

# Profile: Omar Hammami

Omar Hammami, an American citizen from Alabama who once served as primary recruiter for Al Shabaab, the Somali-based terrorist organization affiliated with Al Qaeda, was killed September 13, 2013 at age 29 by members of [Al Shabaab](#).

Between 2007 and 2011, he was a public face and voice of Al Shabaab and a critical part of the terrorist organization's effort to recruit English-speakers. Hammami was identified in Al Shabaab statements and recordings as Abu Mansour al Amriki, Arabic for "Abu Mansour the American."

Al Shabaab disseminated online propaganda videos featuring Hammami that sought to recruit young American men to join its insurgency against Somalia's transitional governments and its Ethiopian supporters. In his numerous written, video and audio statements, Hammami issued appeals to Americans and other English-speakers "to come and live the life of a mujahid [holy warrior]."



There have been approximately [50 known incidents of Americans](#) who have travelled or attempted to travel to Somalia to join Al Shabaab, or who have otherwise attempted to provide support to the organization, since 2007. Similar attempts have also been documented in Britain, Australia, and Canada.

On August 5, 2010, federal authorities unsealed an indictment charging Hammami with providing material support to terrorists. In November 2012, the FBI added him to its Most Wanted Terrorists list, and in March 2013 the Treasury Department's Rewards for Justice program offered a \$5 million reward for information leading to his capture.

As early as January 2012, evidence emerged of a conflict between Hammami and other members of Al Shabaab, which became fully public in a [March, 2012 YouTube video](#) in which Hammami claimed 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." The rift appeared to focus on questions of strategy and [local versus international focus](#).

In a September 3 2013 interview with the Voice of America, Hammami confirmed his break with Al Shabaab, saying that he is "still a terrorist" but no longer a member of Al Shabaab or of Al Qaeda. Less than two weeks later, Hammami was purportedly killed by members of Al Shabaab's elite intelligence service, the Amniyatt Mukhabarat.

## Hammami's Al Shabaab Activity



Between the fall of 2007 and the fall of 2011, Omar Hammami was a key part of Al Shabaab's efforts to appeal to American and other English-speaking audiences, issuing written statements and appearing in the terror organization's propaganda videos and audio recordings.

While his statements focused on a range of issues, including Al Shabaab's goal to establish an Islamic caliphate "in all parts of the world" and to fight against Somalia's transitional governments and its Ethiopian supporters, they often included appeals to Americans "to come and live the life of a mujahid [holy warrior]."

Several Americans charged with terror-related offenses were influenced by Hammami's statements and recordings. Hammami videos were found on the computers of [Abdel Daoud](#), an 18 year old Chicago resident arrested in September, 2012, for attempting to detonate a car bomb in Chicago; [Randy "Rasheed" Wilson](#), an Atlanta resident and apparent former friend of Hammami arrested in December, 2012, along with a co-conspirator for attempting to join terror groups abroad; and [Abdella Ahmad Tounisi](#), a Chicago resident arrested in April, 2013, for attempting to join Al Qaeda in Syria.

The following is a sampling of statements and recordings issued by Hammami on behalf of Al Shabaab, as well as Al Shabaab recordings in which Hammami has appeared:

- On October 7, 2011 Hammami released an audio lecture entitled "Lessons Learned," in which he reflects on over his "five years in southern Somalia." He characterizes Al Shabaab's fight as a "war of civilizations," in which all Muslims will "have to realize sooner or later that trying to practice your religion in Dar al-Kufr (the land of infidels) is nothing more than a dream world." He says that "it's necessary for us to prioritize especially in these times of crisis. So we have to put the liberation of the Muslim lands first. Jihad and hijrah (emigration from non-Muslim lands) have to be the first order of the day." He also offers a frank account of day-to-day life of a mujahid, describing of the depravation and boredom they often face, but concludes that the sacrifices are worthwhile and calls on his listeners to come "to the lands of jihad as soon as possible."
- In May 2011, Hammami spoke alongside other Al Shabaab leaders at a public rally south of Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, vowing to avenge the death of Osama bin Laden. "We are sending a message to [Barack] Obama and [Secretary of State] Hillary Clinton that we will avenge the death of our leader Sheikh Osama bin Laden very soon," he said. "Osama is dead but the holy war is not dead. Mujahedeen fighters all over the world are fully prepared to revenge the death of our leader."
- In April 2011, Hammami released two rap songs on the internet titled "Send Me A Cruise" and "Make Jihad With Me." In "Make Jihad With Me," Hammami calls for attacks on the U.S.: "Allahu Akbar Give Some More Bounty/Attack America Now!/Martyrdom or Victory/We take it Nairobi to Addis – Paradise Inside/Khilafah is here!/We are wiping Israel clear off the globe!"
- In an Al Shabaab video released in May 2010, Hammami can purportedly be heard rapping over footage of militants training for battle. Hammami's rap included the following line: "Establishing Allah's law on land and sea / My number one goal... die a shahid."
- Hammami appeared in an Al Shabaab video released in April 2010 featuring a festival for the children of Al Shabaab "martyrs." Several young boys are shown throughout the video playing with plastic guns and shooting toy AK-47s; one of the boys tells the cameraman he will use his gun to kill the kuffar, or non-Muslims. Hammami is shown urging a group of mothers to tell their children "to try to be like their hero fathers who were martyred" and encouraging a group of young boys "to continue the fighting started by those heroes."

- An Al Shabaab video released in September 2009 featured footage from an Al Shabaab training camp, including various shots of Hammami leading a group of Al Shabaab militants. The video, entitled, "We Are At Your Command, O Osama," also included numerous clips from a previous Osama bin Laden audio recording, in which the Al Qaeda leader urged fighting against the Somali government.
  - In July 2009, Al Shabaab released an audio recording in response to U.S. President Barack Obama's speech in Cairo the previous month. In the audio, entitled "A Response to Barack Obama: The Beginning of the End," Hammami affirmed Al Shabaab's allegiance to Al Qaeda and justified the September 11 terror attacks. Hammami further criticized the U.S. for supporting Israel, which he deemed "the most vicious evil nation of this modern era."
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- Al Shabaab video, entitled "A Response to Barack Obama: The Beginning of the End," released July 2009
- An Al Shabaab video dated July 2008 marked the first video in which Hammami appeared with his face uncovered. In the video, which was released the following March, Hammami was shown preparing an ambush against Ethiopian troops and explaining that, "the only reason we're staying here, away from our families, away from the cities, away from ice, candy bars, all these other things, is because we're waiting to meet with the enemy." After the ambush, Hammami again issued an appeal to foreigners to join the jihad in Somalia, saying, "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." According to American law enforcement officials, several Somali-Americans from Minnesota were also featured in the video including Shirwa Ahmed, who, three months later, carried out a series of suicide attacks with four others against the United Nations compound, the Ethiopian Consulate and the presidential palace in Hargeisa, killing 24 people.
  - In a January 2008 letter, entitled, "A Message to the Mujahideen in Particular and Muslims in General," Hammami explained Al Shabaab's goal to "establish the Islamic Khilaafah [Caliphate] from East to West after removing the occupier and killing the apostates."
  - Hammami first surfaced as a fighter in Somalia in an October 2007 interview with Al Jazeera, less than a year after his arrival in Somalia. His face covered with a green scarf, Hammami appealed to Americans to "take into consideration the situation in Somalia. After 15 years of chaos and oppressive rule by the American-backed warlords, your brothers stood up and established peace and justice in this land."
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- Al Shabaab statement, entitled "A Message to the Mujahideen in Particular and Muslims in General," issued January 2008

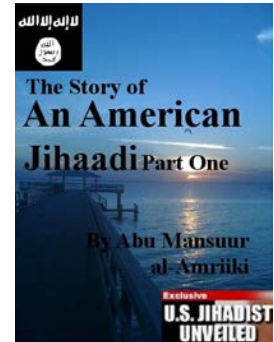
### Hammami's Dispute with Al Shabaab

Hammami came into conflict with other members of Al Shabaab beginning in as early as January, 2012. The dispute seems to have focused on whether the group should pursue a local or international agenda, with Hammami arguing for the latter. In an 45-minute audio lecture posted online, Hammami criticizes jihadist organizations with a local focus, likening them to a "cancerous tumor." He also calls for all Muslims to unite in a "jihad of the entire Ummah [Muslim nation]" under the banner of restored Caliphate.

Similarly, in an earlier memo released in Arabic, Hammami concludes that Al Shabaab, “don’t depart from Somalia except to do that which is in the benefit of Somalia, not the benefit of the Global Jihaad.”

Hammami also voiced criticism of Al Shabaab’s treatment of members and of the local population, as well as his impressions of their corruption and non-compliance with Islamic law. Beginning in January 2013, statements were regularly posted to his purported Twitter account that emphasized these points.

For example, he tweeted that “Each shabab city has a redlight district where qaat is halal. Other parts its haram/jail. But they take taxes on it” and “Shabab actively send people to act like apostates...But well known fighters are jailed at the mere notion of poss. apos.” (sic) [In a 127 page autobiography](#) posted online on May 16, 2012 titled “The Story of an American Jihaadi Part One,” he similarly noted that “The goal [of Al Shabaab training] was not to build our character...but to ‘break’ us.”



Al Shabaab did not publicly acknowledge the existence of a dispute. When a short video was posted to YouTube on March 16, 2012, in which Hammami says, “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,” Al Shabaab responded via its Twitter account expressing surprise at Hammami’s concerns and denying that he has anything to fear.

Some response, however, was posted by the [Muslim Youth Center](#), a Kenyan group affiliated with Al Shabaab. On March 29, 2013, it issued a statement claiming that, “It is now time that Abu Mansoor’s megalomania is dealt with swiftly and appropriately. His public display of petulance and obvious disregard for the global vision of Jihad must be addressed decisively.”

Despite the ongoing debate and apparent continued attempts at Hammami’s life documented on Hammami’s twitter account, Hammami maintained a commitment to violent Islamist ideology. In a September 3 interview with Voice of America, stated that he is “still a terrorist” despite no longer affiliating with [Al Shabaab or Al Qaeda](#). His tweets indicated the same, alternating between criticism of Al Shabaab and encouragement of jihadi ideology.

Hammami’s dispute with Al Shabaab continued on Twitter even after his death. Someone apparently in agreement with Hammami signed on to his Twitter account to confirm the death. That individual then used the Twitter account to blame Al Shabaab leader Ahmed Abdi Godane and to list reasons for Hammami’s murder, including, “because he opposed Godane’s killing of the innocent Somalis without any proper cause,” because “he challenged the unislamic heavy taxes imposed on the Muslims by Godane and his supporters,” and “because he requested Godane again and again to implement the Islamic Shariah.”

The September 21, 2013, Al Shabaab [attack on the Westgate mall](#), 9 days after Hammami’s death and following the earlier assassinations of some of his allies, is viewed by some as partially being an attempt to demonstrate the consolidation of Godane’s power and influence over Al Shabaab and its continued or increased strength following ideological critiques such as Hammami’s.



## Background

Omar Hammami was born in Alabama on May 6, 1984. His mother was Baptist and his father Muslim. He was raised Baptist and converted to Islam in high school following a family trip to Damascus, his father's hometown.

In the fall of 2001, Hammami began studying computer science at the University of South Alabama, where he was president of the Muslim Student Association. Hammami dropped out of school after three semesters and later moved with a friend to Toronto, where he married a Somali-Canadian woman introduced to him by a mutual friend.

Shortly thereafter, Hammami and his wife moved to Egypt with reported plans to study at Al Azhar University in Cairo. After his rejection from the university, Hammami settled in Alexandria but grew impatient with living in what he deemed a secular society, according to media reports.

In April 2006, Hammami reportedly joined an [online forum](#) moderated at the time by [Daniel Maldonado](#), an American convert to Islam who was also living in Egypt and has since been sentenced to 10 years in prison for training with an Al Qaeda-linked terrorist group in Somalia. Hammami apparently first came into contact with Maldonado through the [Islamic Network forum](#) and the two soon became friends.

According to a written statement later provided by Maldonado to federal authorities, Hammami and Maldonado planned to move their families to Somalia to live in an Islamic state. "Me and Omar talked about going and how it may be a security issue being that we are not Somali and we are bearded Muslims," Maldonado wrote, "We also talked about possibly joining the jihad if we went."

Months later, Hammami moved to Somalia and joined the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), a network of Islamic militant tribes that controlled southern and central Somalia. He soon became a central figure in Al Shabaab, the Somali-based extremist group originally formed as the militant wing of the ICU that has waged an insurgency against Somalia's transitional governments and its Ethiopian supporters since the ICU lost power in December 2006. Maldonado also joined the ICU in Somalia but was captured shortly thereafter by the Kenyan military while trying to flee Somalia.



Source: Al Shabaab video, released March 2009  
Omar Hammami (right)

Hammami remained active with Al Shabaab until late in 2011, when he began a dispute with the organization focused on a dispute over regional versus international focus, organizational policies vis a vis the local population and group leadership. Following several apparent attempts, he was killed on September 12, 2013, purportedly by Al Shabaab operatives.

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