

AL SHABAAB'S ARSENAL

FROM TAXES TO TERROR

FEBRUARY 2022



Hiraal
Institute

GIST

AL SHABAAB'S ARSENAL: FROM TAXES TO TERROR

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Summary

BACKGROUND

The situation in Somalia is increasingly one of stalemate, with little prospect of either the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) with AMISOM and international support, or al Shabaab (AS) delivering a decisive military victory. However, AS remains adaptive and in control of large parts of Somalia, in particular in the south, with partial control over other areas. It is clear that AS has access to several sources to acquire weapons. The acquisition of weapons, ammunition, explosives, and other lethal capacity remains a priority for AS but is poorly understood as a system essential to the effectiveness of the insurgency. In October 2021, the Hiraal Institute undertook a four-month project to research the scope, scale, system, and use of AS resources to obtain lethal materiel, both in Somalia and from outside.

FINDINGS

Decision making

Overall decision-making for AS sits with a compact group at the top of the organisation. This encompasses the elite leadership including the Emir and the Deputy Emir. Beneath them sits the Shura, a semi-permanent consultative body, and a number of committees. The main structural pillars of the movement are the ministries (Maktab, pl. Makatib), the heads of which make up another consultative body, the Executive (Tanfid) or AS 'Cabinet'. Makatib with a connection to the weapons acquisition system include Finance, the Military (Jaish), the Police (Hisba), Paramilitary Police (Fursan Hisba), the Explosives Maktab and the secretive Intelligence and Security wing (Amniyat).

Modes of arms procurement

There are different methods for arms procurement: one that can be viewed as 'regular' and that operates largely within the defence Maktab and the Amniyat; one that can be viewed as 'extraordinary', in which there is senior leadership involvement; and a third method, which is 'in-house' manufacturing, mainly related to explosives. Regular procurement happens on a monthly basis, with the AS Defence

Maktab having a monthly budget line for regular arms procurement. Decisions on procurement and resupply activities are passed to the procurement teams within the Defence Maktab or Amniyat. Most regular procurement is believed to take place locally or regionally.

Extraordinary procurement is overseen at a senior level through the Security Committee, which draws its principal members from the AS military command and executive leadership. The committee appears to have a procurement role, reportedly related to high-value purchases, the acquisition of specialist equipment, or substantial increases in procurement prior to a major increase in the tempo of operations or commencement of an offensive.

Expenditure

The overall system is highly reliant on the Finance Maktab, whose collection of illicit taxation and administration of AS's finances underpins the feasibility of a process whereby the extensive revenues extorted from the Somali populace are repurposed into a means of intimidating, killing and maiming them.

Out of an annually planned expenditure of approximately USD 100 million,

the AS annual planned expenditure on arms procurement is assessed to be USD 24 million, budgeted monthly at USD 2 million, with a further USD 1.8 million on 'in-house' explosives and other weapons manufacturing, budgeted monthly at USD 150,000. Extra arms-related expenditure from within the AS financial surplus is likely. Funds are mainly moved through a mixture of cash, hawala, and bank accounts, with the potential for mobile money transfers to be used for smaller value purchases. The Finance Maktab has a major role in conducting financial oversight and monitoring.

Capability and storage

The wide variety of small arms and light weapons used by AS are easily available, as are some heavier systems. Some specialist capabilities such as sniper rifles are also available and there are indications that AS may have begun to make use of unmanned aerial vehicles, while there are further indications that the group is expanding its use of HME. Weapons and explosives are distributed across AS territory, with supplies held with military units as well as in reserve locations.

Procurement methods and networks

The group uses a variety of procurement methods including: direct procurement, where the group purchases weapons itself; through arms traders and dealers, who are contracted to buy and delivery weapons, including from abroad, mainly Yemen; through black markets that operate in Somalia; and through commercial sources, principally for precursors for explosives. The group also acquires weapons through states sources, mainly corrupted officials or via battlefield seizures, or, historically, from former regime stores. The main method of moving arms into Somalia makes use of maritime smugglers who move arms from (mainly) Yemen, using dhows across the Gulf of Aden to pre-arranged docking or landing sites. The methods that AS uses to move arms match those that are used by the wider smuggling networks that operate in and around Somalia and the wider Horn of Africa: there does not appear to be any particular 'AS smuggling methodology.'

1. Introduction

Violent conflict in Somalia has become a chronic feature of the country since the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991. Arms are prevalent in the country, and weapons have become part of Somali culture, heavily associated with clan power dynamics and the need for self-protection in the absence of effective state law enforcement structures.

The conflict has many facets, but the contest between the armed Islamist group Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen (AS) and the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) is the most significant. Since its emergence in the early 2000s, AS has grown in strength and status. It controls large portions of the country and maintains a degree of influence on the populace through a balanced mix of persuasion, administration, and coercion, even in areas that are formally controlled by the Government. It collects substantial revenues and continues mounting attacks on the Government and its partners, seemingly at will.

It is clear that AS has access to several sources to acquire weapons, including diversion of official consignments to Somalia's security forces, domestic procurement through well-established local dealers, and international procurement.

Illicit cross-border weapons flows continue to flourish, particularly from Yemen and transiting through Puntland, though the importance of networks based out of Djibouti is also regularly mentioned. Information acquired on the periphery of recent research suggests that AS has potentially transferred responsibility for arms movements to criminal gangs. Other open source reporting has identified organised criminal networks and businesses who facilitate arms smuggling for AS, as well as some of the key ports of interest in Yemen and in Somalia¹.

Mapping AS's arms acquisition systems and processes, and identifying critical vulnerabilities and opportunities, is key to helping degrade their lethality and, as a result, their coercive capacity, influence on the populace, and ability to prevail in the fight. This paper is designed to fulfil this requirement.

1.A. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In October 2021, the Hiraal Institute began a four-month project to undertake research into the scope, scale, system, and use of AS resources to obtain lethal materiel, both in Somalia and from outside

of the country, highlighting the individuals, units, structures, and processes involved. The project objectives were to:

1. Develop an overview of the organisational and financial system underpinning and supporting the procurement, importation, production, storage and distribution of weapons, ammunition, and explosives:
 - a. Leadership control structure over the acquisition, storage, and distribution process, including roles of key decision makers and how top-down control enhances unity and discipline.
 - b. The financial system underpinning and supporting these activities.
2. Map out the networks, methods, and routes that enable and support these activities, including:
 - a. The main sources of domestic procurement, including deliberate leakage and sale of state weapons, battlefield seizures, and intra-state black-market trading;
 - b. The importation, including arms transfers sponsored by foreign entities and black-market cross-border transactions – particularly with a focus on Yemen;
 - c. Indigenous production, focusing on the manufacturing of explosives and verifying current munitions manufacturing capabilities;
 - d. Storage and distribution, including main entry ports and storage facilities.

1.B. LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Evidently, the subject of the research is highly sensitive. The methodology was designed to overcome this, by leveraging existing relationships and developing new ones progressively. However, significant limitations and areas of uncertainty remain, which we have flagged and caveated in this report where relevant. Names and a level of detail has been redacted to protect our sources.

¹ Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. Civil Society Observatory of Illicit Economies in Eastern and Southern Africa. Issue 11. August-September 2020; Matthias Schwarz, Peace Research Institute Frankfurt. 'Arms Transfers in the Gulf of Aden. Shining the Spotlight on Regional Dynamics'. PRIF Spotlight. No.6. 2021.

2. Al Shabaab Structures

To contextualise the lethal weapons acquisitions activities of AS, it is useful to first understand the overall structure of the organisation and specifically those elements that benefit most from the materiel obtained.

2.A. NATIONAL STRUCTURES, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

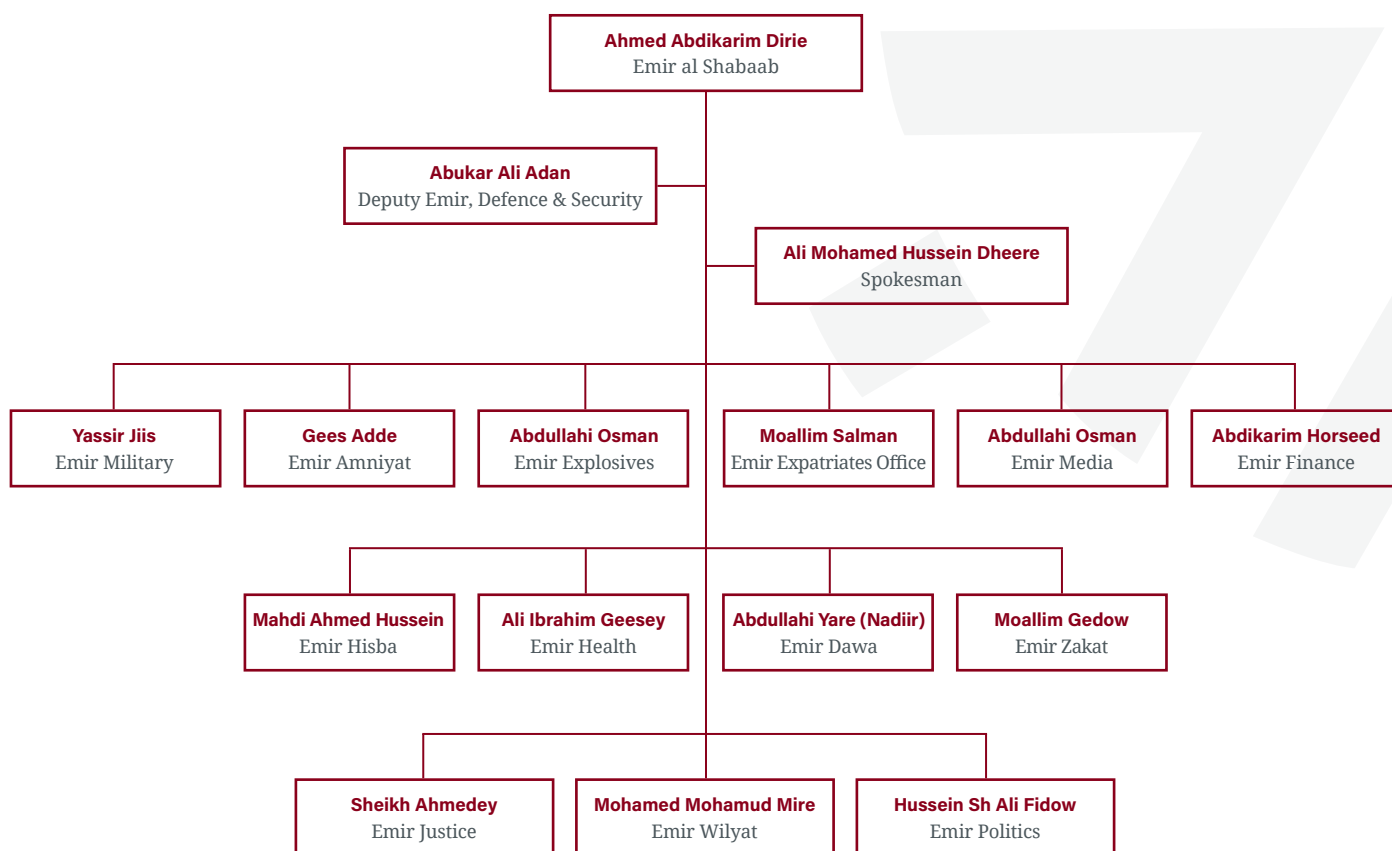
Overall decision-making for the organisation sits with a compact group at the top of the organisation, including the Emir and the Deputy Emir, supported by the Shura, a semi-permanent consultative body, and a number of committees, supporting the various AS 'ministries'.

These ministries (Maktab, pl. Makatib) are the main structural pillars of the movement, the heads of

which make up another consultative body, the Executive (Tanfid) or AS 'Cabinet'. The Maktab structure, organised and hierarchical, is responsible for delivering strategy and policy through the organisation, and ensuring that decisions from the top are effectively and efficiently transmitted down the chain to the regions.

With regard to the specific individuals and the structure that comprises the senior leadership, information can sometimes be contradictory, as can reporting or indications of changes and movement between positions. Despite this caveat, our understanding of the individuals and positions within the senior leadership structure of the organisation is in the figure below, albeit we note that there has been recent unconfirmed reporting of certain changes:

Figure 1. AS Organisational Structure¹



¹ Sources differ significantly on the structure of the organisation. Even the number of ministries fluctuates wildly. The 12 depicted above are those upon which a significant majority of sources agree.

2.B. REGIONAL STRUCTURES

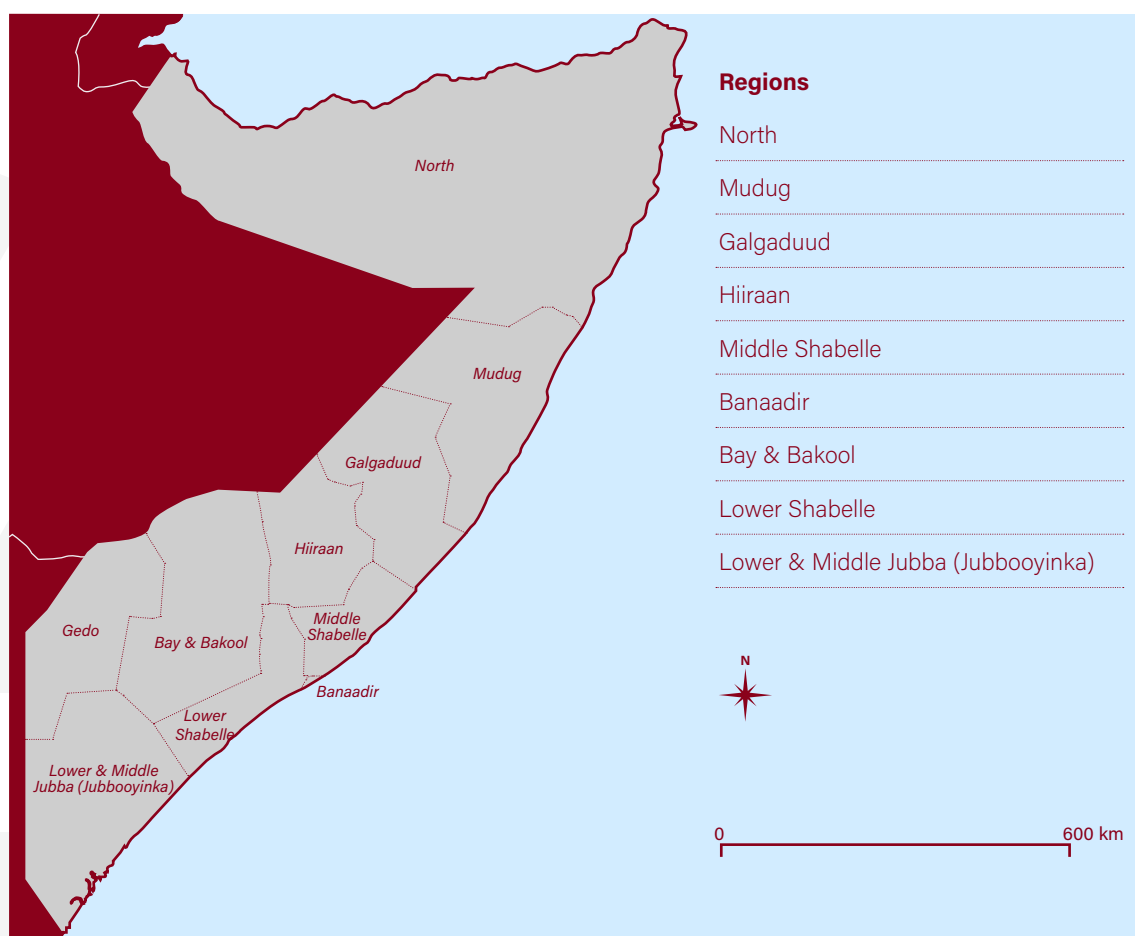


Figure 2. AS regional divisions

AS divides the geography of Somalia into ten administrative regions.

Each of the above regions has dedicated organizational assets assigned through the overarching national leadership and infrastructure. Each Maktab is led by an Emir with support staff who are officially based in the AS capital of Jilib.

Makatib with a connection to the weapons acquisition system include Finance, the Defence Maktab, the Military (Jaish), the Police (Hisba), Paramilitary Police (Fursan Hisba), the Explosives Maktab and the secretive Intelligence and Security wing (Amniyat). Together, these organisational entities form the backbone of the movement's security capabilities, and they are prioritised accordingly, with three quarters of expenditure spent on these ministries. The Military and the Amniyat are particularly well

supported and constitute the main mechanisms by which force is projected against enemies of the movement.

The overall system is highly reliant on the Finance Maktab, whose collection of illicit taxation and administration of AS's finances underpins the feasibility of a process whereby the extensive revenues extorted from the Somali populace are repurposed into a means of intimidating, killing and maiming them.

2.C. ARMS PROCUREMENT STRUCTURES

There are several different methods for arms procurement: one that can be viewed as 'regular' and that operates largely within the defence Maktab and the Amniyat; one that can be viewed as 'extraordinary', in which there is senior leadership involvement; and a third method, which is 'in-house' manufacturing, mainly related to explosives¹.

¹ AS official, Jilib, October 2021; former AS official, Mogadishu, November 2021; AS official, Jubba region, January 2022; former AS official, Lower Shabelle, January 2022; former AS official, Mogadishu, January 2022

2.C.I. Regular procurement

Regular procurement happens monthly, with the AS Defence Maktab having a monthly budget line for regular arms procurement, delivered through the Logistics Department. Given ongoing fighting and military operations, having to go through a high-levels approvals process outside of the Maktab would significantly slow down essential resupply and restocking. AS' leadership therefore pre-approves regular materiel purchase, with external consultations with the senior leadership taking place on an ad hoc basis, should supplies run low or specialist items become needed or available.

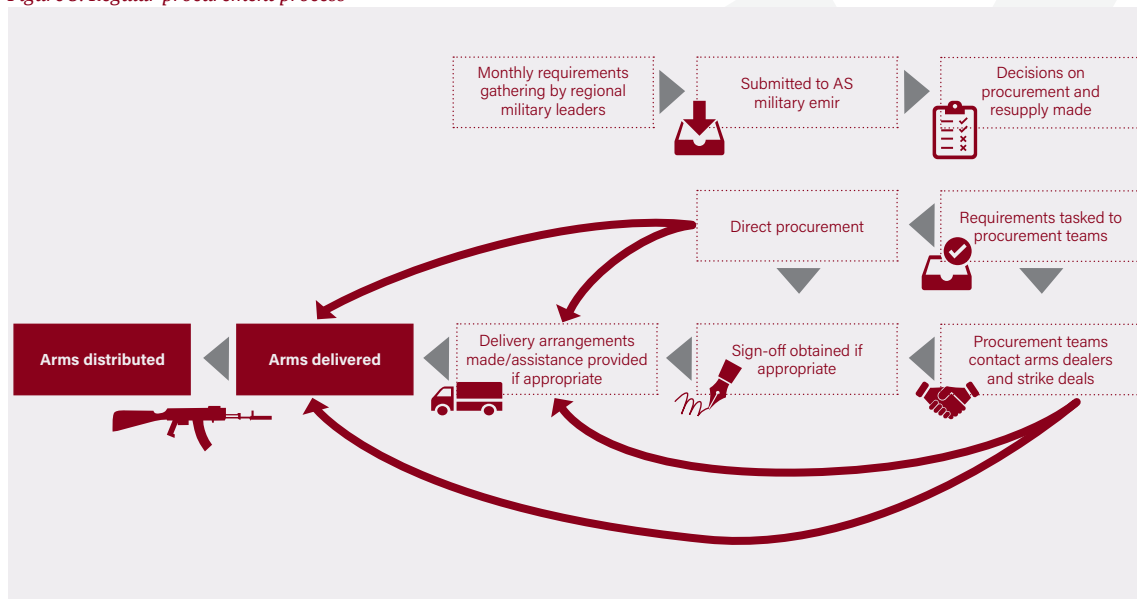
Within the AS Defence Maktab and military, the military leadership in each region reports regularly concerning its arms requirements and the need for stores to the AS military Emir, Yassir "Jiis"; Jiis then consults as required to decide on appropriate procurement activities – the level of arms to be obtained, supplied from storage, the appropriate restocking and resupply actions and so on. Decisions on purchasing and resupply activities are then passed to the procurement teams within the Defence Maktab. There are Logistics and Defence Procurement teams within both the Defence Maktab and the Amniyat who are responsible for engaging potential arms dealers for AS arms procurement. Other individuals are responsible for overseeing or facilitating elements of the smuggling or logistics activities related to arms procurement. These regional teams then, in effect, act as the local or regional unit for arms procurement with their main requirements determined by the local and regional military units. For an overview of this process, see Figure 3 below.

Decisions made about regular procurement are reportedly conveyed upwards to a Security Committee headed by the AS deputy emir (see below), but these are 'for awareness only' rather than requiring sign off or authorisation for the procurement undertaken.

This structure and methodology for regular procurement means that there is a degree of delegated authority for ongoing, regular expenditure. The likely implication of this is that the AS Defence Maktab would be able to continue procurement activities, even if contact with members of the senior leadership is disrupted. In a similar manner, the province-based nature of the procurement personnel means that each province is somewhat independent in terms of the day-to-day matters of handling procurement; this, again, provides a functional structure that removes the potential for easy disruption. The personalised nature of managing interactions with arms traders and illicit smugglers places a premium on the contacts and knowledge of the individuals involved within the process. This factor does present a short-term vulnerability for disruption, although work arounds do appear to have been devised.

Centralised arms logistics management is also somewhat weak within the organisation, with the oversight held with the military Emir and a small number of personal assistants. However, the devolved nature of procurement and logistics management – at a provincial level – means that units are likely to have access to suitable levels of supplies to manage the inevitable ebb and flow of combat. A major increase in operations – whether initiated by AS or in response to SNA or AMISOM¹

Figure 3. Regular procurement process



¹ In January 2022, following a technical meeting, the Somali Government & the African Union agreed on the parameters and strategic objectives for the African Union Transitional Mission to Somalia (ATMIS) that would replace AMISOM. For the purpose of this paper, we still refer to the AU mission as AMISOM.

moves – would, however, most likely require repositioning of supplies from strategic reserves or reallocation from other provinces.

2.C.II. Extraordinary procurement

A second method of arms procurement is overseen at a senior level through the Security Committee, which draws its principal members from the AS military command and executive leadership. The committee's key role seems to be to serve as the organization's intermediary body for handing policy level decisions relating to the materiel demands from the AS military and security organisations – principally the Jaish, Amniyat, and Hisba units – for the supply of arms and explosives and the executive decision-making to meet this organizational demand.

The committee reportedly has a procurement role related to high-value purchases, the acquisition of specialist equipment, or substantial increases in supplies ahead of planned uplifts in operational tempo or an offensive.

This idea of having a separate methodology depending on whether expenditure is regular or extraordinary has an operational logic to it and is consistent with other expenditure patterns seen within the AS Makatib. Each Maktab is assigned a monthly budget overseen and audited by the Finance Maktab which ensures that expenditure is taking place in accordance with the declared needs and is not being used for unauthorised purposes. Additional expenditure is authorised by an oversight committee similar to the Security Committee above.

2.C.III. In-house manufacturing

Within AS, there is an in-house capability to manufacture certain types of ammunition and explosives for use in AS operations. The Explosives Maktab (also known as the Tasni, 'the factory' or 'manufacturing section') is believed to comprise approximately 65 personnel, split between the various units, the largest of which are those focused on producing components or elements for use in subsequent manufacturing and the mortar manufacturing units¹; it is also responsible for producing VBIEDs and the explosives for complex operations.

¹ AS official, Jilib, November 2021; former AS official, Mogadishu, November 2021

3. Arms Finance

As part of our efforts to create a baseline against which AS arms procurement and activities can be measured, data has been extracted from previous research undertaken by the Hiraal Institute into AS finances. It needs to be emphasised that all of AS's actions within the security field – including arms procurement, capability acquisition, and distribution – are enabled by the extensive finance operations that the group undertakes, notably its illicit taxation collection and revenue gathering. In essence, the money that AS gathers illegally from those it forces to pay tax in Somalia funds the ability of the group to purchase weapons, arms, and ammunition that it then uses in its operations and attacks in the country.

As of 2021, the group was believed to have annual revenue collection of about USD 180 million, with planned expenditure of around USD 100 million. Of this security-associated expenditure accounts for the vast majority of AS planned expenditure, at around 70–75%. This security related expenditure includes that which is undertaken by the Jaish and Amniyat. Both organizations are responsible for paying salaries and stipends to their personnel, with rates that vary according to the rank and status of the individual (married/non-married). This expenditure does not, however, include major operational expenditure or investment into specific capabilities (such as drones), which are believed to be funded from the financial surplus that AS gathers, estimated at around USD 80 million per year.

3.A. ARMS PROCUREMENT EXPENDITURE

Arms procurement can be split out separately from other security-related expenditure. Based on research into AS finances, the AS annual planned expenditure on arms procurement is assessed to be:

- USD 24 million for arms procurement during the year, budgeted monthly at USD 2 million
- USD 1.8 million on 'in-house' explosives and other weapons manufacturing, budgeted monthly at USD 150,000

Additional expenditure from within the Amniyat budget – which in total is assessed at over USD 21 million per year – is likely: some procurement does take place through local units, mainly focused on small arms and ammunition, but it is unclear if other Amniyat equipment is financed from within the Amniyat or arms procurement budgets.

However, it should be noted that information about AS expenditure is extremely hard to ver-

ify or confirm and thus these figures should be treated with caution. Also worth noting is that these figures are the forecast expenditure; they do not include off-budget or non-forecast expenditure or additional sums drawn from the AS financial surplus. It is also likely a degree of fluctuation can also take place depending upon operational circumstances – both military operational requirements and also matters affecting AS's financial revenue collection – although given that AS is believed to be operating a considerable financial surplus, it is more probable that the budget will have increased rather than decreased.

3.B. MOVING FUNDS FOR ARMS PROCUREMENT

Within Somalia, AS operates a hierarchical financial administrative structure. A central Finance Maktab headquarters oversees a financial centre under which provincial financial centres (one per AS designated province) operate. Funds are moved through regular AS financial channels, utilising a number of methods and in a corresponding variety of forms – cash, bank accounts and mobile money transfer, and hawala – to channel funds to where they are intended.

A 2018 UN Panel of Experts report stated that in six-month period between September 2017 and March 2018, some 43% of AS income was transferred in cash, 51% in banks and through EVCplus (a mobile money transfer platform), and 6% through hawala. For the purposes of arms procurement, the figures are likely to be somewhat different, with more transferred through hawala and bank accounts and lesser amounts transferred in cash, mainly due to the value of the sums being transferred – although this is not to rule out the transferring of large sums in cash.

A strong assessment can be made that AS is method agnostic when it comes to moving money. The group will use whatever method is viewed as best for the circumstance at hand – with ‘best’ incorporating a judgment combining security, speed, ease, location, familiarity, and reliability, amongst other aspects. Al Shabaab has shown itself willing to adopt new technologies and processes, to make full use of the capabilities inherent within them, and to change practices as and when needed.

3.B.I. Cash

Cash plays a large role in the AS financial system, not least for reasons of practicality. Reporting shows that AS does use cash for making arms purchases. Some of this is likely to be for purchases intra-Somalia, for example in the local black markets, but there are examples where large sums have been used for making international purchases. Our research indicates that AS prefers to split its orders into smaller volumes – between USD 50,000 and USD 200,000 – in order to avoid substantial losses through potential interdiction either of the couriers or of the arms deliveries¹. Larger orders cannot however be ruled out.

3.B.II. Hawala

Hawala services have often been mentioned as being used by AS: “remittance companies serving Somalia and Yemen – commonly referred to as ‘hawalas’ – have a long history of being abused by criminal networks seeking to avoid financial scrutiny”: in a report from September 2020, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime presented examples of arms-related remittances totalling USD 3.7 million, that were sent by arms traffickers between 2014 and 2020². Some use of hawala is also made by AS for transferring money internally within the group (such as for ministry budgets

and taxation revenue) and it is almost certain that budgeted sums for the Defence Maktab to use in arms procurement are routed via hawala services internally within AS. Our research indicates that AS transfers sums used for arms procurement via hawala using the accounts of friendly business contacts or of business associates who are members of the group, and that it undertakes multiple lower value transfers of sums – rather than a single large transaction – to avoid ‘red flags’ that larger transaction values might trigger. However, it is also highly likely that AS makes use of a process to transfer sums ‘off the books’, whereby transactions can be verbally approved by senior managers in a hawala to their counterpart in another branch, ensuring there is no written record at either end.

3.B.III. Banks and mobile money transfer services

While Somalia and Yemen are largely excluded from the international banking system, the use of banks for transfers of illicit payments within Somalia is commonplace; again, reporting states that transactions are made via accounts in the name of friendly legitimate businesses or individuals.

We have seen no reporting that mobile money transfer services are used for payments for arms procurement and the lower sums that wallet limits allow would likely cause the process to be more time consuming or tedious than other methods. However, AS does use mobile money financial services to undertake intra-group money transfers, including for Makatib, and their potential use for lower value transfers for arms procurement cannot be ruled out. It is likely that purchases within Somalia at the local black markets would be the most probable type of procurement for this type of transfer.

¹ Former Somali Government official, Mogadishu, January 2022; AS official, Jilib, November 2021

² Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. Civil Society Observatory of Illicit Economies in Eastern and Southern Africa. Issue 11. August-September 2020.

4. Capabilities

In this section, we examine the weapons capabilities of AS that have been found through our research¹. This section also draws on relevant open-source reporting, which also gives additional insight into the weapons supplies that are available to AS. This section is not intended to give a catalogue of all of the types of weapons used by AS², merely those seen during the research period that were associated with potential arms procurement activities.

4.A. REGULAR EQUIPMENT

The reporting shows that a spectrum of small arms and light weapons have been acquired, which can be split as in below.

4.A.I. Handguns, rifles, machine guns

Our research confirmed that a wide variety of small arms and light weapons are used by AS and are widely available. Specific models of self-loading pistols identified in our research included the Beretta 9mm, Caracal CA707, and Taurus PT24/7. Reporting also identified a large volume of AK variants, and large quantities of 7.62 x 39mm ammunition has been stockpiled, which is the chosen calibre for most AK variants post-World War Two until recent times, when 5.56mm calibre ammunition was adapted. Research also evidenced AK variants that utilise the 5.56mm calibre round. The PKM General Purpose Machine Gun, as well as replacement parts such as spare barrels, are also widely available.

4.A.II. Grenade launchers

Included in the items identified through our research were various rocket-propelled grenade launchers and accompanying warheads, notably for the Russian RPG 7 and RPG 22: this gives an anti-armour, anti-building, and limited anti-aircraft (low flying) capability. The RPG 7 Launcher is a multi-use launcher, which will fire the RPG 7 HEAT warheads, with a varied range of anything between 50–500 m and have a self-destruct capability if they do not hit their target; the self-destruct is usually around 500–900 m. The RPG-22 fires a 72.5mm

HEAT shell and has a shorter range than that of the RPG-7, around 50–200m.

4.A.III. Other munitions

Research showed that mortar rounds were readily available. These are used both in artillery form but are also cannibalised for their explosive content, to boost AS' IED capability. Mortar rounds were identified as possible 60mm and 120mm, both assessed as containing TNT as explosive. Other items available included a wide range of munitions, with such including German-design World War Two-based grenades: these stick grenades contain approximately 170g TNT and are assessed as being most likely to be acquired for the explosive content rather than use in asymmetric warfare. Also available were standard Russian-manufactured F1 fragmentation grenades, which contain around 60g of TNT explosive filling.

4.B. SPECIALIST CAPABILITIES

Of note, our research shows that specialist capabilities are available to AS.

4.B.I. Sniper rifles

Sniper rifles are widely available from dealers, including the 7mm Russian Sniper rifle, in a SVD pattern. This fires a 7.62 x 54mm round, the same as the Dragunov SVD system, with many differing nations producing their own versions.

Recent reporting suggests that AS is particularly keen to bolster their supply of top of the range sniper rifles particularly following the heavy fighting in Gal-mudug during the latter half of 2021, when AS were at a considerable disadvantage due to the number of 'technicals' (armed battle wagons) that the government and its allies could deploy. Sniper rifles like the one above allowed them to combat the technical without putting themselves at undue risk.

4.B.II. Anti-aircraft systems and heavy machine guns

Research also demonstrated that various heavy machine guns and machine gun parts were available. Interestingly, many of these parts were mainly for items around the trigger mount, distinctively

¹ Arms trader, Boosaaso, December 2021; Former Somali Government official, Mogadishu, January 2022; AS official, Jilib, November 2022; Arms trader, Bari, January 2022

² Conflict Armament Research. Maritime Interdictions of Weapon Supplies to Somalia and Yemen. Deciphering a link to Iran. November 2016; United Nations Security Council. S/2019/858; United Nations Security Council. S/2020/949; United Nations Security Council. S/2021/849; United Nations Security Council. S/2021/79

showing an interest in an anti-aircraft capability. These appeared to be DHSK 1938 parts, which would make sense given the geographical location and the known availability of this weapon system in Somalia.

4.B.III. Unmanned aerial vehicles

The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (commonly known as 'drones') has become an increasing feature of both state and non-state actor warfare in recent years, with their use in reconnaissance, intelligence gathering, and attack roles: high profile examples have been seen originating in Yemen, where Houthi forces have used unmanned aerial vehicles to attack targets in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, as well as in the Caucasus, where UAVs played an important role in the Azerbaijan–Armenia Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020.

There are indications that AS has acquired drones, not least as drone sightings around AMISOM bases in Somalia have been increasing. Around twenty are reported to be small 'scout' drones, with roles including reconnaissance and protective surveillance of AS camps. There are confirmed indications that the group is attempting to weaponize some of these drones. The precise models of these drones are not known, but the group is assessed as highly likely to be seeking to acquire more¹.

4.C. IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICES, HOME-MADE EXPLOSIVES

AS makes regular use of IEDs, although the main IED of choice is the roadside bomb, either victim-activated or in Remote Control (RCIED) mode, with initiation usually via mobile phone or Remote Frequency Transmitter (RFT). Vehicle Borne IED (VBIED), often used in the suicide role (SVBIED)² are used primarily in the large cities, for complex attacks or as a breaching tool during attacks on hard targets, including SNA and AMISOM bases. Reporting by the UN Panel of Experts indicates that these have seen an increase in main charge sizes, from 100–200 kilos to 800–1,000 kilos from 2016 and onwards. This year, the use of person born IEDs (PBIEDs) has increased significantly, apparently as a result of an increased security posture around Mogadishu that makes it harder to smuggle in VBIEDs. Magnetic devices have also been used against targets, with the IED placed under the target vehicle and initiated by RC.

As IEDs increase in use, the need for the explosives increases. Throughout the world, insurgencies and terrorist groups have relied heavily on legacy mu-

nitions from civil wars, invasions, and military take overs; when these run out, insurgents and terrorist groups turn to homemade explosives and begin the production of making their own Home-Made Explosive (HME). UN reporting suggests that AS are turning to HME as the dwindling levels of legacy munitions provide insufficient military grade high explosive to be used as the main charge, combining TNT and other military grade explosives with the components of HME, in particular the oxidiser such as potassium nitrate and potassium chlorate. The reason is potentially to increase the explosive capability, although this it is unlikely to work. It is assessed that there is a clear intent on the part of AS to increase their chemical stockpiles in order to produce more HME.

The HME of choice varies depending on readily available resources and finances, what can be procured, seized, or supplied: as a rule, most nitrates and chlorates are used as bulk HME, with peroxides used in improvised detonators due to their sensitivity. For AS in Somalia, agricultural fertilisers, particularly urea nitrate are being imported in large quantities, along with ammonium phosphate, ammonium sulphate, prilled urea, and diammonium phosphate fertilisers³, with further suggestions that potassium nitrate and chlorate are also being used:

4.D. OWN PRODUCTION

Within AS, the Explosives Maktab is responsible for the in-house and homemade production capability. The Maktab has specialist units that focus on producing components for use in VBIEDs, producing the VBIEDs themselves, as well as making explosives for use in complex operations. It also has personnel that provide weapons maintenance and produce common types of ammunition, as well as providing some specialist engineering technical support (electrical, transportation, etc.) when needed.

The group clearly maintains and is increasing its ability to produce IEDs, despite security operations that have targeted this capability. There appears to be a consistent ability to adapt, with evidence of an evolution of devices according to the availability of components: it is likely that knowledge migration between operational theatres is being facilitated by the publication of technical material via social media and online videos, although it is also possible that there is some movement of expert individuals from other locations, notably Yemen.

¹ AS official, Jilib, October 2021; former AS official, Mogadishu, November 2021

² Conflict Armament Research. Maritime Interdictions of Weapon Supplies to Somalia and Yemen. Deciphering a link to Iran. November 2016; United Nations Security Council S/2019/858; United Nations Security Council. S/2020/949; United Nations Security Council. S/2021/849

³ AS official, Jubba, December 2021

4.E. STORAGE

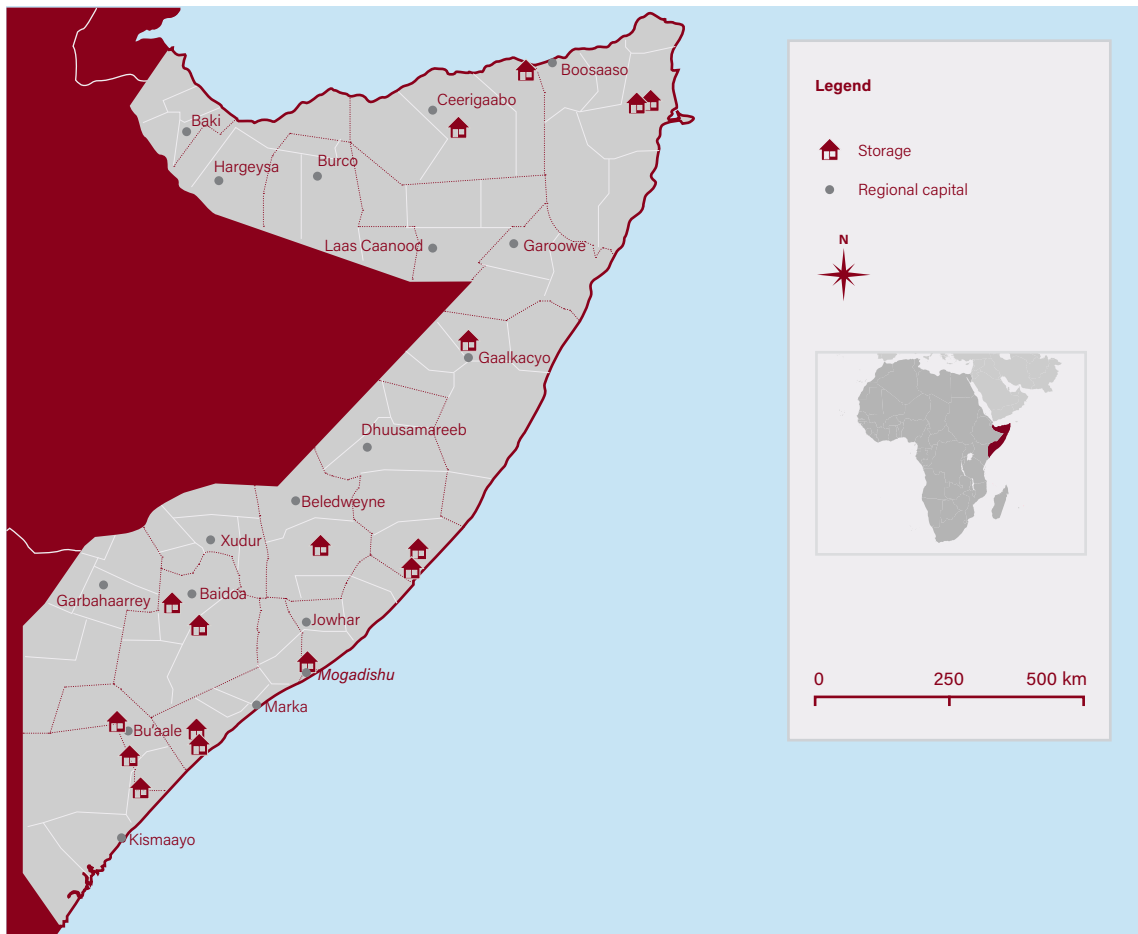


Figure 4. Weapons, arms, and explosives storage locations

There are multiple locations at which AS keeps its weapons, arms, and explosives (see Figure 4). AS maintains a number of weapons caches near the front lines that are managed by the AS Defence Maktab's Logistics and Procurement personnel and, indeed, most units reportedly have small local caches or storage locations. It is believed there are some more significant weapon storage facilities, notably in major urban areas that are under AS control. The main method AS uses to store large amounts of arms and ammunition is to bury them, often under residential houses so that only minimal security is needed¹.

The decision as to which units ultimately are provided with which weapons and munitions, and how many, appears to lie with the AS Logistics and Arms Procurement Department, acting in consultation with the AS Defence Maktab leadership. The responsibility for larger arms stores is believed to also sit with the Logistics and Arms Procurement teams. However, following procurement and distribution of weapons to the military units, the decision as to whether to store or to distribute weapons and munitions within the units themselves lays at the unit military command level, with the responsibility and decision making held at a comparatively low level.

¹ AS official, Jilib, October 2021; former AS official, Mogadishu, November 2021

5. Procurement Methods and Networks

There are multiple methods that AS uses when procuring arms, at least in part depending on the arms needed and from where they are being sourced. Some procurement takes place from local black markets in Somalia, either directly by AS personnel or via business associates; other procurement involves placing of orders and contracts with arms traders in Somalia or abroad (mainly Yemen).

Reporting indicates that only in a minority of cases does the group undertake procurement directly – that is, with members of the group selecting and purchasing arms themselves; for the majority of the time, the group utilises arms suppliers, illicit traders, and smugglers, effectively contracting out its procurement and transferring the risk involved¹.

5.A. DIRECT PROCUREMENT

While most reporting indicates that AS uses arms traders or dealers to acquire its arms – especially when this involves them being imported from Yemen – there are times when AS procures arms directly, using select teams of trusted and well-placed individuals within the AS procurement system.

5.B. ARMS TRADERS

There is a wealth of available reporting regarding the extent of the arms trading networks that operate in Somalia and the Horn of Africa region more widely, notably across the Gulf of Aden in Yemen². Al Shabaab makes substantial use of these arms traders, using them to source and purchase arms, ammunition, and other supplies on behalf of the group³. Given the lack of any formal domestic arms manufacturing industry, all arms in the country are sourced (initially) from outside Somalia. The intermediate locations of the arms traders that AS deals with are largely within Somalia or in Yemen, but

there are also indications that some individuals are located in Djibouti and Ethiopia.

The choice of arms trader depends on a variety of factors, with the number and type of weapons required, AS's particular demands for materiel, the availability, cost, and timeframes for delivery being foremost. The group will also take into consideration clan connectivity, influence with local authorities and availability of materiel through local markets before committing to a specific trader. Unsurprisingly, there is a heavy reliance on known and trusted entities.

For arms sourced outside the country, there are fewer options, and the group uses traders with particular international links, primarily to Yemen: these are mostly illegal arms traders based in the Puntland region. These arms traders are largely independent of AS, with the arms traders responsible for both sourcing and delivery of weapons to AS. Traders are also non-exclusive, with many of the same traders that supply AS also supplying the Islamic State in Somalia (IS-S), other criminal enterprises and clans. Multiple sources indicate that AS will normally provide the equipment requirement and identify a location for delivery: it is for the arms trader to undertake the arrangements and complete this in the manner that they deem most suitable, including arranging for shipment and transportation. Some arms traders have their own transportation and smuggling capability, while others will in effect sub-contract with specialist smugglers; this is especially the case for supplies sourced from Yemen.

The destination or delivery point varies according to the order, which part of AS it is for and the resources of the arms trader. Some arms brought from Yemen are reportedly transferred to AS ownership in Puntland, for instance, while in other instances the handover point will be in south or central Somalia⁴. There are suggestions that AS will sometimes assist in the coordination and direction of road transport⁵ and, in central and south Somalia, AS will often provide transport and security to safeguard the delivery of supplies to the respective military unit⁶ – i.e. in those areas where AS has a more substantial presence or is in direct control of the ground⁷. For an overview of this process, see Figure 5 below.

¹ AS official, Puntland, January 2022; AS official, Galmudug, January 2022

² Michael Horton, The Jamestown Foundation. 'Yemen: A Dangerous Regional Arms Bazaar' Terrorism Monitor. Vol.XV, Issue 12. 16 June 2017

³ Former AS official 1, Mogadishu, January 2022; former AS official 2, Mogadishu, January 2022; Arms trader, Boosaaso, December 2021; Former Somali Government official, Mogadishu, January 2022; AS official, Jilib, November 2021; Arms trader, Bari, January 2022

⁴ Former AS official, Mogadishu, January 2022

⁵ Former AS official, Mogadishu, January 2022

⁶ AS official, Jubba region, January 2022

⁷ AS official, Jubba region, January 2022

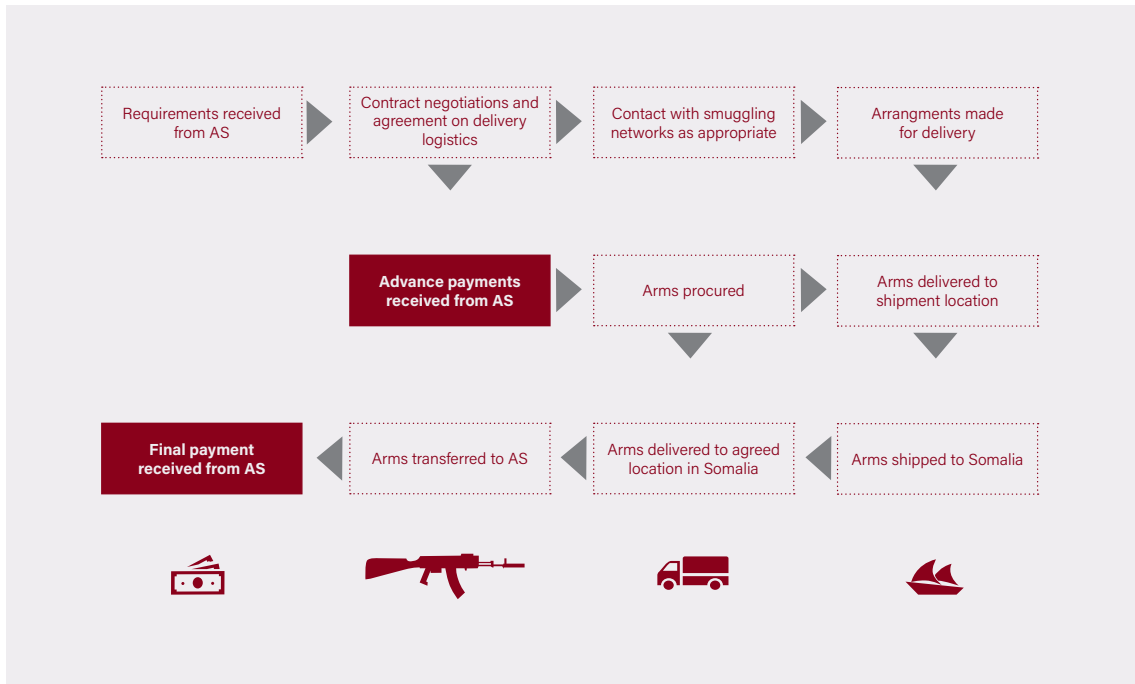
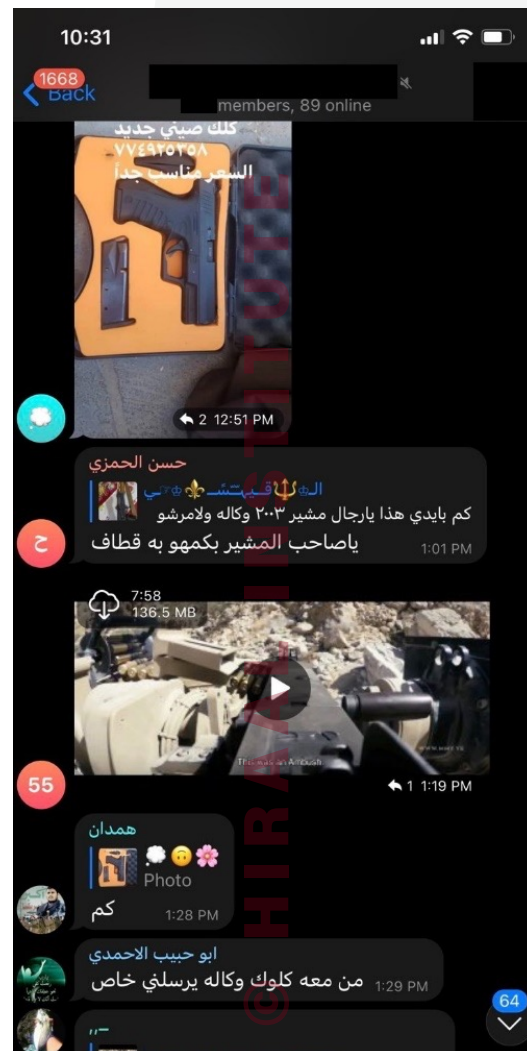


Figure 5. Arms trader procurement process

Communications between AS and traders often happens direct between individuals who have personal relationships or between nominated representatives. There are also a number of encrypted online communications chat groups active where suppliers display their wares and potential buyers can confirm specifications, numbers, price and other details (see Figure 6 for an example). Once the conversation gets into the realm of confirming numbers and price the buyer and seller leave the group to confirm the details. A detailed study of a number of these groups confirms that the membership is surprisingly diverse nationality-wise, but also that suppliers tend to specialise in arms sourced from particular countries – notably Iran – while others specialise in certain types of arms, some focusing on small and light weapons, others on indirect fire or anti-armour weapons such as mortars, grenade launchers, or rocket propelled grenades, and others on heavier weapons such as heavy machine guns or rocket propelled grenades.

Figure 6. Screenshot from weapons trading online communications chat group



5.B.I. Organised crime groups

When analysing arms trading networks operating in Somalia and the Horn of Africa more widely, there are a multitude of actors involved, representing a spectrum of capacity and capabilities. It is clear from open source, confirmed by our field research, that there are arms traders and networks that have a greater reach and extent of operations than others and individuals with a higher profile. Some can undertake the whole procurement process, involving weapons sourcing, acquisition, transportation and delivery, demonstrating effective vertically integrated organisations: this separates them from the arms trader who has to sub-contract out for transportation or smuggling, for instance.

5.B.II. Orders and payments

Reporting indicates that in its transactions with arms dealers, AS generally expects to pay 30% of the agreed price for a particular order in advance. Dealers will supply evidence, at a minimum photographic, of the quality of the arms they will be supplying. Once the order is confirmed, dealers have a fixed period to deliver the arms – normally two months, although it can be as long as four or five months. Once delivered, and within an agreed time period, AS pays the remaining 70%. This payment will often occur following an in-person meeting; a favoured location for these meetings is reportedly the Kunya Barrow area in AS-controlled territory. The group reportedly places importance on paying arms dealers swiftly, not least as it often uses successful dealers repeatedly¹. Should the arms be intercepted or lost during transit, AS does not seemingly ask for compensation or restitution. If arms are intercepted by Somali forces or other institutions, AS will make efforts to secure the release of the weapons.

5.C. BLACK MARKET

A number of well-known illegal local markets, known as irtoogte, operate at various locations across Somalia and AS makes use of these to source a significant amount of its basic arms and ammunition requirements². To do this, AS utilises business associates who then coordinate with AS officials to facilitate the transportation of materiel to respective AS units³. As when dealing with arms traders, reporting indicates that there is a geograph-

ical remit for the business associates involved, with certain individuals operating for example in Beledweyne, others in Mogadishu, different contacts in Galgaduud and so on⁴; this is logical and draws on the expertise and local knowledge that these individuals have.

The illegal arms traders at these markets sell arms imported from outside of the country, particularly from Yemen, Djibouti, and Ethiopia, as well as arms leaked from individual sources within the Somali security forces: Reports from the UN Panel of Experts on Somalia have provided precise details of weapons that have been legally imported by the Federal Government of Somalia that have then ended up in local arms black-markets in Mogadishu.

The markets are not likely to be equal in importance to the group in terms of the quantity or value of arms procured: there are indications only limited supplies of small arms come from the Baidoa and Beledweyne markets, for instance⁵.

5.D. Commercial sources

For arms procurement, AS makes only limited direct use of its commercial and business contacts. However, legitimate businesses are reported to be heavily used in the procurement of some of the components and precursors for 'home-made' explosives; for example, reporting indicates that AS makes use of commercial fronts in Mogadishu to buy agricultural fertiliser and other elements, mainly transiting through Mogadishu seaport, Bosasso seaport, and Berbera seaport⁶. When obtaining particular precursors, AS will sometimes place orders with particular middlemen on the basis of negotiated prices; in other cases, the group will buy what it needs from legitimate agricultural and chemical traders. There are indications that the prices that the group pays differ based on the commercial entity, the particular requirement, quantity, and prevailing market prices.

5.E. VIA STATE SOURCES

A considerable volume of materiel comes via corrupt Somali states sources: some is via battlefield seizures of equipment (see below), while other materiel is acquired through corrupt personnel selling on the weaponry or ammunition to arms traders or, in some cases according to reporting, directly to AS. The annual reports from the UN Panel of Ex-

¹ AS official, Puntland, January 2022; AS official, Galmudug, January 2022

² Former AS official, Mogadishu, January 2022; former AS official, Mogadishu, November 2021; AS official, Jubba region, November 2021

³ AS official, Jubba region, November 2021

⁴ AS official, Jubba region, November 2021

⁵ Former AS official, Mogadishu, January 2022

⁶ AS official, Jilib, November 2021; former AS official, Mogadishu, November 2021; AS official, Jubba region, January 2022

perts on Somalia¹ have repeatedly highlighted that arms supplied to the FGS have ended up on the black market or with AS – for example:

- On 27 January 2019, a pistol supplied as part of a consignment of sidearms by UAE to the FGS in September 2014 was used in the assassination of a police officer in Yaqshid district, Mogadishu.
- On 16 August 2019, a pistol retrieved from the scene of an attempted assassination of an FGS Ministry of Education official in Bakara Market was linked to a shipment delivered to the FGS in June 2018.
- On 28 July 2019, ammunition used in an AS assassination of an alleged NISA informant was linked to ammunition supplied to the FGS in 2014 and 2015.
- An AK-pattern rifle recovered from one of the AS gunmen involved in the 9 November 2018 attack at the Sahafi Hotel in Mogadishu had marking consistent with materiel imported by the FGS in July 2017.
- A rifle used by one of the gunmen in the AS attack on the DusitD2 complex in Nairobi on 15 January 2019 is believed to have originated in a consignment the FGS purchased from the Government of Ethiopia in July 2013.
- Weapons and ammunition retrieved in the aftermath of the Manda Bay attack on 28 December 2019 have characteristics consistent with equipment previously owned by the FGS and AMISOM: one assault rifle was traced to a consignment delivered to the FGS on 22 July 2017 and which was subsequently distributed to the SNA in Baidoa, between November and December 2017.

5.E.I. Battlefield seizures

While only occurring on a large scale on isolated occasions, AS has augmented its arms supply through the seizure of weapons from battlefield sites or when it has overrun SNA or AMISOM bases, as has been highlighted through open source

and UN Panel of Experts on Somalia annual reports². For example:

- In January 2016, AS attacked an AMISOM forward operating base in El Adde and held it for several days before the Kenyan Defence Forces managed to reclaim it. A significant quantity of weapons, ammunition, vehicles, and communications equipment was taken by the group.
- On 27 January 2017, AS captured 81-mm mortars following an attack against a Kenyan Defence Forces forward operating base at Kulbiyou, on the Kenya-Somalia border.
- In 2018 and 2019, two UN assessments stated that one of the primary materials that AS used in its IEDs was 2,4,6-trinitrotoluene (TNT), harvested from explosive remnants of war and munitions captured from its attacks on AMISOM bases.
- On 1 June 2018 and 22 September 2019, AS captured military vehicles, anti-aircraft guns, and large quantities of ammunition during two attacks on SNA bases at Moqokori, Hiran region, and El Salini, Lower Shabelle region. Media affiliated with AS subsequently released photographs of this materiel.
- On 26 January 2019, AS-affiliated media released photos of an armoured vehicle allegedly seized from the SNA in Lower Shabelle.

5.F. HISTORIC MATERIEL

A considerable volume of materiel has been in Somalia and the Horn of Africa more widely since the Cold War. As has been repeatedly documented in open sources, after the collapse of the Barre regime in 1991, armed groups looted government stockpiles and arms supplies, which contained arms and ammunition supplied during the Cold War by the Soviet Union and the United States. While some of this will have degraded with age, a considerable volume is highly likely to remain in circulation, and it is known that AS has made use of this at times.

¹ United Nations Security Council. S/2019/858; United Nations Security Council. S/2020/949

² Jefferson Brehm. 'The loss of arms and ammunition in peace operations: mapping and addressing the challenge.' The Global Peace Operations Review. 15 June 2018; United Nations Security Council. S/2018/1002; United Nations Security Council. S/2019/858

6. Routes and Movement Methods

There are a variety of routes that are used to move arms into Somalia, with weapons and associated supplies often originating in a first country then routing through a second or third country.

In the section below, we detail instances where reporting has been able to link them to AS in particular. This does not detail weapons smuggling into Somalia as a wider phenomenon, which has existed for a considerable length of time and has been extensively described elsewhere.

6.A. METHODS

The methods used for moving weapons into Somalia and then within the country itself are the same, whether they are undertaken by AS directly or by arms dealers on behalf of the group: both make extensive use of smugglers and smuggling techniques. There is not a particular 'AS smuggling method': in fact, given that the group contracts-out much of the procurement and movement of arms, the methods used are those of organised crime groups and networks, rather than AS per se.

The major means of moving arms into Somalia makes use of maritime smugglers who move arms from (mainly) Yemen into the country. It appears that, as with arms dealers, there are smugglers who handle different types of materiel; some only have the capacity to handle small arms, for instance, while others are able to transport larger arms, and/or explosive substances. Where needed, arms can be hidden within fish stores within boats.

These smugglers move arms in dhows across the Gulf of Aden, landing at pre-arranged sites or docking hubs. These docking locations can be in remote areas, while others have been reported to be in urban locations: much depends on the level of access that the smugglers have in the area, the level of control AS has, and any measures that need to be taken to handle local security forces. Open-source reporting provides multiple examples of dhows that have been intercepted by international

security forces in the Gulf of Aden that have been transporting illicit arms.

At the arranged point, the shipment is met by a team of porters who bring the arms ashore. Once arms are landed, they are transported further on by another smuggling team – whether part of the same group or through an arrangement with another group can vary – or can be passed directly to AS, again depending on the particular arrangement agreed.

6.B. MARITIME ROUTES

6.B.I. Departure points from Yemen

The routes that smugglers use to move arms from Yemen to Somalia are multiple, varied, and largely depend on the shipment, trader, and client. Environmental factors and the presence of international naval forces also play a part. The key element, however, is the intended docking location (see below). The main departure points identified from Yemen for arms shipments associated with AS include Al-Mukallah (alt. Al-Mukaala, Makalle), the nearby Al-Khalaf coastal area, and Burum, all within Hadhramaut Governorate. However, other departure locations are highly likely, given the widespread nature of the smuggling networks that operate across the Gulf of Aden.

6.B.II. Docking locations and ports

Research has identified multiple locations where arms procurement shipments are reported to have come ashore at informal docking sites – for example, a sheltered bay or natural landing location. Many of these are on the northern Puntland coast with a small number in Galmudug (see Figure 7), with a small number in southern Somalia (see Figure 8). Other shipments, in particular of agricultural fertiliser, come in via the main seaports, although it should be noted that reporting does state that some arms shipments for AS also come via the main official seaports.

Figure 7. Docking locations and ports in northern Somalia

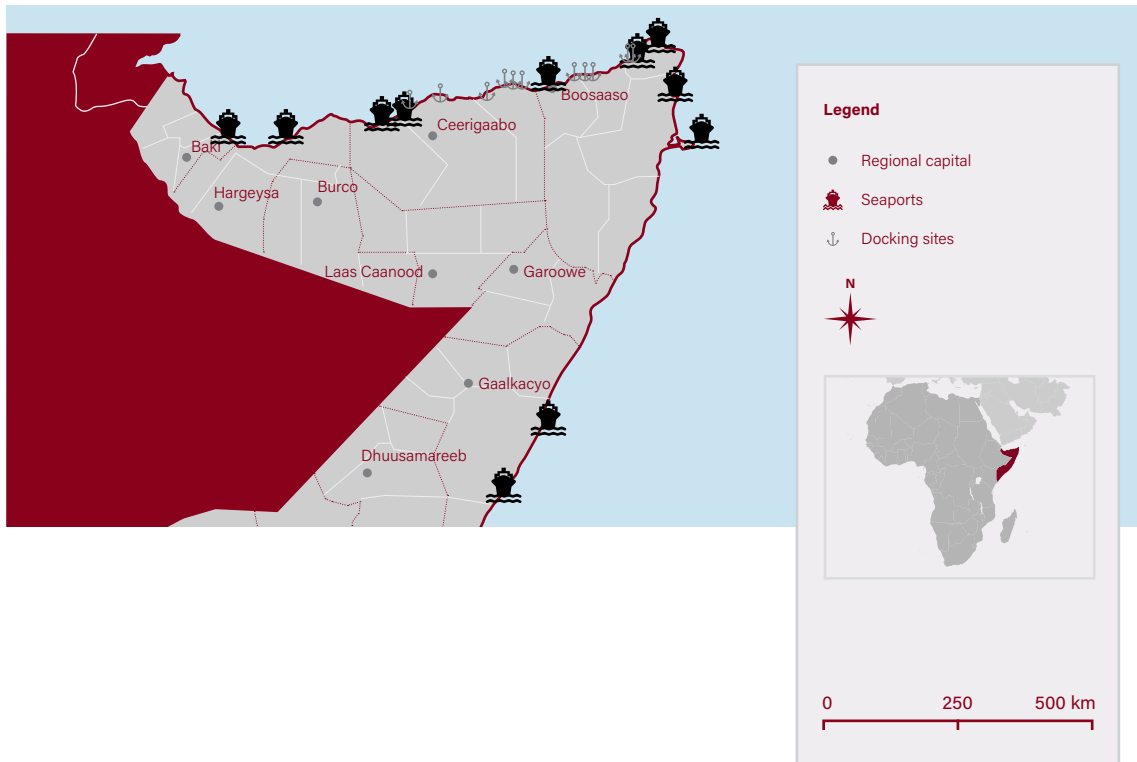
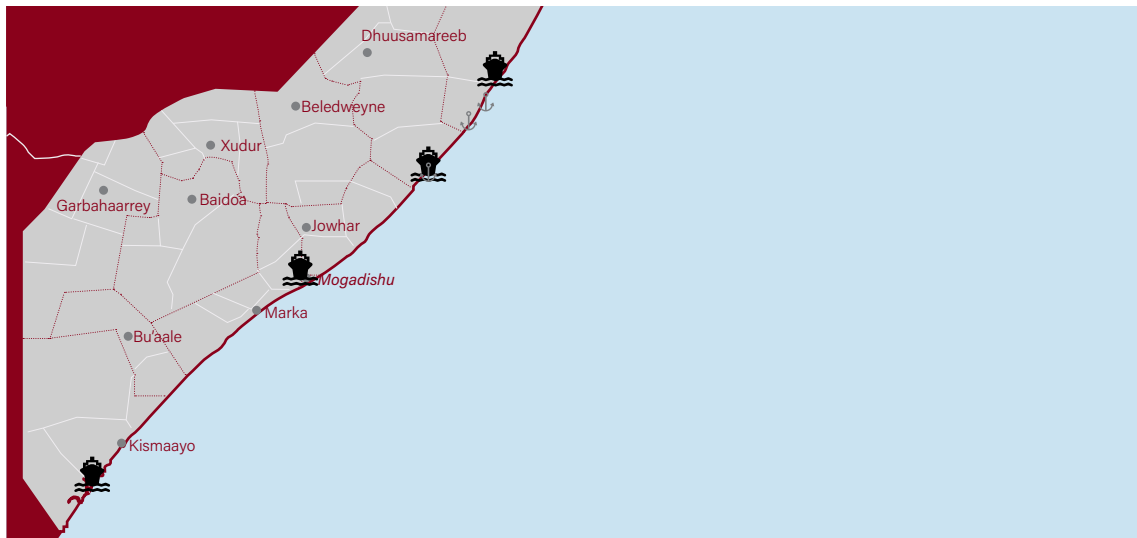


Figure 8. Docking locations and ports in southern Somalia



7. Recommendations

The conclusions and analysis above can be condensed into some clear recommendations, both in terms of activities to consider within Somalia and externally.

7.A. WITHIN SOMALIA

Actions focused on disruption will need to be sustained and resourced, and linked to actions external to Somalia, if they are to have a greater impact than current measures. However, the following specific lines can be considered:

- Focused targeting for disruption (individuals) – there are weaknesses within the AS arms procurement system, both in terms of individual personnel and the methods used. A focus on key experts within the Explosives Maktab, for instance, would have a disproportionate effect in undermining AS's ability to make its own weapons.
- Focused targeting for disruption (systems) – similarly, a focus on the most dangerous and hard to access weapons systems (HME, massive VBIED enablers, drones, MANPADs etc) would have a greater impact or a greater preventative effect.
- Focused targeting for disruption (geographic) – while not total, it is clear that a considerable portion of the arms entering Somalia come via the Gulf of Aden and through docking sites on the Puntland coast. A focused effort on this area, associated with appropriate capacity building, would have a disruptive impact, albeit that this would need to include measures to ensure the problem did not just relocate elsewhere.
- Strategic communications – the AS use of the finance it raises to procure arms that are then used to coerce or harm the Somali people presents a clear opportunity for messaging that would likely succeed in fostering discontent against the group and highlighting the predatory nature of the AS financial system. A wider strategic communications campaign addressing issues around weapon ownership within Somali society could also be considered.
- Although not within the remit of this project, the examination of AS arms procurement and capabilities has shed light on some challenges and shortcomings within the FGS and Somali security apparatus. Programming areas that could be considered for strengthening could include:
- Capacity building review – review of current capacity building with Somali security, law enforce-

ment, and state authorities to identify ongoing gaps and provide current assessment of capabilities, for instance in arms management and chemical use monitoring.

- Chemicals legal framework – improvements to the legal framework and rules and regulations for the handling of dual-use chemicals (such as fertilizers) could be made, as well as improvements within the chemical sector more widely, to ensure that supplies are held in compliance with international standards.
- Management of eventual AMISOM handover and/or withdrawal – handovers of facilities in other counterinsurgency situations from international to local forces has previously seen equipment and weaponry leak into the black market or to non-state groups (for example, in Iraq and Afghanistan). While the future of AMISOM and any potential change in form is still subject to AU, UN, and partner discussions, the eventual handover to the SNA and/or withdrawal of AMISOM forces needs to be carefully managed if such a situation is not to be repeated.

7.B. EXTERNAL TO SOMALIA

- Internationally-supported, sustained counter-illicit arms trade operations in Gulf of Aden – the cross-Gulf of Aden smuggling networks are currently able to operate with a high degree of impunity, with limited action taken against them. A systematic focus on counter-illicit arms trade, in the manner of the internationally-resourced counter-piracy operations, would increase the costs to the illicit arms networks and aid in disrupting the arms flows between Yemen and Somalia.
- Review of the UN arms embargo – although it has been in place for 30 years, the arms embargo has failed to stop the arms supply to non-state actors in Somalia. The FGS currently relies on donations of lethal support as the process for legally acquiring small arms and light weapons is too complex. Although the arms embargo has been amended in recent years, there is still a major disparity between the arms that are accessible to AS and those that are (officially) available to Somali state security forces. Support towards simplification of the process would enable FGS to equip units in line with its increasing capacity. A review of the embargo to consider whether it is still fit for purpose could be considered, potentially with measures that link lifting to improvements in FGS and SNA accountability and weapons management processes.



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