arabs as "mercenary and contradictory" above. When Egypt signed the Peace Treaty with Israel in 1979 and Arab countries condemned it and suspended its membership of the Arab League, Somalia, as a member state of the League, maintained its diplomatic relations with Egypt. A few years later, Somalia broke off diplomatic relations with Libya, blaming it for its support of an opposition group, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). When the Iraqi army invaded Kuwait in 1990, Siyaad Barre sided with Kuwait, expecting large amounts of financial aid from the Gulf States and the United States, despite his having had good relations with Iraq before.

On the other hand, after the collapse of the Siyaad Barre regime, Arab countries became hesitant about their policy toward Somalia. They, on at least a governmental level, promised

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12 Cismaanya had been encouraged mainly by the Majeerteen, a sub-clan of the Daarood. Cusmaan Yuusuf Keenadiid who invented the Cismaanya was also a member of the Majeerteen. Cismaanya was named after him, so it was only natural that other tribes were opposed to it [Mukhtar 2003: 121]. Furthermore, the Muslim religious leaders justly objected to introducing this indigenous writing system and urged the adoption of the Arabic script [Lewis 2002: 115].

financial aids, but did not want to make a positive intervention in Somali affairs and closed the door to Somali refugees with some exceptions [Mukhtar 2003: 40–41].

However, as the Arab governments were abstaining from taking an active role, the private or non-governmental organizations of some Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, became quite active in Somalia. Most of them were NGOs, though some of them had in reality a governmental background, and they performed aid activities under the name of charitable societies or philanthropic foundations in a country that had been devastated by civil wars. However, some of these NGOs supposedly had relations with terrorist organizations [Shay 2008: 52].

III. Al-Qāʻida and Somalia

1. Usāma bin Lādin and Somalia

After the collapse of the Siyaad Barre government in 1991, Somalia became a very important strategic stronghold of global Jihadist organizations like al-Qāʻida, not only as an actual battlefield but also as an ideologically important theme which could be used as a good example of the disorder that ensues after the breakdown of a secular regime and the interference of non-Muslim countries in a Muslim state's internal affairs, favorite themes of global Jihadist groups.

Usāma bin Lādin had already mentioned Somalia in his notorious *Declaration of Jihad against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Mosques* in 1996, in which he described the country as a strategically important base. Usāma continued to speak about Somali problems in his later statements and interviews. For him, Somalia was also a symbol of a Muslim victory over the Zionist-Crusaders federation, but Somalia could not play a central role in his priority of Jihad if compared with Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iraq or Chechnya. Somalia was nothing but one of the many battlefields for their Jihad at this stage. It was after 2006 when Somalia became a main theme for Usāma's ideology, after the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) overran most of the mid-Western area of Somalia. The ICU invaded Mogadishu on June 14, 2006 and Usāma published his speech entitled "Messages to the Umma in General and People of Iraq and People of Somalia in Particular" on the Internet on July 1 of the same year [Usāma b. Lādin 2006: 333–338].[13] It is very important that Usāma bin Lādin at this point supported the ICU and called for Somalis to cooperate with them.

He began his message by condemning the Ziyād Barrī (Siyaad Barre) government's anti-Islamic policy, saying that he had burned Ulama in the public square, and he went on to say that there was no way for Somalis to survive except by upholding Islam and urged them to be united as one hand with the ICU which sought to establish an Islamic State (al-Dawla

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13 All the quotes of Osama bin Laden's statements issued before July 2006 are from *al-Arshīf al-Jāmiʻ li-Kalimāt wa Khiṭābāt Imām al-Mujāhidīn Usāma b. Muḥammad b. Lādin* compiled by the Internet's Jihadist forum, al-Burāq.

al-Islāmīya).[14]

Then he denounced ʿAbd Allāh Yūsuf (Cabdullaahi Yuusuf Axmed, the then President of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG)) as a traitor and an agent of the international forces occupying Somalia and threatened that anyone who supported him would be considered as an infidel and continued to say that there would be no dialogue with ʿAbd Allāh Yūsuf except with the sword, encouraging Somalis to fight them immediately.

However, the ICU was defeated in December 2006 by the alleged intervention of Ethiopian troops. In the same year, probably sometime before the ICU's defeat, al-Shabaab (al-Shabāb) was believed to have emerged as an off-shoot of the ICU.[15] With the ICU's defeat and al-Shabaab's appearance, al-Qāʿida changed its counterpart from the former to the latter.

On January 5, 2007, Ayman al-Ẓawāhirī published a new video statement focusing on the Somali situation on the Internet, but, he did not refer to al-Shabaab in this five-minute video, just condemning the Ethiopian intervention. Then, Abū Yaḥyā al-Lībī, a Libyan ideologue of al-Qāʿida, issued a video, entitled "To the Army of Difficulty in Somalia (Ilā Jaysh al-ʿUsra fī al-Ṣūmāl)," on March 25, 2007.[16] I checked 41 statements from the al-Qāʿida leadership published in 2007. In 18 among these 41 statements, namely in almost half of the 2007 statements, Somalia was mentioned. It might be said that the strategic position of Somalia in the Jihadist media has got bigger since 2007.

2. Al-Shabaab's Chemical Reactions with al-Qāʿida

Among the 2007 statements, the one by Abū Yaḥyā al-Lībī is very important because it shows direct relations between al-Qāʿida and al-Shabaab. Al-Lībī used here the term, Jaysh al-ʿUsra جيش العسرة, designating al-Shabaab. The term, Jaysh al-ʿUsra, means the army of difficulty or hardship in Arabic but, in fact, it originally referred to the Battle of Tabūk, or Ghazwa Tabūk, in 630. The Prophet Muḥammad made an expedition to Tabūk, a city of present-day Saudi Arabia, to fight against the Byzantine army. This long, difficult journey is called Jaysh al-ʿUsra. Al-Lībī probably took this name from *Hadith* or other historical works, though, even at this stage, al-Lībī did not refer to the name of al-Shabaab in this important statement. However al-Shabaab, when they started to issue statements on the Internet in 2007, adopted a special logo for their organization with the name, Jaysh al-ʿUsra fī al-Ṣūmāl written in its lower part, immediately after the statement of Abū Yaḥyā al-Lībī issued on March 25, 2007.[17] In a word,

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14 After the defeat of the ICU and its reconciliation with the TFG, Usāma denounced the ICU's former leader, Sharif Ahmad (Shariif Sheekh Axmed) as a traitor.

15 " 'Extremist' Splinter Group of Somali Islamic Courts Formed," *Somaliland Times*. The article is, as far as I know, one of the earliest mentions of the group (http://www.somalilandtimes.net/sl/2005/238/4.shtml, retrieved on August 10, 2011). The dateline is August 12, 2006.

16 See at http://www.al-hesbah.org/v/showthread.php?t=117585 (retrieved on March 25, 2006).

17 Al-Shabaab later adopted the name of Jaysh al-ʿUsra as the name of their military wing [Somalia 2008].

al-Shabaab reacted positively to the verbal support from al-Qāʿida leadership, especially Abū Yaḥyā al-Lībī.

In his message in 2007 mentioned above, al-Lībī made a special request to the Mujāhids of the media frontline to adopt the cause of the Somali Mujāhids and bring them to the attention of Muslims through every legitimate means, including text and audio visual. Then, six days after the publication of al-Lībī's message, "the first Shabaab al-Mujahideen text communiqué surfaced in the "official data section" of the forums — posted care of the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF) registered correspondent. They have appeared there ever since, without fail, care of the same GIMF superuser account." [Kohlmann 2009; 46]

However, scholars', specialists', and journalists' opinions about the relations between al-Shabaab and al-Qāʿida are divided. It is very difficult to determine whether al-Shabaab is actually a lower branch of al-Qāʿida or not by giving clear-cut evidence to show their relations. According to Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, al-Shabaab posted a Somali language biography of Aden Hashi Ayro (Aaden Xaashi Faarax Ceyroow), one of the leaders of al-Shabaab, after he was killed in 2008. About the Battle of Mogadishu in 1993, he quotes from the Somali biography as [the Battle of Mogadishu was] "the first time he fought under the supervision of Al-Qaeda, and with its logistical support and expertise." [Gartenstein-Ross Fall 2009][18]

However, it is quite interesting that there are no Arabic statements related to Aden Hashi Ayro which would indicate any connection between the two organizations. Actually, al-Shabaab and related organizations issued many eulogies written in Arabic on the death of Aden Hashi Ayro, but, I could not find a single word from al-Qāʿida on the same issue among these Arabic statements. Differences or contradictions between Somali and Arabic information are sometimes obvious.

Al-Qāʿida – al-Shabaab relations are not limited to the three leaders of al-Qāʿida Central and al-Shabaab. Al-Qāʿida's branches or affiliates also have strong connections with al-Shabaab. On April 28, 2010, al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the suicide attack against the AMISOM base in Mogadishu. The statement of al-Shabaab said that it was in revenge for slain leaders of the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI, al-Qāʿida's Iraqi branch).[19] Moreover, when Muṣṭafā Abū al-Yazīd, the head of al-Qāʿida in Afghanistan, was killed by a US drone attack on May 2010, al-Shabaab offered special condolences for him and his family the next month, and declared the establishment of a battalion named after him four months later. Furthermore, it is known that al-Shabaab has often exchanged statements on the Internet

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18 The Battle of Mogadishu is also known as Black Hawk Down. Usāma suggested al-Qāʿida's involvement in this clash in his interview with ABC reporter John Miller (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/ frontline/shows/binladen/who/interview.html, retrieved on August 10, 2011).

19 As for the media tactics of al-Shabaab and its resemblance to al-Qāʿida in Iraq, see [Somali and the Young Mujahideen Movement: An Insurgency and Media War Modeled after Iraq 2008].

with its fellow Mujāhids, like al-Qāʿida in the Arabian Peninsula and Anwar al-Awlaqi, an American-Yemeni Imam in hiding in Yemen.[20]

IV. Al-Shabaab's Media Strategies

1. Propaganda inside Somalia

Basically speaking, al-Shabaab is a Somali local organization, the main purposes of which are to defeat the TFG, to expel the infidels, and to establish the caliphate (khilāfa) in Somalia. The Somali language media of al-Shabaab is, of course, in line with this political roadmap. Al-Shabaab uses Somali media to spread news in two different directions, one to Somali locals living inside Somalia and the other to the Somali Diaspora living outside Somalia. I have already discussed the latter briefly above.

For propaganda to Somalis living inside Somalia, al-Shabaab has special tactics. It holds seminars on various themes, especially Islamic jurisprudence, gathering a large number of people. It holds sport meetings, and distributes grain or livestock to locals, especially in the Islamic holy months, and holds press conferences on various occasions. The results of these events are usually publicized flamboyantly and statements in Arabic are issued on the Internet, but publicity is never given in advance in Arabic. Due to the lack of advanced information and communication technology (ICT), al-Shabaab's primary means of communications with local Somalis is "face-to-face meetings" [Dickinson 2010] or word-of-mouth advertising.

Of course, al-Shabaab has its websites, like Heegan.net or Kataaib.net in the early stages.[21] Both of them are official websites providing Somali speakers with a lot of materials, whether text, sound or video. Due to limited access to the Internet inside Somalia, the main target of readership for these Somali websites is intended to be the Somali Diaspora in the Gulf and the West, where the Internet is widely used even among exiles.

Especially since 2011, al-Shabaab seems to have been trying to establish its own mass media. It is known that al-Shabaab has its own radio and television station(s), most of which it seized from the enemy. For instance, Radio Jowhar was taken over by al-Shabaab and was renamed Radio al-Andalus in July 2010.[22] Further, al-Shabaab announced its launch of a television broadcasting station on February 3, 2011. Most of the equipment must have been captured from the former owner.[23] It is very difficult for us to estimate the extent of the influence of these media on local Somalis.

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20 Anwar al-Awlaqi was killed in an American drone attack in Yemen on September 2011.

21 Both of them are discontinued now. These days, AmiirNuur.com and Somali Memo.net are supposed to be al-Shabaab's affiliates and provide al-Shabaab's information mostly in Somali language.

22 Abdulkadir Khalif. "Al-Shabaab militants open new radio station." *Africa Review*, July 19, 2010

23 http://shamikh1.net/vb/showthread.php?t=92769 (retrieved on February 4, 2011).

2. Media Production and Distribution Entities

Al-Shabaab has changed the grand design of its media strategies along with its military and political processes. So far as I can verify, the earliest Arabic statement issued in the name of al-Shabaab was the one posted on Jihadist forums, May 11, 2007.[24] It is very significant that this, at least one of the earliest of this kind, was issued through the Global Islamic Media Front (GIMF).

Major Jihadist organizations have their own propaganda organs or media arms. For instance, al-Qāʿida Central has al-Saḥāb, which produces the video statements of al-Qāʿida Leadership or documentary-like video programs mainly dedicated to martyrs, or suicide bombers, or attack statement videos. Moreover, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI, former Tanẓīm Qāʿida al-Jihād fi Bilād al-Rāfidayn, al-Qāʿida's Iraqi branch) has its al-Furqān, al-Qāʿida Organization in Islamic Maghrib (Tanẓīm al-Qāʿida fi Bilād al-Maghrib al-Islāmī), al-Andalus, and al-Qāʿida in the Arabian Peninsula (Tanẓīm Qāʿida al-Jihād fi Jazīra al-ʿArab), al-Malāḥim. In the case of al-Shabaab, the GIMF corresponds to them. However, there is a big difference between the GIMF and other al-Qāʿida media arms. In the latter cases, the connections between them and their parent organizations are very strong, and can be described as a pecking order or hierarchical relationships [Kimmage March 2008].

Jihadist organizations also have distribution entities. These entities usually post statements and video files on forums or online storages after obtaining the texts and files from the production entities like al-Saḥāb, though the latter sometimes serve as distributors as well. The most famous entity in this field is al-Fajr, which has strong connections with al-Qāʿida Central, ISI or AQIM. Relations between Jihadist organizations and media production arms are organizational and structural, but the relations between Jihadist organizations and distribution entities are rather contractual or sometimes even ad hoc.

3. GIMF and al-Shabaab

Let us take a look at the case of the GIMF. The GIMF is believed to be an independent or virtual entity having no direct relations with actual fighting groups. This means the GIMF has no exclusive connections with al-Shabaab. The GIMF is actually in charge of the production, distribution and translation of other organizations' statements along with al-Shabaab's statements, so the relations between them are horizontal, and not vertical as seen in the case of al-Qāʿida and its affiliates' media arms.

The GIMF has been involved in almost all the Arabic statements of al-Shabaab since the latter started issuing them. In the statement posted on May 11, 2007 in a Jihadist forum, which is one of the earliest, as far as I can confirm, the GIMF left its fingerprints in the bottom

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24 But, according to Evan F. Kohlmann, al-Shabaab's first text communiqué with the GIMF was posted on March 31, 2007 [Kohlmann 2009: 46].

part of the statement. In the two lines at the bottom, you can read "the Source: The Echo of Jihad Media Center (al-Maṣdar: Markaz Ṣadā al-Jihād lil-I‘lām)" and "the Global Islamic Media Front (al-Jabha al-I‘lāmīya al-Islāmīya al-‘Ālamīya.)"[25] Should these two lines be interpreted as "Production: GIMF and Distribution: The Echo of Jihad Media Center (EJMC)?" It is not easy to answer this question, but if you read later statements, you can find another name, for instance, the Media Section of al-Shabaab (al-Qism al-I‘lām li-Ḥaraka al-Shabāb al-Mujāhidīn) beside the EJMC and the GIMF, so it is only natural to attribute the production of the statement to the Media Section of al-Shabaab and distribution to the EJMC. In ordinary statements of Jihadist organizations, "the source (al-Maṣdar)" usually means nothing but "the distributer." The EJMC can be considered an affiliate or a distribution unit of the GIMF,[26] so what is the role played by the GIMF, if the media section writes a statement and the EJMC uploads it on forums and storages?

I conjecture that the GIMF would be in charge of Arabizing statements. Arabic statements from al-Shabaab, for example, were discontinued from July 24 to October 18, 2010 and again from June 20 to August 10, 2011. During the absence of Arabic statements, the Somali language and sometimes English language statements continued to be posted directly by al-Shabaab on their own Somali websites.[27] So, these two cessations were not the responsibility of al-Shabaab itself, because it was able to issue statements in Somali and post them on the Internet. Furthermore, the GIMF also continued to issue statements or videos for other Jihadist organizations during that period. Therefore, the answer should be attributed neither to al-Shabaab nor the GIMF, but to the liaison between the GIMF and al-Shabaab.

Let's take a look at the explanation by al-Shabaab on October 2010, when Arabic media returned to the Internet. The statement was issued in the name of al-Katā'ib, which is a media organ of al-Shabaab, established in 2009. First, al-Katā'ib apologized for the interruption of statements and explained that it was "because of some circumstances which led to the disconnection of communication between al-Katā'ib and the brothers in charge of publishing the statements of al-Katā'ib."[28] "The brothers" mentioned here are, of course, the GIMF. Al-Shabaab and the GIMF have kept silent on what happened between them, so we cannot grasp the exact cause of the interruptions, but we can hazard a guess at two possibilities. First, there could have been conflicts, or some kind of problem, technical or personal, between al-Shabaab and the GIMF. Second, al-Shabaab could not issue Arabic statements without help from the GIMF. This is why I surmised that the GIMF was in charge of Arabizing al-Shabaab's statements, at lease to a certain degree.

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25 180.235.150.135/~shamikh/vb/showthread.php?t=2757 (retrieved May 12, 2007)

26 The Media Section of al-Shabaab once said that EJMC belongs to the GIMF. See at http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=36096 (retrieved on November 28, 2008).

27 See for instance at amiirnuur.com.

28 http://www.7anein.info/vb/showthread.php?t=202589 (retrieved on October 18, 2010).

Besides the statements and videos, the GIMF has cooperated with al-Shabaab to publish an online bulletin, called *Milla Ibrahim* [Paz 2008]. All the articles in the bulletin are written only in Arabic.

4. Two al-Katā'ib

The evolution and transformation of the media strategies of al-Shabaab can be symbolized by the establishment of the two media arms. At the end of 2009, al-Shabaab announced it had established al-Katā'ib Foundation for Media Production (Mu'assasa al-Katā'ib lil-Intāj al-I'lāmī),[29] and in July 26, 2010, this al-Katā'ib Foundation declared the establishment of another media arm called al-Katā'ib News Channel (Qanāt al-Katā'ib al-Ikhbārīya).[30]

What is the functional segregation among these media entities, including the GIMF? According to the statements of al-Shabaab, al-Katā'ib Foundation will become a new minaret for the Jihadist media, and will join "the eagles of the Jihadi media." 'The eagles' in this case obviously means the media organs of other global Jihadist organizations, al-Andalus of al-Qā'ida Organization in Islamic Maghrib, al-Furqān of Islamic State of Iraq, al-Malāḥim of al-Qā'ida in the Arabian Peninsula, and al-Saḥāb of al-Qā'ida Central. They continue: "The Foundation will be in charge of all publications specialized in al-Shabaab and will provide news about Jihad and Mujāhidīn in order to become a minbar (pulpit) for bringing the facts to our Muslim brothers all over the world."

How about the al-Katā'ib News Channel? The statement published in July 2010 said it will be a special news channel for bringing the facts directly from the [battle?] field (al-maydān) by sound and image and with proof and evidence. The Foundation is most likely a head office charged with drawing up the grand designs of media strategies, and supervises all the media activities of al-Shabaab, including the publications of statements or videos. Moreover, it said that all the publications of al-Shabaab will have the logo of al-Katā'ib Foundation hereafter, that is, statements without the logo can be considered as faked ones.

On the other hand, the News Channel will be in charge of news reports on the ground. Naturally it will be under the control of the Foundation.

Then, how about the GIMF and EJMC, both of which were originally independent from al-Shabaab? It is important to note that the GIMF and EJMC have continued and still continue to brand their names on all the statements issued by al-Katā'ib Foundation, so they must still be in charge of at least the distribution of the statements of al-Shabaab. This means that the basic relations between the two, al-Katā'ib and the GIMF, remain the same, the former being in charge of production and the latter, distribution.

Now let's go back to those mysterious periods when announcements were interrupted.

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29 http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=371188 (retrieved on December 21, 2009).

30 http://www.as-ansar.net/vb/showthread.php?t=25224 (retrieved on July 26, 2010).

Technical problems, as a cause of the interruptions, should be ruled out, because both entities continued to issue statements on the Internet during the interruptions. It is more probable that some personal troubles could have happened between the two in this period. Unfortunately, we cannot obtain any information about what those troubles, or "other circumstances," were. Could the person in charge have been injured or killed by an enemy attack? Maybe, but is it perhaps possible that the troubles could have been related to the birth of the new media arm of al-Shabaab? Take a look at the two dates, the date of the birth of al-Katā'ib News Channel, July 26, 2010 and the date of the last release of the statement before the first interruption, July 29, 2010. This might be a strange coincidence but it is possible that this coincidence might have been related to a certain confrontation or friction around segregation of functions especially between the News Channel and the GIMF.

As for the second interruption, it continued from June 20, 2011 to August 20, 2011. Al-Shabaab did not say anything about the reason behind this interruption or its return, but in this interruption too, al-Shabaab and the GIMF continued to issue statements in different ways. The former published Somali and English statements on their affiliate website, AmiirNuur.com, without mentioning al-Katā'ib and the GIMF, but referring only to "Press Office" as a source. In this case, too, the return of Arabic statements coincided with the return of the GIMF. In a word, we may surmise that al-Shabaab or al-Katā'ib might be outsourcing Arabizing operations, or at least a part of them, to the GIMF.[31]

5. Social Networking Services

Al-Shabaab naturally became aware of the importance of social networking services (SNS) like Facebook, twitter, or YouTube as tools for their propaganda, especially when it witnessed the success of the overthrows of Tunisian and Egyptian governments during the so-called Arab Spring. According to SITE Monitoring Service's information, al-Katā'ib Media Foundation launched its Facebook page on May 25, 2011. It has since been removed so that I could not confirm any involvement of the GIMF in this page, though there are some Facebook pages with al-Katā'ib's name until now, but they are believed to have been launched voluntarily by al-Shabaab sympathizers.

We can find something on YouTube al-Katā'ib channel with al-Katā'ib's official logo, but I couldn't confirm it as authentic.[32] It is, however, quite important that a lot of videos originally created by al-Katā'ib are now uploaded to YouTube and other video hosting services and proliferated to the whole world. The official pages or channels in these SNS are removed, almost as soon as they are launched, rather like a cat and mouse game. Even

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31 For the relations between al-Shabaab and the GIMF, also see [Cuevas, Wells 2010: 18] and [Kohlmann 2009: 44–48].

32 http://www.youtube.com/user/AlKataib (retrieve on August 20, 2011). There was a Alkataib1 channel on YouTube, which seemed more authentic than AlKataib, but it has already been removed.

though these materials are removed in one place, their traces continue to remain somewhere in the Internet. It is impossible to root them out. However, the effectiveness of open and public SNSs as a tool for the recruiting of new candidates to be Mujāhids or suicide attackers is dubious in comparison with the case of closed radical Internet forums, because the latter, usually protected by passwords, attract only Jihadist sympathizers who have already been influenced and inspired by Jihadist ideologies.

V. Is al-Shabaab al-Qāʿida?

1. Self-Definition of al-Shabaab

I said al-Shabaab is a local Somali organization but, judging from their statements, articles or videos in Arabic, we can notice that al-Shabaab seems to have a different face as a global Jihadist organization. From the launch of Arabic statements with an experienced Jihadist media entity, the GIMF, al-Shabaab has always tried to be global, at least in Arabic discourses in cyberspace, including the introduction of suicide attacks, or martyrdom operations previously unknown to Somalia.

Al-Shabaab's leader, Mukhtār Abū Zubayr (or Mukhtār ʿAlī Zubayr or Mukhtaar Cali Zuubeyr in Somali) explained about his organization in the audio message issued and posted by the GIMF on June 1, 2008.[33] The title of this Arabic message is "our Jihad is until persecution ceases altogether and religion is held wholly for the sake of Allah," after a verse of al-Qurʾān 8: 39.[34]

Here, in this message, the leader of al-Shabaab declared "Allah willing, the global Jihad's corps (Sarāyā al-Jihād al-ʿĀlamī) will be launched from the land of the two migrations (hijratayn) upon the infidels, making their beds sleepless and destroying their interests in the world." Then he enumerates four important themes of his organization; the goals of the Jihad, rejection of the Jāhilīya, the role of al-Shabaab as a part of global Jihad vanguard, and the role of the GIMF. The first, the goals of the Jihad, is simple; elevation of the word of Allah and establishment of the caliphate, which are shared by all global Jihadist organizations as the final goals. The second, the Jāhilīya, originally meant the pre-Islamic era, but here he denotes all anti-Islamic things and includes in the concept of the Jāhilīya nationalists, secularists, apostates, and infidels. The third, al-Shabaab's role, he defines as an indispensable part of the global Jihad's vanguard (Ṭalīʿa al-Jihād al-ʿĀlamī). And finally fourth, he praises the role of GIMF in supporting al-Shabaab.

It is also very important that he locates Somalia's historical role as a battlefield to defend

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33 Quotations of this message are, not from the original message posted in the Internet forum, but from al-Shabaab's online magazine, *Milla Ibrāhīm*, published on October 2008 (vol.1, pp.39–44).

34 Quotation of al-Qurʾān is from the English translation by Muhammad Zafrulla Khan. Here, an Arabic term, *fitna*, is translated as "persecution." The fitna has wide variety of meanings from temptation or trial to riot or civil war. For discussions on Fitna, see, for example, [Kepel 2004].

the Muslim world against Christian invasions (Ethiopians and Westerners.) The Hijratayn he used in his message is an Arabic term indicating the two legendary migrations, namely the migrations of the early Muslims to Abyssinia, or Ethiopia, in the 7th century. By this, he emphasized the Somalis' legitimacy, having ancient and honorable roots due to being some of the earliest Muslims, and thus historically justified the current military activities against non-Muslim powers, namely the TFG, the African Union (AU), and the Western forces, in which the international vessels for anti-piracy measures are also included.[35]

Al-Shabaab has been bound by this self-definition as a global Jihadist organization and has had to transform its activity and exterior to appear more like major global Jihadist organizations, by using Arabic and English media effectively. Emphasis on the relations with al-Qāʿida has been a first step for the evolution of al-Shabaab from a local insurgent to a global organization. It is very symbolic for Abū Zubayr in his message that he expresses greetings to Mullā Muḥammad ʿUmar of Ṭālibān, Usāma bin Lādin, Ayman al-Ẓawāhirī and Abū Yaḥyā al-Lībī. Especially for Usāma, he uses the titles "our Shaykh" and "our Amīr," though the second in order after Mullā ʿUmar. It is not sure whether this reflects the actual vertical relationship or is merely an expression of respect.

2. Killing of Usāma and al-Shabaab

Usāma bin Lādin published an audio video message with English subtitles exclusively on Somali affairs on March 19, 2009, entitled "Fight on, Champions of Somalia," and urged Somalis to fight against Shaykh Sharīf, the President of the TFG.[36]

Six months later, al-Shabaab posted a video message called "Labaik Ya Usama (Labbayka Yā Usāma,)" using a lot of highly sophisticated computer graphics.[37] This video message is said to be a positive response from al-Shabaab to the video issued by Usāma bin Lādin on March 2009.

Abū Zubayr, the leader of al-Shabaab, said in this video that "'Labaik' Oh our Sheikh and Amir Aba Abdullah, the Mujahideen here are fine and the winds of victory are still blowing on them and the enemy's plans are collapsing, one after the other" and in the later part "we are awaiting your guidance in this advanced stage in the life of Jihad, in which the challenges of fighting the occupiers, have overlapped with the requirements of establishing the Islamic State."

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35 Even before Abū Zubayr, an American al-Shabaab, Abu Mansoor al-Amriki clarified the position of al-Shabaab vis-à-vis the ICU in his message to the Mujahideen in particular published in English and Arabic on February 2008. He claimed in this message that while the ICU used to preside over each individual tribe, al-Shabaab were made up of many different tribes and while the ICU had a goal limited to the boundaries placed by the tyrant, al-Shabaab had a goal including the establishment of the Islamic caliphate in all parts of the world.

36 http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=52548 (retrieved on March 20, 2009).

37 http://al-faloja1.com/vb/showthread.php?t=84235 (retrieved on September 20, 2009). Quotations are taken from English subtitles of the video.

"Labaik Ya Usama" or "Labbayka Yā Usāma" means in Arabic "I am here! Oh Usāma" or "At your service, Oh Usāma!" And "Aba Abdullah (Abū ʿAbd Allāh)" is a *kunya* of Usāma bin Lādin. Moreover, the phrase of Abū Zubayr, "we are awaiting your guidance," is also considered as confirming al-Shabaab's obedience to Usāma. Judging from this evidence, some Western news reporters and analysts thought this video "is a form of declaration of allegiance (from al-Shabaab to Usāma bin Lādin)."[38] However, I could not find a very important Arabic term usually seen in the case of Jihadist organizations showing their allegiance to superior groups, *bayʿa* or *mubāyaʿa* in this forty-eight-minute video.

After the killing of Usāma bin Lādin by the American special force on May 1, 2011, al-Shabaab has issued some eulogies for him. For example, it held a ceremony called "We are all Usāma bin Lādin (Kullnā Usāma bin Lādin)."[39] Many of the al-Shabaab officials offered their concordances to Usāma bin Lādin, but I could not discover, among the speeches delivered by the al-Shabaab leadership, any proof indicating the direct hierarchical relationship between al-Qāʿida and al-Shabaab.

Ayman al-Ẓawāhirī was named as the new leader of al-Qāʿida on June 16, 2011, after the death of Usāma bin Lādin. Many al-Qāʿida's affiliates like the Iraq, Maghrib and Arabian Peninsula branches have renewed their allegiances to the new leader one after another. But, al-Shabaab's allegiance cannot be confirmed by its official Arabic statements, though some news reports said that al-Shabaab had given its allegiance to al-Ẓawāhirī, based on a message posted by someone in a Jihadist forum. For instance, a poster said, quoting from al-Andalus Islamic Radio and ʿAlī Maḥmūd Rāghī, that al-Shabaab had announced its renewal of allegiance (al-bayʿa) to the new leader of al-Qāʿida.[40]

So far as I know, the only Arabic official statement issued by al-Katā'ib and the GIMF, confirming the succession of al-Ẓawāhirī appeared on June 19, 2011 on an Internet Jihadist forum.[41] According to the message, this is an *Arabic translation of the comment* of al-Shaykh ʿAlī al-Dīrī on the election of al-Ẓawāhirī. The comment of ʿAlī al-Dīrī (Cali Dheere in Somali,) who is supposed to be a spokesman of al-Shabaab, was originally broadcast through al-Andalus Islamic Radio, al-Shabaab's official radio. In this comment ʿAlī al-Dīrī welcomed the appointment of al-Ẓawāhirī, as the most suitable person for the position having experience

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38 Herve Bar. "Somalia's Shebab proclaim allegiance to bin Laden." September 22, 2009.

39 The name of the ceremony was most probably a parody of "We are all Khaled Said." Khaled Said was a 28 year old Egyptian who was tortured to death in Alexandria on June 6, 2010 by the Egyptian Police. The Facebook group with his name, "We are all Khaled Said" was moderated by Wael Ghonim and became one of the strongest driving forces for eliminating the Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak on February 11, 2011 (January 25 Revolution). After the death of Usāma bin Lādin, a lot of fan pages of Usāma appeared on Facebook, in which there are many pages having the name of "Kullnā Usāma bin Lādin" in Arabic. Most of the English pages have been deleted, but some "We are Usāma bin Lādin" pages in Arabic still survive.

40 http://www.muslm.net/vb/showthread.php?t=440586 (retrieved on June 21, 2011).

41 http://202.149.72.131/~shamikh/vb/showthread.php?t=115299 (retrieved on June 20, 2011).

in Jihad, and urged Mujāhid brothers to stand beside him as they had stood with Usāma bin Lādin before.

'Alī al-Dīrī and 'Alī Maḥmūd Rāghī quoted above is the same person and both the two messages used al-Andalus Radio as their sources. However, the former used the term 'al-bay'a', and the latter did not. The latter is an official statement, because it was marked with the seal of al-Katā'ib and the GIMF. I am not sure whether al-Andalus Radio really used the term 'al-bay'a' in its Somali broadcast, but if so, it would be in contradiction with the Arabic statement, and the Arabic statement did not mention any contradiction with the Somali one. In short, al-Shabaab could never have pledged allegiance to al-Qā'ida, at least in the official Arabic statements, or otherwise, al-Shabaab does not want to be seen as al-Qā'ida's branch or affiliate in the Horn of Africa by Arabic speakers.

VI. Conclusion

Why does al-Shabaab need such media arms as the al-Katā'ib Foundation? Isn't "the Media Section," which al-Shabaab had before the establishment of al-Katā'ib, enough for dispatching information? The main reason for non-Somali language media is supposed to be the sustainable recruiting of new Mujāhids from outside Somalia. For this purpose, al-Shabaab's non-Somali media, even during the period while it was called "the Media Section," had been successful to a certain extent. There are many reports showing the existence of a lot of foreign fighters in the organization before the advent of al-Katā'ib. After al-Katā'ib, did the number of foreign fighters increase or not? I have no credible information about their numbers before and after al-Katā'ib. Thus, we cannot say that the media's evolution has contributed to increasing the number of new Mujahids, but we can conclude at least that this media evolution, as in the establishment of al-Katā'ib, aims at a wider expansion of its recruiting ability.

However, was it really necessary for the organization to change the name of "the Media Section?" Could al-Shabaab have put forward media reform without changing the name of the section? Definitely it could have, but at the same time, it had to change the name from a curt, plain and unadorned name like the Media Section to a stronger, braver, and more attractive name suitable for a global Jihadist organization.

The second reason, which has already been pointed out by some other scholars, is al-Shabaab's deep distrust of mainstream journalism [Kohlmann 2009]. Take for example the relations between a famous Arabic satellite channel, Aljazeera of Qatar, and al-Shabaab. The latter criticized the former harshly, saying that Aljazeera published erroneous news.[42] In consequence, al-Shabaab hastened to have its own media at its disposal.

Finally, the third reason why al-Shabaab needs such media arms is, I think, formal or

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42 http://www.al-faloja.info/vb/showthread.php?t=36096 (retrieved on November 28, 2008).

nominal, but much more important than the first and second logical reasons. Al-Shabaab had to have al-Katā'ib Foundation and al-Katā'ib News Channel to keep up with the other Jihadist organizations that already had such media arms with cool names.

I have discussed the characteristics of al-Shabaab as a local insurgent group above. I understand this is, in reality, correct, but, al-Shabaab is not a local insurgent "in theory". Al-Shabaab has defined itself as a global Jihadist organization, as I discussed in the previous session, so that it must try to appear always "global" and "Jihadist" at least pro forma. Al-Katā'ib, the GIMF, Arabic statements, and an Arabic bulletin are the outer garments or accessories by which al-Shabaab makes believe to sympathizers or supporters outside Somalia that it is fighting for the sake of Allah, and not just for narrow, local Somali causes.

If we go into details, we can find a lot of contradictions and uncertainties among the contents of its Arabic statements, articles, and ideologies, but these do not matter, especially for youngsters who want to fight in a Jihad or who want to die as martyrs in the way of Allah. They do not want to stick with trifles; all they need are global Jihadist organizations with plain causes intelligible to anyone that can provide them with suitable places to fight or to die for a cause they believe in.

Postscript

There have been two important developments in al-Shabaab's media strategy after I finished writing this paper. First, al-Shabaab started its Twitter in English as HSM Office on December 2011 (https://twitter.com/#!/HSMPress) and the account is still working until now. The second could be one of the biggest developments in the history of al-Shabaab. Ayman al-Ẓawāhirī, the leader of al-Qāʿida Central, announced on February 9, 2012 that al-Shabaab joined ranks of al-Qāʿida. Al-Qāʿida's media organ, al-Saḥāb, issued the video statement by al-Ẓawāhirī, in which al-Shabaab's leader, Abū al-Zubayr, pledged allegiance to al-Ẓawāhirī and the above-mentioned Twitter account also confirmed the merger on February 12, 2012. In the section V of the paper, the present author doubted as to al-Shabaab was al-Qāʿida's branch in the Horn of Africa, but now this statement must be corrected.

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