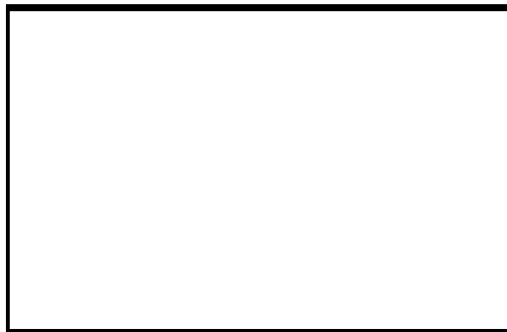


“Identifying and Countering Extremism in Somali Political Discourse and Behavior”



March 2011

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ACLURM051825

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Somali culture: long a “non-permissive environment” for ideological extremism

- Enduring power of Somali culture in face of foreign ideologies and interests
- Pastoral heritage: family, mobility, clan, resources
- Pride and egalitarianism
- Culture of pragmatism
- Culture of negotiation
- Information culture
- Fluidity of alliances
- Fluidity of identity politics



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The Somali context through Somali eyes – A world gone mad

- Brutal repression under Barre
- Civil war, ethnic cleansing, displacement, famine
- Protracted state collapse, warlordism, secessionism
- Diasporization – 1.5 million abroad; alienation and identity
- Criminalization at home and abroad
- “Lost generation” of youth
- External armed interventions, aid, anti-piracy patrols



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- Post 9/11 tensions in Somalia and abroad
- ICU and its 2006 defeat by Ethiopia
- Humiliations, powerlessness, loss of home, loss of identity

The search for explanations in the face of an apocalypse

Radicalism not surprising in face of protracted catastrophe

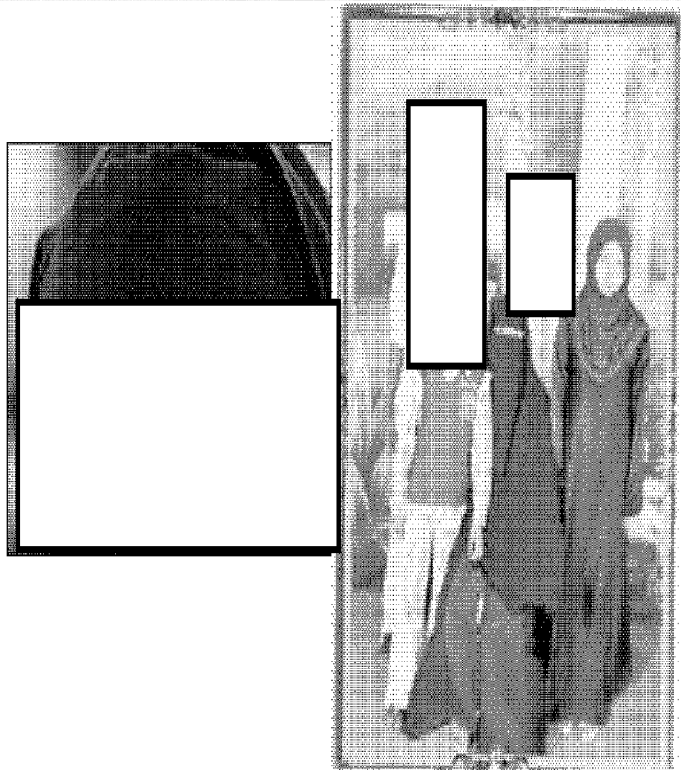
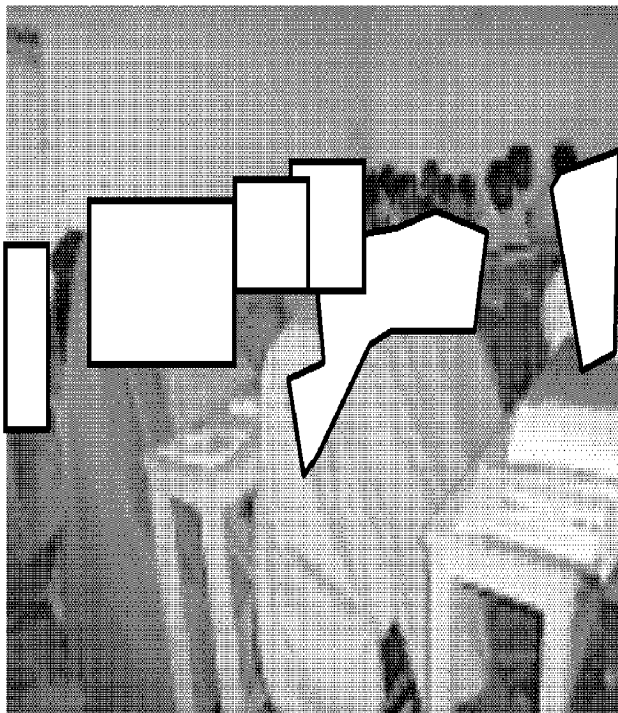
- Survivalism and adaptation – for most, no time or energy for explanations
- Escapism – qat; new lives abroad
- *Conspiracy theories* – of foreigners; of Ethiopia; of the US; of Christian world; of the warlords; of all these together
- Extreme defensiveness/chauvinism – example, piracy narratives
- Bad Somali leadership
- Bad Somali political culture, especially clannism
- Corruption of Somali Islamic practices

Islamism as ascendant discourse(s)

Islam as promise -- an answer to failed ideologies and identities, and source of meaning in a hopeless environment – but multiple discourses, most not radical

- Students and migrants in 1980s; exposure to salafism
- Islamism as protest movement
- Al-Ittihad – nationalist Islamism as failed armed movement, 1991-96
- Islamism as defensive cultural and identity movement across Somalia *and in diaspora*
- Al-Islah and progressive Islamism
- Islamic charities and schools, Arabic language, “look East” shift away from West; splits among Somalis in East and West
- Access to Islamic media and websites
- Identity with Islamic world as source of pride and strength
- Salafism vs sufism as main religious struggle today – battle over what is “unIslamic” and “unSomali”

Clothing and cultural shifts since 1990

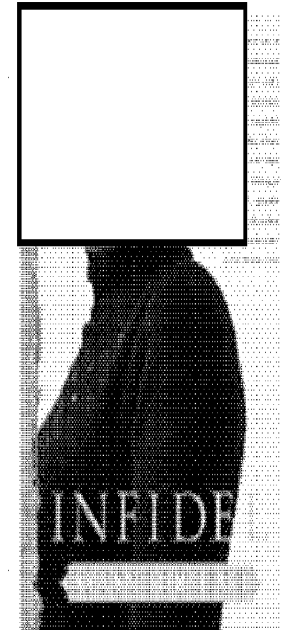


What constitutes extremism in Somali discourse?

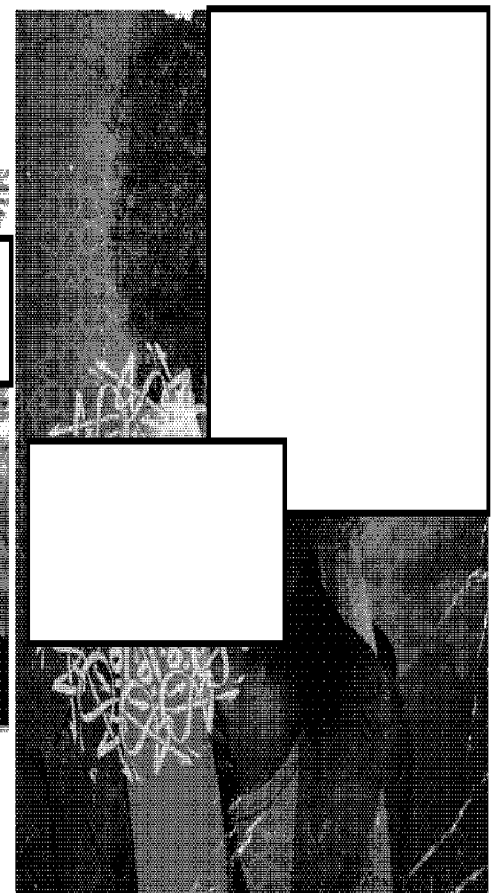
Depends on point of reference.

For Somalis, can include a wide range:

- Secessionism
- Secularism, disavowal of Islam or religion
- Abandonment of Somali identity and obligations to kin
- Feminism
- Clan chauvinism
- Salafism
- Jihadism



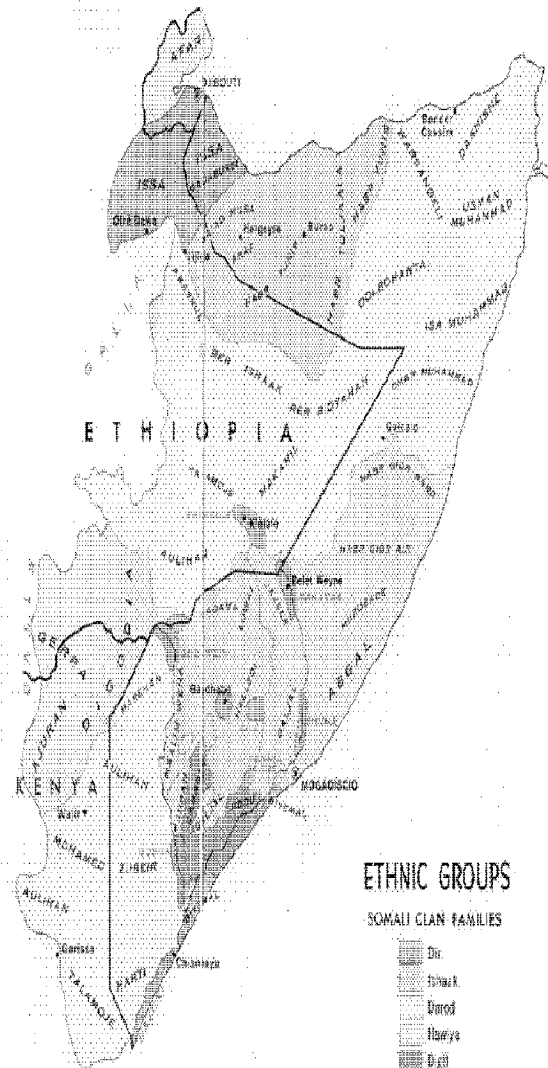
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Somali extremist rhetoric from African/(Ethiopian and Kenyan) perspective

Most dangerous Somali extremism:

- irredentist rhetoric (formal and informal);
- Somali nationalist discourse;
- Somali pan-Islamic discourse
- Somali criticism of status of Somali citizens in neighboring countries
- Somali threats to destabilize or attack neighboring states




Somali extremist rhetoric



- what really matters?

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Indicators of 'extremist' views among Somalis

- Appropriation of the Al Qa'ida narrative – interpretation of events in Horn as civilizational clashes, part of pattern of persecution of Muslims worldwide (conflation of grievance narratives);
- Claim that US using proxies to persecute Muslims;
- Embrace of global jihadist war against West, goal of global caliphate;
- Open endorsement of shabaab today (as opposed to 2007-08);
- Use of or endorsement of takfir (declaration of apostasy) against a fellow Somali
- Subtle signals 



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Positions that do *not* necessarily reflect Somali extremism

- Claim that US and Ethiopia are seeking to keep Somalia in chaos
- Position that solution to Horn of Africa will only come when Ethiopia collapses
- Justifying shabaab as defensive jihad against Ethiopia
- Belief that Islam is the only solution for Somalia
- Claim that Muslim population will grow in Europe and eventually take over
- Argument that AMISOM forces are killing Somalis and must be removed
- Belief that TFG is illegitimate

Assessment of Somali extremist rhetoric

- It is ubiquitous – seepage of aspects of AQ narrative into Somali discourse is worrisome as a worldview
- Some of what seems extremist is not – it's posturing, part of broader grievance narrative – link to negotiation culture
- Some of what seems extremist may or may not be – it's part of a shift to a narrative informed by salafist teachings, not necessarily jihadist but not friendly to the West or US
- The more nationalist, the less radical (to us – but not to Somalia's neighbors)
- “Radically angry” is not the same as radical
- Most of the rhetoric *is not acted on*

Extremist actions among Somalis

- Disjoint between rhetoric and behavior revealing – few cases of diaspora planning terrorism in West
- Why? Role and obligations of diaspora; remittances as lifeline
- Shabaab threats to take war beyond Somalia also not acted on (exception: case 2010)

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What constitutes an extremist act among Somalis?

- Terrorist attack abroad
- Suicide bombing in Somalia
- Fundraising and recruiting for shabaab,
especially since 2008

What actions may or may not be extremist among Somalis?

- Joining shabaab (note variety of motives)
- Fund-raising for shabaab (prior to 2009)
- Calling for or supporting attacks on AMISOM
or TFG

Countering Somali extremism

