



Somalia: Line in the Sand

Identification of MYM
Vulnerabilities

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14. ABSTRACT Since 1991, the Somali people have existed without a functioning government. Poverty, clan clashes, and western influences have left Somalia lifeless and without direction. In 2006, prominent Somali Muslim men sought to bring order and peace to their people. Their wartime experience in Afghanistan and adoption of a Taliban-style Islam gave them a foundation for bringing order to their fellow Somalis. These men would emerge from the ashes of an Ethiopia encroachment into Somalia, one that would last until December 2008, and form a group calling itself Al-Shabaab or the Mujahidin Youth Movement (MYM). Al-Shabaab's military objectives, organization, spheres of influence, and strategic direction would be influenced by Al-Quida (AQ). This paper which is based on open source information from reporting out of Somalia attempts to identify the vulnerabilities of the MYM and apply the Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic (DIME) methodology in providing a means to counter the advances of the MYM and limit it's advances throughout the region.						
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The people of Somalia live in a state of decay, living day-to-day, not knowing if their lives will end. Children are being forced to serve as child-soldiers, either because they see no other alternative or their lives and that of their families are being threatened – serve or die! For the last two years, the people of Somalia have been witness to a conflict, not one based on ideology, control of resources, or leadership of the country, but one fought over religious reasons. The aggressive nature of this conflict has resulted in thousands of deaths, destruction of sacred monuments, and brother on brother, family on family, and clan on clan battles. The battle lines have been drawn in the sand, and on one side is the Somali Transitional Government (TFG) and their African Union supporters, while on the other side is the Al-Shabaab Foreign Terrorist Organization, also known as the Mujahedeen Youth Movement (MYM).¹

The battle between these two groups has been waged on the streets of Mogadishu, the desolate towns and villages of central and southern Somalia, and on the media front.² Al-Shabaab's tactical victories and exceptional executed information operations war has swelled recruitment, increased funding from Somali diaspora living abroad, and caught the attention and support of senior Al-Quida leadership³, not to mention, terrorism analysts of western intelligence agencies. However, careful analysis of their strategy reveals vulnerabilities that western analysts should be able to identify, and together with operational planners develop defeat mechanisms to orchestrate a plan or strategic campaign for defeating this growing threat. A synchronized effort by US, AU, and TFG agencies may result in limiting the success that MYM has enjoyed over the last couple of years. In this paper, I provide my assessment of these vulnerabilities that, if applied and executed aggressively, with a defeat mechanism or counteraction could result in the



reduction of the manipulation of the MYM. This paper will not address what specific actions or defeat mechanisms should be applied at this point in the course.

Organization of Methodology Framework

The framework which I used to organize these vulnerabilities was using the four sources national power – Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic.⁴ Second, the next consideration was whether the vulnerability was at the strategic, operational, or tactical level of war. Using this simple design makes it user-friendly so analysts or planners can understand the methodology for application in the future. Too many mythologies for organizing information are either too analytical or technical forcing intelligence or operational planners to disregard them as analytical or planning tools.

MYM VULNERABILITIES

The MYM current organization and structure is difficult to know with any certainty. Estimates on their composition and strength, along with their disposition vary across the community, with estimates ranging from hundreds to thousands. MYM leadership changes and challenges in the use of pseudo-names and aliases makes detailed analysis difficult. Regardless, figure 1 is a composite of all the vulnerabilities identified in my analysis of the MYM. The remainder of this paper will provide

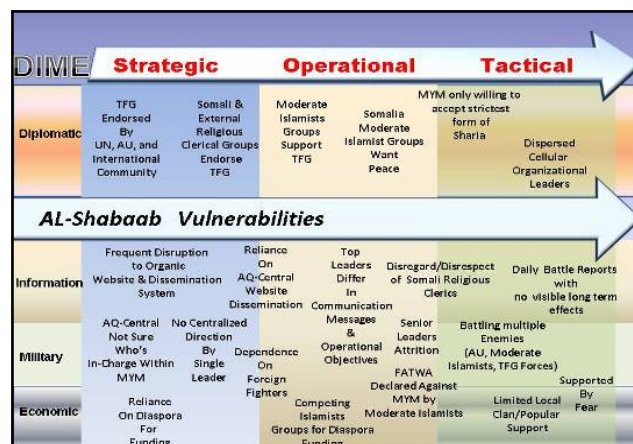


Figure 1: MYM Vulnerabilities

a description of the vulnerabilities listed in figure 1.

Diplomatic-Strategic Vulnerabilities

MYM and the government of President Sharif have both sought the support of the Somali people and neighboring countries.⁵ In their struggle to influence the public, the TFG has been endorsed and, subsequently, supported by the United Nations, African Union, and the International Community. This legitimacy will limit the MYM's ability to surface beyond a Somali terrorist organization, and unless the TFG does something viewed as unethical or irresponsibility, they will continue to be supported by international and AU governments, making MYM's attainment of their strategic goals difficult.

In addition, Somali and external religious clerical groups have endorsed the TFG. MYM has not been endorsed by recognized Somali Islamic leaders because they have assassinated leading clerics who disagree within them. The TFG and international community must continue to seek clerical support and endorsement to have a favorable public opinion.⁶ It is difficult to determine for how long the TFG will continue to receive aid and public support, especially, if the TFG shows limited results in their ability to provide basic services and protection to the public.

Diplomatic – Operational Vulnerabilities

The MYM's alliance with the Hisbul Islami (The Islamic Party) has not resulted in any endorsements by moderate Islamic organizations. Somali moderate Islamic organizations and civic groups, such as, the Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama, the Organization of Somali Religious Scholars, the Hawiye Cultural and Unity Council, the National Reconciliation Committee, and several civic/professional organization, have endorsed the TFG and expressed their desired for peace.⁷

MYM has in fact alienated these organizations and their members because of their commitment to violence and unwillingness to negotiate. Moreover, these and several other organizations have influenced their members and international supporters to align themselves with the TFG; hoping, that international pressure will force MYM to the negotiating table with the TFG.

These same moderate organizations have criticized the MYM for their aversion to compromise with the TFG, and the MYM's determination to seek the Taliban-form of Sharia (Islamic law).



These moderate organizations seek peace; which, is in direct contrast to the violent path the MYM has adopted in realization of their goals. As long, the MYM rejects peace and continues to attack AU and TFG forces, these

moderate groups will continue to reject MYM claims for leadership of the country.⁸

Diplomatic-Tactical Vulnerabilities

MYM's unwillingness to accept any form of Sharia other than the Taliban type has resulted in loss of public support from Somali and international groups and leaders. This determination has been recognized and supported by AQ-Central leadership and their affiliates; however, it has also resulted in the TFG and neighboring countries using this in the ongoing public information war.⁹

In addition, the MYM's organization and dispersed cellular structure has not resulted in a synchronized campaign. Analysis of their attacks on TFG and AU forces has shown that attacks seem to be uncoordinated between MYM units in central and southern Somalia. In addition, MYM's military attacks look to be local, with no, centralized command and control organization,

nor, a continued reinforcement of forces after capture of key cities or resources. In fact, holding of key terrain or parts of the country seems to be temporary, with no long term strategy.

Information-Strategic Vulnerabilities

Despite the diplomatic shortcomings, MYM has enjoyed the support of AQ-Central hosted information dissemination websites, which, makes TFG look amateurish.¹⁰ However, over the last few months, MYM-hosted websites have been taken down or disrupted by allies of the TFG. When this occurs, MYM has had to depend on these AQ-Central websites for dissemination of their tactical victories, magazines, videos, and forum bulletin board announcements. Dependency on someone else's website leaves them vulnerable, and the fact that their last three websites has been disrupted points to their lack of skills in the cyber-warfare arena.¹¹

Information-Operational Vulnerabilities

In addition to being dependent on AQ-Central websites for dissemination of MYM information, the top leadership of the MYM seems to have different strategic communication messages. For example, long time spokesman, Sheik Mukhtar Robow spoke frequently about the MYM's independence from AQ and the need to consider national objectives first, before expanded beyond Somalia's border, while his counterparts spoke about a worldwide jihad and the need to send jihadist to neighboring countries. Robow's messages may have led to his removal in May 2009; however, there have been other instances where MYM's top leaders have expressed differing military and political objectives.¹²



Figure 2: Sheik Robow

Information-Tactical Vulnerabilities

In the information operations war being waged on the internet, the MYM has published daily accounts of their tactical victories over the TFG and AU. Despite claiming victories and destruction of TFG and AU resources, there does not seem to be a long-term sustainment or capitulation of these areas. The MYM daily accounts may have a negative impact since they are inferring that MYM would rather be violent than go to the peace table, so an unintended effect may be MYM being labeled as “uncooperative” and always seeking military conflict. In addition, moderate and even hard-line Islamists may tire of this publicity with no tangible results or strategic outcomes.¹³

Military-Strategic Vulnerabilities

MYM has showcased a number of leaders, each giving interviews, directing forces in the field, and developing their own followers. Yet, AQ-Central and open source reporting suggests that these independent leaders may have their own agenda. The fact that AQ-Central leadership has not formerly acknowledged anyone within MYM as the military leader indicates that there is no one single individual leading MYM. This, in turn, points to a lack of a grand strategy and operational concept.¹⁴ While Sheik Mukhtar Abu Zebeyr is allegedly the emir of the MYM, there has been no public or published announcements indicated he controls the organization.

Military-Operational Vulnerabilities

The MYM dependency on foreign fighters may delegitimize their argument that Somalis support their struggle against the TFG. Reporting suggests that within the MYM military structure, both leaders and foot-soldiers originate from Middle Eastern – Arabic speaking

countries, as well as, from English-speaking nations. Recently, in a recruitment video, an American named, Al-Amerika, was featured leading a MYM unit. In addition, anti-terrorist law



Figure 3: Abu Yahya Al-Libi

enforcement officials have apprehended Somali diaspora attempting to migrant to Somalia. When asked, they claimed, that they were answering a call to join the jihad in Somalia. Finally, AQ-Central leadership, including senior military leader, Abu Yahya Al-Libi, has

called on Muslims worldwide to join the MYM in their struggle. This dependency on foreign fighters indicates local Somali youth are either rejecting or refusing to join MYM's fight against the TFG.¹⁵

The continuing struggle between the MYM and the TFG has resulted in the deaths or defection of MYM senior leaders. Dependency on a core of leaders has left MYM vulnerable to losing momentum, and without an effective replacement system, makes them vulnerable to losing military engagements, as well as, the information war with the TFG. Over the last two years, MYM has lost leadership at the region and operational level, and since the MYM does not have a formal military advancement system, in-fighting between field commanders may occur, as key leaders are killed.

Military–Tactical Vulnerabilities

The MYM continues to fight a multi-front, multi-enemy, and multi-level war, and sustaining it may be difficult, especially if the TFG receives additional resources from the United States, the United Nations, and the African Union. The MYM has a host of enemies, including the TFG, the AU, moderate Islamic organizations, and neighboring countries whose forces are growing rapidly. In addition, AU and UN policymakers will be providing TFG with an information

operations capability, in addition, to advisors on nation building. With the increase in external resources and a committing TFG leadership, MYM's ability to recruit and resource their struggle will be limited. In the last couple of months, US administration and AU leadership have committed themselves to helping the TFG defeat the MYM. MYM's continued rejection of peace, couple with an impatience, by Somalia moderate and civic organizations, will undoubtedly result in MYM's loss of influence to an ever-growing TFG and their allies.¹⁶

Economic-Strategic Vulnerabilities

MYM's dependency on overseas Somali Diaspora makes them vulnerable to shortfalls in funding if this support were cut off at the source. Somali diaspora living in western countries have provided funding to MYM, which, in turn has been used to pay for weapons, salaries, and other resources. Western intelligence agencies and anti-terrorist organizations identification and neutralization of this support system could result in MYM shifting dependency to the Somali population and political supporters – such as Eritrea and other AQ affiliates. As noted earlier, the Somali population's inclination for peace has alienated MYM from this source, unless done at the point of a weapon.

Economic-Operational Vulnerabilities

One of the biggest vulnerabilities the MYM contends with is competing for resources with the other Islamic organizations. The creation of Hizbul Islami (The Islamic Party) in January 2009 has been both a positive and negative effect for MYM. While HI can be counted on to provide manpower or reinforcements on a tactical level, the HI also



Figure 4: Flag of Hizbul Islami

competes with MYM on a funding issue. HI and MYM financial leaders are appealing to the local Somali public, but also to the Somali diaspora in western countries. More difficult for the MYM, is the fact that HI is composed of four organizations merged into one. Combined together, resources are likely to be sent to a larger organization with a proven and established leadership. Finally, HI and MYM leaders support the other, as long as, it serves the interest of their organizations. In a land, where brothers fight each other, alliances are temporary and turning to the other side is not uncommon. Both TFG incentives and offers for influential positions may tempt HI leadership to side with President Sharif and his government.¹⁷

Economic-Tactical Vulnerabilities

The MYM's base of support permeates from clans that provide both leaders and foot-soldiers. Clans in Somali have for the most part attempted to remain neutral in the struggle for Somalia, switching sides, as either the MYM or TFG/AU/ASWJ captures or recapture villages and towns. Clan elders and civic organizations continue to be interested in which group will bring basic services and peace to their people, not one, which will enforce a particular form of Sharia.¹⁸ MYM's continued violent attacks and persistence on the Taliban-style of Sharia has alienated clans, forcing others to join the TFG or ASWJ.¹⁹ In the long run, MYM rule by fear has clan leaders willing to comprise and accept MYM regional civil administrations; however, acceptance of the MYM is balanced between surviving today and enduring for tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

The existence of the Mujahedeen Youth Movement depends on many factors, including their ability to recruit soldiers, provide weapons of war to these soldiers, attain support either abroad or at home, and continue to appeal to the Somali population. Their battles have been brilliantly executed, with hundreds of African Union and TFG forces losing their lives or withdrawing from Somali. That being said, the MYM does have its vulnerabilities, and this paper provided an explanation of the Strategic, Operational, and Tactical (SOT) vulnerabilities, organized along the DIME model. A coalition of UN, AU, TFG, and US operational planners can provide resources to these vulnerabilities, which may result in the limitation of MYM influence in Somalia and abroad. This paper was intended to indentify only the vulnerabilities but careful consideration of national and international operational capabilities can lead to the diminishment of the MYM.

¹ “Somalia: No Peace without Islam video,” MYM Media Section, translation in OSC AFP2008123041008, December 28, 2008; Institute for Security Studies, “Situation Report: Somalia: Understanding Al-Shabaab,” dated 3 June 2009; the US Government included the MYM in their list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations in 2008.

² “OSC Media Aid: Main Insurgent Groups Adeptly Use Media,” OSC Media Aid in English, AFF20090818049001, August 18, 2009; “Islamists pledge to continue fighting foreign troops in Somalia” translation in OSC AFP20090409950055, April 8, 2009; “Al-Shabab calls for renewed fighting against Somali government, AU troops,” translation in OSC AFP20090412950031 *Universal TV* in Somali 1900 GMT, April 11, 2009.

³ Usama Bin Ladin, “Fight On, Champions of Somalia,” March 19, 2009, translation in OSC FEA20090319833838, March 19, 2009; “Al-Sahab Releases new Al-Zawahir Video on Somalia, Yemen, Gaza, Afghanistan,” Jihadist Websites, OSC Summary in FMP 200902234416014, February 22, 2009; Abu Yahya al-Libi, “Somalia... Victory Comes with Patience,” Al-Sahab Media Production Organization, February 13, 2009.

⁴ See Joint Publication 5-0 and JP 2-0 for further explanation of the DIME concept.

⁵ “Somalia: Islamist says they will support government if shari’ah is implemented,” April 3, 2009, translation in OSC AFP20090404950006 *Universal TV* in Somali 1900 GMT 03 Apr 09; “UN Security Council’s Monthly Report on Somalia Apr 09,” AFP20090403577004 New York *UN Security Council Report* in English 03 Apr 09; “New Somali Leader Takes Oath, Vows To Form Broad-Based Government,” translation in OSC AFP20090131507001 Doha *Al Jazeera Net WWW-Text* in English 31 Jan 09; “Al-Qaradawi Congratulates HAMAS on Gaza ‘Victory,’ Sharif on Somali Presidency,” in translation OSC GMP20090201666005 Doha *Al-Jazirah Satellite Channel Television* in Arabic 1905 GMT 01 Feb 09.

⁶ “Somalia: Moderate Islamic Group Welcomes Election of New President,” translation in AFP20090131301001 Angered *Somaliweyn WWW-Text* in Somali 31 Jan 09; “Somalia: Islamic group urges rival sects to stop fighting,” in translation OSC AFP20090122950097 Mogadishu *OSC Translation on Sub-Saharan Africa* in Somali 22 Jan 09; “Somalia clan elders urge fighting groups to heed religious leaders’ calls,” in translation OSC AFP20090226950028 Mogadishu *Shabeelle Media Network (Internet Version-WWW)* in Somali 26 Feb 09.

⁷ “Clan elders in Somali capital denounce attacks on African Union mission,” in translation OSC EUP20090122950002 Toronto *Waagacusub.com* in Somali 21 Jan 09; “Somali opposition official calls for cessation of violence,” in translation OSC AFP20090104950051 Mogadishu *Shabeelle Media Network (Internet Version-WWW)* in Somali 04 Jan 09; “Ethiopia: Communication minister pledges to support Somalia,” in translation OSC AFP20090131950052 Addis Ababa *Walta Information Centre (Internet Version-WWW)* in English 31 Jan 09; “Somali minister says those behind Mogadishu fighting to be held responsible,” in translation OSC AFP20090226950046 Gaalkacyo *Radio Gaalkacyo* in Somali 1015 GMT 26 Feb 09.

⁸ “Al-Shabab calls for renewed fighting against Somali government, AU troops,” in translation OSC AFP20090412950031 *Universal TV* in Somali 1900 GMT 11 Apr 09; “Somali Clerics Council Chairman Denounces Attacks on Government, AMISOM,” in translation AFP20090410327001 *Somalimirror* in Somali 10 Apr 09; “Forum Member Accuses Somali President of Combating Islam, Deceiving Muslims,” in translation OSC GMP20090407241001 *Jihadist Websites -- OSC Summary* in Arabic 03 Apr 09.

⁹ “Analysis: Terrorism -- Al-Qa’ida’s Online Supporters Regularly Use YouTube,” in translation OSC FEA20090406842722 - OSC Feature - *International* -- OSC Analysis 06 Apr 09.

¹⁰ Ibid, OSC Media Aid in English, AFF20090818049001, August 18, 2009; “Somalia: Website Posts ‘Public Alert Notice’ Warning Against Fake Jihadist Sites,” in translation OSC AFP20090410302002 *Jihadist Websites* -- OSC Summary in Somali 09 Apr 09.

¹¹ “Somalia: New Jihadist Website for Mujahidin Youth Movement Announced,” in translation OSC AFP20090408327001 *Jihadist Websites* -- OSC Summary in Somali 07 Apr 09.

¹² “Somali Mujahidin Youth Movement Spokesman on Government, AU Forces, Other Issues,” in translation OSC GMP20090224643001 Doha *Al-Jazirah Satellite Channel Television* in Arabic 1430 GMT 24 Feb 09; “Somalia: Hardline Islamist group official accused of being clan oriented,” in translation OSC EUP20090408950001 Toronto *Waagacusub.com* in Somali 07 Apr 09; “Somalia: Dissenting Islamist Pledges To Defend Government if Shari’ah Applied,” in translation OSC AFP20090406410002 *Somalia Today* in Arabic 05 Apr 09; “‘Bitter rift’ emerges within hardline Somali Islamist group Al-Shabaab,” in translation AFP20090129950046 Internet *Midnimo (Internet Version-WWW)* in Somali 29 Jan 09.

¹³ “Somalia: Islamist Groups Hold Anti-Government Sermons in Mogadishu,” in translation AFP20090403301002 *Markacadey.net* in Somali 03 Apr 09; Ibid, See UN Security Council’s Monthly Report on Somalia Apr 09 OSC AFP20090403577004.

¹⁴ This is based on analysis on Open Source Center products, FEA20090319833838, FMP 200902234416014, and GMP20090224643001 In addition, senior MYM leaders have indicated that MYM is not subordinate to AQ, but rather is in agreement with their jihad.

¹⁵ Ibid, OSC FEA20090319833838, FMP 200902234416014, and GMP20090224643001; Elliott, Andrea,” A Call to Jihad, Answered in America,” New York Times, Sunday, July 12, 2009, National section, pages 1, 14-15.

¹⁶ “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia,” United States Security Council, July 20, 2009; Janine Zacharia, “Clinton Urges Eritrea to Stop Backing Somali Militia,” Bloomberg.com, access on <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=2067001>, August 6, 2009.

¹⁷ “Somalia: Mujahidin Factions Issue Joint Statement,” in translation OSC AFP20090105327001 *Somalimirror.com* in Somali 03 Jan 09; “Insurgent group vows to continue fighting new Somali government,” in translation OSC AFP20090207950062 Mogadishu *Shabeelle Media Network (Internet Version-WWW)* in Somali 07 Feb 09; “Somalia: Newly Formed Islamic Party Vows To Fight on Until Sharia Rules,” in translation OSC AFP20090207301001 *Kaambooni* in Somali 07 Feb 09; “Somalia: President Shaykh Sharif Reportedly Meets With Militant Islamist Leaders,” in translation OSC AFP20090209301003 Angered *Somaliweyn WWW-Text* in Somali 09 Feb 09.

¹⁸ “Religious leaders reiterate call for support of new Somali leader,” in translation OSC AFP20090209950044 Mogadishu *Shabeelle Media Network (Internet Version-WWW)* in Somali 09 Feb 09; “Elders to mediate between Islamist, government forces in southwestern Somalia,” in translation OSC AFP20090212950091 Mogadishu *Shabeelle Media Network (Internet Version-WWW)* in Somali 12 Feb 09; “Somalia: Islamist says they will support government if shari’ah is implemented,” in translation AFP20090404950006 *Universal TV* in Somali 1900 GMT 03 Apr 09.

¹⁹ “Somalia: Clan Chiefs Seek To Mediate Between Al-Shabaab, Moderate Islamic Group,” in translation OSC AFP20090402301001 *Falaar.com* in Somali 01 Apr 09; “Somalia: Secret talks between government, opposition groups,” in translation AFP20090409950079 *Garoweonline (WWW.Text)* in English 08 Apr 09.