

Al Shabaab's American Recruits

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A wave of Americans traveling to Somalia to fight with Al Shabaab, an Al Qaeda-linked terrorist group, was described by the FBI as one of the "highest priorities in anti-terrorism."

Americans began traveling to Somalia to join Al Shabaab in 2007, around the time the group stepped up its insurgency against Somalia's transitional government and its Ethiopian supporters, who have since withdrawn. At least 50 U.S. citizens and permanent residents are believed to have joined or attempted to join or aid the group since that time.

The number of Americans joining Al Shabaab began to decline in 2012, and by 2014, [the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria](#) (ISIS) [replaced Al Shabaab as the terrorist group of choice](#) for U.S. recruits. However, there continue to be new cases of Americans attempting to join or aid Al Shabaab.

These Americans have received weapons training alongside recruits from other countries, including Britain, Australia, Sweden and Canada, and have used the training to fight against Ethiopian forces, African Union troops and the internationally-supported Transitional Federal Government in Somalia, according to court documents.

Most of the American men training with Al Shabaab are believed to have been radicalized in the U.S., especially in Minneapolis, according to U.S. officials. The FBI alleges that these young men have been recruited by Al Shabaab both on the Internet and in person.

One such recruit from Minneapolis, 22-year-old [Abidsalan Hussein Ali](#), was one of two suicide bombers who attacked African Union troops on October 29, 2011. He was identified by his family as speaking in an audio message released by Al Shabaab claiming credit for the bombing. Somali authorities reported that 10 people were killed in the ensuing firefight.



Al Shabaab video, released September 2009

Ali is the third American suicide bomber. The first, Shirwa Ahmed, carried out a suicide bombing at

the Ethiopian Consulate and the presidential palace in Hargeisa killing 24 people in October 2009. The second, [Farah Mohamad Beledi](#), carried out a suicide bombing on May 30, 2011, targeting a military base outside Mogadishu, the Somali capital, killing two African Union peacekeepers and a Somali soldier. Federal investigators have also looked into reports about whether another American was involved in a suicide attack in Mogadishu in September 2009 that killed 21 people. The identity of that attacker has never been confirmed.

Additionally, Al Shabaab claimed that three Americans took part in its assault on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, on September 21, 2013. Al Shabaab named Ahmed Mohamed Isse of St. Paul, Minnesota, Abdifatah Osman Keenadiid of Minneapolis, and Gen Mustafe Noorudiin of Kansas City, Missouri as attackers via the organization's Twitter feed. As of October, 2013, Al Shabaab's claims had not been verified by American law enforcement. In addition, other Twitter accounts claiming to be Al Shabaab have suggested that other Americans were also involved.

FBI director Robert Mueller said he was "absolutely" concerned that the young American men may return to the U.S. with their passports and attempt to carry out an attack on U.S. soil similar to the foiled plot in Australia, in which Somali-Australians allegedly affiliated with Al Shabaab planned to carry out a suicide attack on a Sydney army base after returning from Somalia.

While there have been no similar plots in the United States to date, Al Shabaab's desire to expand its operations outside of Somali and its ability to attract American recruits, presents a significant threat to the U.S.

Recruitment in the U.S.

Al Shabaab, the FBI alleges, has made an "active and deliberate attempt" to recruit young American men both in person and on the Internet. "These young men have been recruited to fight in a foreign war by individuals and groups using violence against government troops and civilians," said B. Todd Jones, U.S. Attorney for the District of Minneapolis, who brought charges against some of the men.

Mahamud Said Omar, a former janitor at Abubaker As-Saddique Islamic Center, a mosque many of the defendants attended, played a major role in recruiting some of the young men, according to the Department of Justice. In November 2009, Omar was arrested



Al Shabaab video, released September 2009

in the Netherlands and charged in a Minneapolis District Court with providing the young men funding to travel to Somalia. He also allegedly visited Shabaab safe-house and donated money to the group for the purchase of AK-47 rifles for the Minneapolis men to use. In October 2012, Omar was found guilty of five charges related to his recruitment for Al Shabaab and was sentenced to 20- years in prison on May 13, 2013. The Department of Justice has found no evidence that the mosque's leadership was involved in recruitment.

[Two men who pleaded guilty to providing material support to terrorists](#), Abdifatah Yusuf Isse and Salah Osman Ahmed, claimed in their defenses that they were recruited in Minneapolis to join Al Shabaab. In a motion filed by Isse's lawyer, he said the recruitment happened "at a place of worship." Ahmed reportedly admitted that he attended "secret meetings" beginning in October 2007. Isse and Ahmed were both sentenced to 3-years in prison on May 14, 2013.

Cabdulaahi Ahmed Faarax, a naturalized U.S. citizen from Minneapolis who the Department of Justice alleges previously fought "jihad" in Somalia, held meetings at private residences and a mosque where described his experiences in Somalia as "true brotherhood."

There is also concern that some American recruits return to the United States after spending time in Somalia with the goal of radicalizing others. After having been trained by Al Shabaab, they are able to assimilate back into their home communities, particularly in Minnesota, and "pose a significant threat" according to local law enforcement.

Young American men have also been targeted for recruitment by Al Shabaab through propaganda videos posted on the Internet. [Omar Hammami](#), an Alabama native who became the public face and voice of Al Shabaab, has appeared in several videos urging foreigners "[to come and live the life of a mujahid](#)."

After an ambush shown in a March 2009 video, Hammami, who is identified in the video as Abu Mansour al Amriki (Arabic for "Abu Mansour the American"), praised a killed fighter as a martyr and said, "We need more like him, so if you can encourage more of your children and more of your neighbors and anyone around you to send people like him to this jihad, it would be a great asset for us." Hammami



Abu Mansour al Amriki

also maintained an active Twitter feed with which he regularly interacted with Americans.

Hammami has since become a cautionary tale for supporters of Al Shabaab. In March 2012 it became clear that he was in an open and public conflict with Al Shabaab's leadership, primarily over differences between a global and local view of Shabaab's mission. That same month, Hammami publicly declared that he fears that "my life may be endangered by [Al Shabaab] due to some differences that occurred between us regarding matters of the Shariah and matters of strategy." The conflict between Hammami and Al Shabaab leadership grew over the course of the year to the point where he publicly broke from both Al Shabaab and Al Qaeda on September 5, 2013, claiming that he was still a terrorist but was disenchanted with Al Shabaab and Al Qaeda. The rift culminated in Hammami's killing on September 12, 2013, ostensibly by Al Shabaab's elite intelligence service, the Amniyatt Mukhabarat.

Al Shabaab has put together numerous additional videos with the goal of recruiting Americans. In April 2009, two men who identified themselves as Abu Muslim and Abu Yaxye appeared in another [video](#) claiming to be "Somali youth" from the United States who joined Al Shabaab. "We came from the U.S. with a good life and a good education, but we came to fight alongside our brothers of Al Shabaab...to be killed for the sake of God," Abu Muslim reportedly said in the video. Later in the video, Abu Yaxye added, "We are here to invite others to come and join us." Another video, released in August 2013, is specifically focused on the large Somali-American populations of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Titled "The Path to Paradise: From the Twin Cities to the Land of the Two Migrations," it presents a standard Islamist narrative of the obligation to fight and then focuses on the importance of leaving the US to join Al Shabaab, including personal narratives by different individuals who have made the trip. One of the featured jihadists, named Muhammed, tells viewers, "This is the best place to be, honestly.... If you guys only knew how much fun we have over here – this is the real Disneyland." He concludes by urging, "Everyone who is a real Muslim...who really wants to serve in the cause of Allah...come here and join us so that we can die for the sake of Allah."

In 2014, Al Shabaab began calling for homegrown attacks against the U.S. in its videos as well. A [video released in May 2014](#) presented Muslims living abroad with two options: undertaking a "lone wolf mission" in their home countries or traveling abroad to join the group. And a [video released in February 2015](#) called on



Image from 2015 video calling for attacks on Western shopping centers

followers to attack “American and Jewish-owned shopping centers across the world,” with specific threats directed at “the Mall of America in Minnesota, or the West Edmonton Mall in Canada, or in London’s Oxford Street, or any of the hundred or so Jewish-owned Westfield shopping centers.”

Prior to leaving Minnesota, several of the men who trained with Al Shabaab reportedly listened to a sermon titled “Constants on the Path of Jihad” given by [Anwar al-Awlaki](#), an American-born Muslim cleric living in Yemen who targets English-speaking Muslim audiences with radical online lectures that encourage attacks against the West and non-Muslims. In December 2008, al-Awlaki praised Al Shabaab, calling on all Muslims to “help them with men and money.”

Some of the men raised funds for their travels from other members of the Somali community in Minneapolis by lying about what they intended to do with the money. In one instance, some of the men told members of the Somali community that one young man needed money to study Quran in Saudi Arabia, according to court documents.

Efforts to recruit fighters for Al Shabaab have taken place in other countries as well. For example, an Al Shabaab recruiter at a youth recreation center in Stockholm, Sweden, reportedly showed YouTube clips that encouraged young people to sacrifice themselves for their beliefs. Approximately 20 individuals from Sweden have been recruited by Al Shabaab, according to the Swedish security service. Other foreign recruits come from Australia, the United Kingdom, South Asia, and the Middle East. And Al Shabaab listed individuals from Canada, the UK, and Finland among the attackers on the Westgate Mall in addition to the three Americans previously mentioned.

Al Shabaab

[Al Shabaab](#) (Arabic for “the youth”) is an Islamic militant group that seeks to create an Islamic state in Somalia. Al Shabaab is linked to Al Qaeda both ideologically and through leadership contacts, training and joint operations in the Horn of Africa, according to U.S. officials.

In a February 2010 press conference, Al Shabaab announced it was aligned with Al Qaeda “to confront the international crusaders and their aggression against the



Al Shabaab symbol

Muslim people." In order to do so, an Al Shabaab leader said, "the jihad of the Horn of Africa must be combined with international jihad led by the Al Qaeda network headed by Sheikh Osama bin Laden."

In June 2011, Al Shabaab reaffirmed its affiliation to Al Qaeda by swearing allegiance to [Ayman al Zawahiri](#), who assumed leadership of Al Qaeda after bin Laden's death in May 2011.

A joint communiqué issued by Al Shabaab and Al Qaeda in February 2012 further solidified the relationship between the two groups. Zawahiri welcomed "the joining of the Al Shabaab Al Muhajideen Movement in Somalia to Al Qaeda in support of the jihad gathering in the face of the Zionist Crusade campaign."

Another indication of Al Shabaab's ties with Al Qaeda is Fazul Abdullah Mohammed's leadership role in the Somali-based terrorist organization. Mohammad, a member of Al Qaeda, traveled to Somalia for the first time in the early 1990s to train Somalis to fight the American and U.N. forces, after he had trained with Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. He brought Al Qaeda tactics, including suicide bombings to Somalia, and served as a conduit for foreign financing and fighters to join Al Shabaab.

Mohammed was wanted by the U.S. government for allegedly masterminding the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, which killed more than 220 people including 12 Americans. Kenyan officials have also alleged that Mohammed organized a November 2002 failed missile attack on an Israeli airliner and the bombing of an Israeli-owned resort in Mombasa, Kenya, which killed 15 people. Mohammed was killed at a checkpoint in Mogadishu in June 2011. At the time of his death, Mohammed was found with a list of targets including several prominent institutions in Britain.

Another Al Qaeda leader with links to Al Shabaab was Saleh Ali Saleh Nabhan, who was killed in a U.S. raid in Somalia in September 2009. He was also connected to the 1998 Embassy bombings as well as the attacks on the Israeli airliner and resort in Kenya.

Al Shabaab has also established links to the Yemeni regional affiliate, [Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](#) (AQAP). This relationship was highlighted by information gathered from an Al Shabaab leader, Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame, who was detained by the American military while traveling between Somalia and Yemen. He reportedly confirmed that Al Shabaab seeks to expand its operations beyond Somalia and has received training and weapons from AQAP.

Al Shabaab started as the military wing of the Somali Council of Islamic Courts, which took over most of southern Somalia in 2006. Though this group was routed by the Somali government and Ethiopian forces, a clan-based insurgent terrorist group remained. The group has managed to exert control over much of southern and central Somalia and controlled large portions of the capital, Mogadishu until it was routed in August, 2011.

Al Shabaab finances itself through donations from abroad, taxing the areas under its control, and increasingly through piracy and ransom. There are also allegations that Eritrea finances Al Shabaab activities to use it as a proxy against its regional rivals.

The group has claimed responsibility for attacks against Ethiopian forces, African Union troops, and the internationally-supported Transitional Federal Government in Somalia. For example, a suicide bombing in December 2009 killed three government ministers along with 19 others during a graduation ceremony at Mogadishu's Benadir University. More recently, Al Shabaab recruited the Somali Interior Minister's niece, who assassinated the minister in a suicide bombing at his home.

The group has also stated its intent to target Western interests. After the U.S. designated Al Shabaab as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in February 2008, former Al Shabaab spokesman Sheik Mukhtar Robow reportedly told the BBC that, "Al-Shabab feels honored to be included on the list. We are good Muslims and the Americans are infidels. We are on the right path." In April 2009, Al Shabaab [fired mortar shells](#) at a U.S. congressman as his plane lifted off from a Somalia airport.

While Al Shabaab's terror-related activities had been confined within the borders of Somalia and its immediate vicinity, twin bombings in Uganda in July 2010 marked the first time the Somali-based organization launched an international terrorist attack. The bombings, which tore through two venues where crowds gathered to watch the broadcast of the World Cup finals, killed more than 70 people, including an American aid worker.

A member of Al Shabaab, who has been arrested for allegedly masterminding the Uganda bombings, reportedly admitted that he was motivated by hatred of the U.S. "My rage was with the Americans whom I deemed responsible for all the suffering of Muslims around the world," the alleged ringleader said. "I targeted places where many Americans go."

Al Shabaab spokesman Ali Mahmud Ragi, who claimed responsibility for the bombings, threatened additional attacks against Uganda and other African countries if they do not withdraw their soldiers from the African Union's peacekeeping mission stationed in Somalia to protect the country's transitional government.

Six months before the Uganda attacks, Somali national Mohammed Muhideen Gelle attempted to kill a Danish cartoonist who printed controversial cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in 2005. While Al Shabaab did not claim responsibility for Gelle's actions, Danish intelligence officials have alleged that Gelle is linked to the Somali-based terrorist organization. As further indication of Al Shabaab's intent to operate outside of Somalia, the group has declared an "open battle" against Israel, which it deems the "oppressing Zionist entity," and Jewish interests in Africa.

In November 2009, the terrorist organization announced the establishment of [Al Quds Brigade](#), a military unit specifically tasked with attacking Israel and freeing "Islamic holy places" from the Israelis. A Somali was arrested at the Cairo airport in May 2011 and confessed to being part of a cell with plans to attack Western interest in Egypt and Israel. Previously, 720 Somalis affiliated with Al Shabaab were selected to travel to Lebanon to fight Israel in the 2006 Lebanon War, according to a U.N report. Part of the criteria for selection included combat experience in Afghanistan.

Al Shabaab's international reach has increasingly extended through Western Africa. This was cemented by its partnership with Boko Haram, which it announced in June 2011. Boko Haram is an Islamic militant group that wants to establish an Islamic state in northern Nigeria. The group claims that it has sent its militants for training with Al Shabaab in Somalia, and conducted its first suicide bombing in June 2011.

Al Shabaab also advances its agenda in Kenya, where it has two affiliate organizations: the Muslim Youth Center and al Hijra. It has also published an online magazine, [Gaidi Mtaani](#) (roughly translated as "Terrorism Street"), in Swahili and English that is directed at Kenyan audiences. In a 2012 issue of Gaidi Mtaani promoted by the Muslim Youth Center, Kenyans were warned that Al Shabaab "will not differentiate between civilians and combatants," and advised to "reflect on the magnitude of what is yet to come." Al Shabaab further extends its reach in the country through attempts by individuals such as Abdulkadir Mohamed Abdulkadir, also known as Ikrima, to increase linkages and recruitment. Abdulkadir was the subject of a failed U.S. raid on Barawe, Somalia, on October 5, 2013.

Al Shabaab's increasingly international reach was highlighted by its aforementioned attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, on September 12, 2013. Armed Al Shabaab militants took control of the mall, attacking non-Muslim shoppers. Sixty-one civilians and 6 police officers were killed in a four-day standoff. Al Shabaab spokesman Sheikh Abulaziz Abu Muscab said that in addition to Kenya's military involvement in Somalia, the terrorist group attacked the Westgate Mall in Nairobi because it is a place "where there are Jewish and American shops," underscoring Al Shabaab's intentions against Jews, Israel, and the United States. The attack is also seen in some quarters as an affirmation of Al Shabaab leader Ahmed Abdi Godane's authority following the killings of Hammami and others who were in argument with him and others in the organization's top leadership.

On September 1, 2014, Godane was killed in a U.S. airstrike. In December 2014, another airstrike killed a senior leader of the group, Tahlil Abdishakur, after which an additional senior leader, Zakariya Ismail Ahmed Hesri, surrendered to the Somali government. In January 2015, Somalia's president renewed a longstanding offer of amnesty to Al Shabaab members who defect. And in February 2015, Yusuf Dheeq, Al Shabaab's head of operations, was killed in a drone strike. However, the group continues to exist and operate in Somalia and neighboring countries.

Americans Linked to Al Shabaab

The following is a list of Americans and U.S. residents that have been charged, convicted or otherwise affiliated with Al Shabaab:

- [Cabdulaahi Ahmed Faarax](#), a 32-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen from Minneapolis, was charged in October 2009 for conspiring to kill, kidnap, maim, and injure persons outside the U.S. According to court documents, Faarax previously fought with Al Shabaab in Somalia in 2007 and later returned to Minneapolis where he encouraged others to travel to Somalia to fight. Faarax, who previously worked as a cab driver, is still at large and was last seen in October 2009 at the U.S.-Mexico border crossing.
- [Omar Hammami](#), a 25-year-old American citizen from Alabama, became the public face and voice of Al Shabaab as part of the terrorist organization's effort to recruit English-speakers. Since the fall of 2007, Hammami has issued written statements on behalf of Al Shabaab and has appeared in the terror group's videos and audio recordings. Identified in Al Shabaab statements and recordings as Abu Mansour al Amriki (Arabic for "Abu Mansour the American"),

Hammami was charged with providing material support to Al Shabaab in an indictment unsealed in August 2010. However, beginning in March 2012, Hammami came into public conflict with Al Shabaab, issuing messages that he fears his life “may be endangered by [Al Shabaab] due to some differences that occurred between us regarding matters of the Shariah and matters of strategy,” and later noting failed assassination attempts. He was killed on September 12, 2013, allegedly by Al Shabaab members.”

- Dahir Gure of Minnesota is believed to be among the first Minnesotans to travel to Somalia to join Al Shabaab. He left for Somalia on October 30 2007 and is believed dead.
- [Khalid Mohamud Abshir](#), a 26-year-old legal permanent resident who lived in Minneapolis, was charged in an indictment filed in August 2009 and unsealed in November with providing and conspiring to provide material support to terrorists, conspiracy to kill, kidnap, maim, and injure persons outside the U.S., and solicitation to commit a crime of violence. The indictment alleged that Abshir persuaded four other men to go with him to Somalia to train with Al Shabaab in December 2007. Abshir, who previously worked at a car-rental company, is still at large and believed to be in Somalia.
- [Salah Osman Ahmed](#), a 26-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen from Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, pleaded guilty in a Minneapolis District Court to providing material support to terrorists in July 2009. Ahmed traveled to Somalia in December 2007, according to his plea agreement, to fight against Ethiopian troops. On May 14, 2013, he was sentenced to 3-years in prison for traveling to Somalia and receiving weapons training from Al Shabaab. Ahmed is a former student at North Hennepin Community College, a parking lot attendant and a security guard.
- Shirwa Ahmed, a 27-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen who lived in Minneapolis, was reportedly the first known American suicide bomber. Ahmed carried out a suicide attack in October 2008 on the United Nations compound, the Ethiopian Consulate and the presidential palace in Hargeisa, killing 24 people. Ahmed, who graduated from Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis in 2000, was one of six men who left Minnesota for Somalia in December 2007 and attended an Al Shabaab training camp.

- [Abdifatah Yusuf Isse](#), a 25-year-old a naturalized U.S. citizen from Seattle, pleaded guilty in a Minneapolis District Court to providing material support to terrorists in April 2009. He left for Somalia in December 2007 and trained with Al Shabaab in Somalia, according to court documents. Isse also admitted to investigators that he had contact in Somalia with Shirwa Ahmed, the first known American suicide bomber, who carried out an attack in October 2008. On May 14, 2013, he was sentenced to 3-years in prison for traveling to Somalia and receiving training from Al Shabaab. Prior to his travels to Somalia, Isse was an economics major at Eastern Washington University.
- [Ahmed Ali Omar](#), a 24-year-old legal permanent resident who lived in Minneapolis, was charged in an indictment filed in August 2009 and unsealed in November with providing and conspiring to provide material support to terrorists, conspiracy to kill, kidnap, maim, and injure persons outside the U.S., possessing and discharging a firearm during a crime of violence and solicitation to commit a crime of violence. The indictment alleged that Omar persuaded four other men to go with him to Somalia to train with Al Shabaab in December 2007. Omar, who graduated from Edison High School in Minneapolis in 2004, is still at large and believed to be in Somalia.
- Abdirashid Ali Omar allegedly traveled from Minnesota to Somalia in 2008 in the second group of individuals travelling from Minneapolis to Somalia for that purpose. He is believed to have died fighting with Al Shabaab against African Union Peacekeepers in Mogadishu in September 2010.
- Ruben Shumpert, a 26-year-old American Muslim convert from Seattle, allegedly fled to Somalia while free on bond after pleading guilty to possession of a firearm and transferring counterfeit U.S. currency. Officials suspect that Shumpert was working with Al Shabaab when he was killed in a missile strike in Somalia in 2008.
- Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan, an 18-year-old legal permanent resident who lived in Minneapolis, was charged in an indictment filed in August 2009 and unsealed in November with providing and conspiring to provide material support to terrorists, and also with conspiring to kill, kidnap, maim, and injure persons outside the U.S. Hassan reportedly left for Somalia in August 2008 a year before graduating from Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis. He is still at large and believed to be outside the U.S. presumably in Somalia, according to the FBI. Hassan

maintains an active social media presence [on which he encourages other English-speakers to join terrorist groups](#) including Al Shabaab and ISIS. He was apparently in contact with [Douglas McAuthor McCain](#), who died fighting with ISIS in August 2014.

- [Mustafa Ali Salat](#), an 18-year-old legal permanent resident who lived in St. Paul, was charged in an indictment filed in August 2009 and unsealed in November with providing and conspiring to provide material support to terrorists and conspiring to kill, kidnap, maim, and injure persons outside the U.S. Salat reportedly left for Somalia in August 2008 a year before graduating from Harding High School in St. Paul. He is still at large and believed to be outside the U.S. presumably in Somalia, according to the FBI.
- Jamal Bana, of Minneapolis, allegedly left for Somalia in November 2008 while studying engineering at Minneapolis Community and Technical College and Normandale College. Reports indicate that Bana was killed in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, in July 2009 when he was 19 years old.
- Burhan Hassan, of Minneapolis, allegedly left during his senior year at Roosevelt High School in November 2008 and traveled to Somalia. Media reports indicate that Hassan was killed in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, in June 2009 when he was 17 years old.
- Mohamoud Hassan, of Minneapolis, allegedly left for Somalia in November 2008. Hassan, a former engineering student at the University of Minnesota, was reportedly killed in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, in September 2009 when he was 23 years old.
- Troy Kastigar, an American-born Muslim convert from Minneapolis, allegedly left for Somalia in November 2008. Kastigar's family reportedly received information that he was killed in September 2009, when he was 28 years old. In 2014, it became apparent that Kastigar had, since high school, been [friends with Douglas McAuthor McCain](#), who is believed to have died while fighting with ISIS in August 2014.



- Adarus Abdulle Ali, a 25-year-old from St. Anthony, Minnesota, pleaded guilty in November 2009 to perjury for making false statements to a federal grand jury. In December 2008, Ali testified that he did not know anyone who traveled to Somalia; however, he attended a meeting where others discussed traveling to Somalia to fight against Ethiopians. Ali also drove one of the defendants to the Minneapolis airport for his flight to Somalia, according to court documents.
- [Kamal Said Hassan](#), a 24-year-old a U.S. citizen from Plymouth, Minnesota, pleaded guilty in a Minneapolis federal court to providing material support for terrorism and to a foreign terrorist organization in February 2009, and six months later also pleaded guilty to making a false statement to FBI agents regarding his affiliation with the terrorist organization. He admitted in federal court to training with Al Shabaab in Somalia. Before leaving for Somalia, Hassan reportedly attended Minneapolis Community and Technical College in 2006. On May 13, 2013, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison for fighting with Al Shabaab.
- [Zakaria Maruf](#), a 30-year-old legal permanent resident who lived in Minneapolis, was charged in an indictment filed in August 2009 and unsealed in November with providing and conspiring to provide material support to terrorists and conspiring to kill, kidnap, maim, and injure persons outside the U.S. Maruf, who previously belonged to a violent street gang in Minneapolis, gave an interview in January 2009 to Andalus Radio, a station in Somalia, about why he and others went to Somalia. In the interview, Maruf claimed that they went to Somalia after they "heard the verses from Allah," and those that are there "hold the highest position in the sight of Allah." Maruf's family has reportedly claimed he was killed while fighting in Somalia in July 2009.
- Omar Mohamed from Seattle left the US to join Al Shabaab. He is presumed dead, suspected of conducting a suicide attack by driving a stolen UN vehicle into an AMISOM base in Mogadishu in September, 2009.
- Abdow Munye Abdow, a 26-year-old naturalized U.S. citizen from Chanhassen, Minnesota, pleaded guilty in May 2010 to lying to federal agents during a terrorism investigation. An indictment filed against Abdow in October 2009 alleged that he lied about being in a rental car that was stopped near Las Vegas with at least two other men who later allegedly traveled to Somalia and are also indicted on terrorism charges. In addition, Abdow told federal agents that he did not know who paid for the rental car, when in fact, according to court documents, he

used his own debit card to pay for the car. He was sentenced in July 2010 to four months in prison and four months house arrest. He began serving his sentence in January 2011.

- [Abdiweli Yassin Isse](#), 25-years-old from Minneapolis, was charged in October 2009 for conspiring to kill, kidnap, maim, and injure persons outside the U.S. According to court documents, Isse raised money to buy airplane tickets for other defendants to travel to Somalia to fight "jihad" against Ethiopians. Isse, who previously worked at a money-wiring service, is still at large and was last seen in October 2009 at the U.S.-Mexico border crossing.
- Mahamud Said Omar, a 43-year-old a legal permanent resident who previously resided in Minneapolis, was arrested in November 2009 in the Netherlands and charged in a U.S. District Court with providing and conspiring to provide material support to terrorists and conspiracy to kill, kidnap, main, and injure persons outside the U.S. The FBI alleges that Omar provided the young Somali-American men with funds to travel to Somalia. He also reportedly visited an Al Shabaab safe-house and donated money to the group for the purchase of AK-47 rifles for use by the Minneapolis men. On May 13, 2013, he was sentenced to 20-years in prison for his role in recruiting militants for Al Shabaab.
- [Mohamed Mahmood Alessa, a 20-year-old American citizen, and Carlos Eduardo Almonte](#), a 24 year-old naturalized American citizen, both New Jersey, were arrested in June 2010 as they attempted to board separate flights to Egypt with the intention of continuing to Somalia to join Al Shabaab. The men, who have been charged with conspiring to kill, maim, and kidnap persons outside the United States, allegedly planned to kill American troops who they thought would soon be deployed to Somalia to help fight Al Shabaab. Both men pleaded guilty to a charge of conspiracy to murder people outside the U.S. in March 2011 and face the possibility of life imprisonment. On April 15, 2013, Alessa was sentenced to 22-years in prison and Almonte was sentenced to 20-years.
- [Farah Mohamad Beledi](#), a 27-year-old from Minneapolis, killed two African Union peacekeepers and a Somali soldier during a suicide attack against a military base in Mogadishu on May 30, 2011, according to the FBI. The FBI confirmed Beledi's identity through fingerprint analysis. He was one of [14 people indicted](#) in July 2010 with providing material support to terrorists for their various connections to Al Shabaab.

- [Zachary Chesser](#), a 20-year-old American citizen from Virginia who threatened the creators of South Park for satirizing issues surrounding the depiction of the Prophet Muhammad, pleaded guilty to attempting to travel to Somalia and join Al Shabaab in October 2010. Chesser was originally apprehended and questioned in July 2010 as he attempted to board a plane to Uganda, with the intention of continuing to Somalia. He later admitted to federal authorities that he had attempted to join Al Shabaab in Somalia on two previous occasions. He was sentenced to 25 years in prison in February 2011.
- [Abdikadir Ali Abdi, 19, and Abdisalan Hussein Ali, 21](#), both American citizens from Minnesota, are among ten individuals who remain at large in Somalia – charged in an indictment unsealed in August 2010. Among other charges, Abdi and Ali are indicted for providing financial support and personnel to Al Shabaab and to a conspiracy to kill abroad. The other suspects named in the indictment were previously charged for similar terror offenses relating to their alleged involvement with Al Shabaab. [Ali carried out a suicide bombing](#) in October 2011.
- [Amina Farah Ali, 33, and Hawo Mohamed Hassan, 63](#), both naturalized American citizens from Minnesota, were arrested in August 2010 for raising funds for Al Shabaab through door-to-door solicitations in various Somali communities in the region. They also solicited financial contributions to support terrorist activities in Somalia during various fundraising teleconferences, according to court documents. The women allegedly raised funds for Al Shabaab "under the false pretense that the funds were for the poor and needy." The two have pleaded not guilty. Both women were convicted on charges of conspiring to provide material support to Al Shabaab in October 2011. On May 16, 2013, Hassan was sentenced to 10-years in prison for fundraising on behalf of Al Shabaab and lying to the FBI. Ali was sentenced the same day to 20-years in prison for her fundraising efforts.
- [Shaker Masri](#), a 26-year-old American citizen from Chicago, was arrested in August 2010 for planning to travel to Somalia to join Al Shabaab. Masri allegedly mapped various routes to Somalia, including ones through California, Mexico, Venezuela and Tanzania, to avoid detection by American federal authorities. He also stated his intentions to become a suicide bomber in Somalia. "I will not stay idle," he said in July 2010. "I wish to know how to the explosive belt is made... I will wear one and I will not take it off."

- [Jehad Serwan Mostafa](#), a 28-year-old American citizen from California, was charged in an indictment unsealed in August 2010 with conspiring to provide material support to Al Shabaab and with fighting with the Somali-based terrorist group. Mostafa, a former student at the University of California San Diego, allegedly left the U.S. in 2005 and remains at large, presumably in Somalia.
- Mohamed Osman, a 19-year-old from Bayonne, New Jersey, pleaded guilty on September 15, 2010 to charges of making materially false statements to federal investigators in a matter involving international terrorism. Osman lied to FBI agents during their investigation of Mohamed Mahmood Alessa and Carlos Eduardo Almonte who were arrested at JFK Airport en route to join Al Shabaab in Somalia.
- [Basaaly Saeed Moalin, 33, Mohamed Mohamed Mohamud, 38, and Issa Doreh](#), a 54-year-old naturalized American citizen, all from San Diego, California, [were arrested and charged](#) in an indictment unsealed in November 2010. The men allegedly transferred money to Al Shabaab at the request of Aden Hashi Ayrow, the former military leader of the terrorist group. In February 2013, all three were convicted of various charges related to providing material support to terrorist and Al Shabaab and money laundering.
- [Mohamud Abdi Yusuf, a 30-year-old with refugee status from St. Louis, and Abdi Mahdi Hussein, from Minneapolis](#), were arrested and charged in an indictment unsealed in November 2010, accusing them of sending money to Al Shabaab supporters in Somalia. A third man charged in this indictment, Duane Mohamed Diriye, who remains at large, allegedly received the funds in Somalia and transferred the money to members of Al Shabaab. Yusuf pleaded guilty to providing material support to Al Shabaab in November 2011 and was sentenced to 10-years' imprisonment. Hussein pleaded guilty to a non-terrorism related charge in January 2012 and was sentenced to 3-years' probation for concealing money transfers to Kenya and Somalia.
- Nima Ali Yusuf, a 24-year-old permanent U.S. resident, was indicted in a San Diego federal court on November 15, 2010. She was charged with conspiracy to provide material support to Al Shabaab and making false statements in a matter involving international terrorism. Yusuf allegedly promised to send money and at least one recruit to Al Shabaab. She is allegedly linked

to Minnesotans who traveled to Somalia to join Al Shabaab. Yusuf was sentenced to 8-years in prison in December 2102 for providing material support to Al Shabaab.

- [Ahmed Nasir Taalil Mohamud](#), a 35-year-old from Anaheim, California, was charged with conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists and a foreign terrorist organization, conspiracy to kill in a foreign country and conspiracy to launder monetary instruments in a California federal court in an indictment that was unsealed on December 3, 2010. Mohamud allegedly conspired to provide money to Al Shabaab with three other San Diego residents arrested on Al Shabaab-related terror charges – Basaaly Saeed Moalin, Mohamed Mohamed Mohamud and Issa Doreh. In February 2013, Moahmud was convicted of conspiracy to provide material support to terrorists, conspiracy to provide material support to Al Shabaab, and conspiracy to launder monetary instruments.
- [Ahmed Hussein Mahamud](#), a 26-year-old American citizen from Columbus, Ohio, was charged in an indictment, unsealed in June 2011, with providing material support to Al Shabaab. Mahamud, who was arrested in Ohio, previously lived in Minnesota. In February 2012, he pleaded guilty to conspiring to provide material support to Al Shabaab. On May 14, 2013, he was sentenced to 3 years in prison for fundraising for Al Shabaab.
- [Betim Kaziu](#), a 21-year-old U.S. citizen from Brooklyn, New York, was convicted on July 7, 2011, for traveling abroad to join terrorist group, including Al Shabaab, and to fight against American forces in Afghanistan, Iraq and the Balkans. He was arrested in Kosovo and extradited to the United States.
- Omer Abdi Mohamed, a 26-year-old legal permanent resident from St. Anthony, Minnesota, pleaded guilty to conspiring to provide material support to a conspiracy to kill, kidnap, maim, and injure persons outside the U.S. on July 18, 2011. Authorities allege that Mohamed helped recruit six young men to fight in Somalia. Prior to his arrest, Mohamed reportedly attended Roosevelt High School in Minneapolis and worked as an employment counselor until he was laid off in the fall of 2009. On May 14, 2013, Mohamed was sentenced to 12-years in prison for his role in recruiting on behalf of Al Shabaab.

- Craig Baxman of Laurel, Maryland, was arrested on January 6, 2012 in Kenya while allegedly attempting to travel to Somalia and join Al Shabaab. He was charged with attempting to provide material support to the organization.
- Mohamed Osman (distinct from previous) and Omar Ali Farah left Minneapolis for Somalia in July, 2012, allegedly to join Al Shabaab. Osman was 19 years old, and Farah 21. While in the United States, Osman had been a Quran instructor at an Islamic school. They remain unaccounted for.
- Ahmed Mohamed Isse of St. Paul, Minnesota, Abdifatah Osman Keenadiid of Minneapolis, and Gen Mustafe Noorudiin of Kansas City, Missouri, [have been listed among the September 2013 attackers on the Westgate Mall](#) in Nairobi, Kenya, according to Al Shabaab's twitter handle. Although it later became clear that they were not among the attackers, they may nonetheless be American members of Al Shabaab.
- Gufran Ahmad Kauser Mohammed, a U.S. citizen from Florida, was arrested in August 2013 for aiding both Al Shabaab and Jabhat al Nusra, the Al Qaeda affiliate in Syria. Mohammed pleaded guilty in July 2014 and was sentenced to 15 years in prison.
- [Rahatul Ashkim Khan](#), a 23-year-old U.S. citizen from Round Rock, Texas, was arrested on June 17, 2014 for allegedly recruiting others to join Al Shabaab.
- Hinda Osman Dhirane, a 44-year-old U.S. citizen from Washington, and Muna Osman Jama, a 34-year-old apparent U.S. permanent resident from Virginia, were arrested on July 23, 2014 for providing material support to Al Shabaab. The two were allegedly part of an international network of women who funneled money to Al Shabaab.

Previous Somali-Related Terror Arrests

Prior to the recent wave of American Muslim extremists traveling to Somalia to join Al Shabaab, a few Americans showed similar interest in supporting terrorist groups in the region.

For example, in July 2007, [Daniel J. Maldonado](#) was sentenced to 10 years in prison for training in Somalia with Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a terrorist group that has worked with Al Qaeda to train recruits to fight for an independent Islamic state in Somalia. Maldonado, the first U.S. citizen to be charged with participating in terrorist activities in Somalia, grew up in New Hampshire.

Tarek Mehanna, a Massachusetts man who was charged in 2009 with providing material support to terrorists and conspiring to kill in a foreign country, was also arrested in November 2008 for lying to the FBI about his relationship and contact with Maldonado. According to court documents, the men discussed religious justification for suicide bombing, the killing of civilians and the "glory of dying on the battlefield for Allah." Maldonado has admitted that while he was in Somalia, he called Mehanna and urged him to join the fighting in Somalia.



Tarek Mehanna, courtesy of Facebook

In 2005, [Mark Robert Walker](#) was sentenced to two years in prison for attempting to provide goods and services to the Somali terrorist group Al Ittihad Al Islami (AIAI). AIAI, a U.S.-designated terrorist group, is closely allied with Al Qaeda and, like Al Shabaab, is fighting to establish an Islamic regime in Somalia. During an interview with federal agents after his arrest, Walker, a student at Wyoming Technical College in Laramie, reportedly acknowledged that he was planning to send equipment to the AIAI and that he intended to meet with an individual at the El Paso International Airport to talk about traveling to Somalia. Agents found Kevlar vests and information about ammonium nitrate, nitric acid and weapons in Walker's vehicle at the time of his arrest.