

Al-Shabaab



OVERVIEW

AS OF APRIL 2026

Al-Shabaab is a Sunni Islamic terrorist group that publicly pledged loyalty to al-Qa'ida in 2012. The group seeks to overthrow the Somali Federal Government, expel foreign forces from Somalia, and establish a fundamentalist Islamic state. Since 2014 al-Shabaab has killed more US citizens than any other al-Qa'ida affiliate, and as of 2025, the group is al-Qa'ida's wealthiest component.

Al-Shabaab formed as the military wing of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), which briefly controlled central and southern Somalia in 2006. After the ICU was removed from power by UN-backed Ethiopian forces in December 2006 and disbanded, al-Shabaab remained active and used foreign intervention to gain support for its struggle against occupying forces. Al-Shabaab uses radio broadcasts, websites, and social media to disseminate its propaganda to local and global audiences.

Operating Area

Maintains stronghold in southern Somalia; mainly conducts operations in Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia

Members

Between 7,000 and 12,000

Tactics And Targets

Al-Shabaab targets US and other foreign military forces, including African Union Mission personnel, Somali Government and security forces, and civilian targets, such as hotels, shopping malls, universities, and busy intersections. The group has carried out mass-casualty attacks in Kenya, Somalia, and Uganda. Al-Shabaab's complex attacks generally consist of an IED or VBIED detonation, followed by small-arms fire. The group also conducts ambushes, military-style assaults, kidnappings, mortar attacks, and assassinations in Mogadishu, such as an attempted assassination in March 2025 of Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud.

Terrorist Group Designation

The US State Department designated al-Shabaab as a foreign terrorist organization in March 2008. Many of the group's senior leaders and officials—including explosives experts, operations plotters, and Kenya-based cell leaders—are Specially Designated Global Terrorists.



Al-Shabaab *(continued)*

KEY LEADERS

**Ahmed Diriye***a.k.a. Abu Ubaidah*

Amir; group leader since 2014

**Abukar Ali Adan**

Deputy amir; former al-Shabaab military chief

**Mahad Karate***a.k.a. Abdirahman Mohammed Warsame*

Finance chief and commander of al-Shabaab's amniyat (intelligence and security wing); former deputy amir

NOTABLE ATTACKS

2 August 2024**Lido Beach, Mogadishu, Somalia**

Al-Shabaab conducts a suicide and small-arms attack at Lido Beach, a popular meeting spot, killing 37 people and injuring over 210 others.

5 January 2020**Camp Simba, Manda Bay, Kenya**

Al-Shabaab conducts an indirect-fire and small-arms attack on the joint US-Kenyan military facility at Manda Bay, killing one US soldier and two US contractors.

15 January 2019**Dusit D2 Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya**

Al-Shabaab attacks the Dusit D2 Hotel complex in Nairobi using an IED and small-arms fire, killing 21 people, including one US citizen.

14 October 2017**Mogadishu, Somalia**

Al-Shabaab detonates an explosives-laden truck in downtown Mogadishu, killing more than 500 people—including three US citizens—and injuring almost 300 others in the group's deadliest attack in Somalia.



Al-Shabaab *(continued)*

NOTABLE ATTACKS *(continued)*

2 April 2015

Garissa University, Garissa, Kenya

Four al-Shabaab gunmen attack Garissa University, killing 148 people and injuring 100 others in the group's deadliest attack in Kenya.

21 September 2013

Westgate Mall, Nairobi, Kenya

Four al-Shabaab gunmen conduct a four-day siege at Westgate Mall, killing 67 people and injuring around 200 others in an attack the group claims was in retaliation for Kenya's military intervention in Somalia.

