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MORE MOGADISHU KIDNAPPINGS: THE PLIGHT OF JOURNALISTS & HUMANITARIANS

Nearing their 12th month of captivity in Mogadishu, journalists Amanda Lindhout of Canada and Nigel Brennan of Australia do not have freedom from malnutrition, enslavement and neglect. They have company.

Early this morning, two vehicles bearing a dozen armed insurgents burst into the SAHAFI INTERNATIONAL HOTEL in Mogadishu and kidnapped two more *ajnabi* (foreigners) at gunpoint. Foreigners are loathed by the insurgent AL SHABAAB and HIZBUL ISLAM, and **these particular foreigners made the mistake of identifying themselves as journalists**, doubling the hatred aimed their way.¹

But it's worse than that. **What makes this incident alarming and bewildering is the two French men are reportedly "security consultants" who chose to pose as journalists.**



Close to the Mogadishu airport on KM4 road is THE SAHAFI INTERNATIONAL HOTEL. It boasts of "60 Bed rooms with toilets ... and a kitchen with professional cooks." And in this promotional photo, the hotel depicts a young boy with a wound-draining gizmo. *Choice. (From SAHAFI promotional material.)*

Wearing government uniforms, the gunmen stormed and quickly disarmed the guards at the SAHAFI – which oddly enough means "journalist" in Arabic – and proceeded straightaway for the rooms occupied by the French men. In minutes and without a shot fired or scuffle started, the gunmen spirited the two French men away in a car with TFG interior ministry markings. The "consultants" had been there for 9 days.

Proceeding directly to the rooms of the French consultants is a sign of an inside job – inside TFG as well as the hotel staff. The abduction of the Canadienne and Aussie 23 August 2008 was also an inside job: they were "protected" by "guards" provided by the SHAMO HOTEL.

¹ "War Deg-Deg Ab (Breaking News)." *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-119, 7 June 2009.

and ambushed on the infamous road that links Mogadishu with Afgooye, where Miss Lindhout and Mr. Brennan went to cover Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) at the abject refugee camp in Afgooye.²

On 9 February 2005, BBC reporter Kate Peyton, 39, was shot in the back at the SAHAFI HOTEL where she interviewed Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden, parliamentary speaker at the time. Lawless then as now, Mogadishu has never brought her killers to justice. **Who is chiefly responsible for Miss Peyton's assassination? One of the FBI's most wanted: Aden Hashi Ayro, leader of the AL-QAEDA-linked AL SHABAAB.**

In early June, insurgent kingpin Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys said Somalia's Transitional Federal Government is responsible for civilian kidnappings and deaths. What a jolting claim: AL SHABAAB assassinated SHABELLE RADIO NETWORK director Mokhtar Mohamed Hirabe on 7 June in Bakaara market (in Somali, *Suuqa Bakaaraha*). In the same incident, "The Lads" seriously wounded one of his reporters, Ahmed Omar Hashi (*Tajir*), who described the assassination this way:

We were walking in the street together. Hirabe was shot in the head and fell to the ground while I was hit in the stomach and in the hand. Then the gunmen came, they shot him again in the head, but I managed to escape.



In a phone call to AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE arranged by the kidnappers and placed by an intermediary, Australian Nigel Brennan and Canadienne Amanda Lindhout sounded drained, distraught and desperate. Mr. Brennan: "I've been shackled for the last four months... My health is extremely poor and deteriorating rapidly due to extreme fever ... I implore that my government help me as a citizen of Australia (inaudible) [and ask] for the help of my family in every way possible so that the ransom can be paid for my release." Miss Lindhout: "I have been sick for months. Unless my government, the people of Canada, all my family and friends can get one million dollars, I will die here, OK that is certain ... The situation here is very dire and very serious. I've been a hostage for nine months, the conditions are very bad, I don't drink clean water, I am fed at most once a day." When the reporter asked Miss Lindhout further details on her health, she responded, "I cannot answer any question that you have. What I just said, that's all I can say." As we noted last month, if this audio track doesn't make you want to pack a bag, grab the appropriate accessories and free these people, nothing will. Click on "View Video." [Video grab from TV coverage of the duo aired in September 2008, their second month of captivity. Note the masked man on the left wearing a Cimaamad (Somali for Keffiyeh).]

Mr. Hirabe was the fifth journalist murdered this year and the third from RADIO SHABELLE. On 22 May, gunmen killed another SHABELLE reporter, Abdirisak Warrsamah Mohamed, in the same Bakaara market. Ironically, the news of that reporter's murder used by

² We have tracked the fate of Miss Lindhout and Mr. Brennan and examined the prospects for their rescue since their abduction in August. Sample analyses include: "Somali Gunmen Abduct Nuns from Church in Kenya," *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 08-018, 10 November 2008; "Journo Kidnaps: AL SHABAAB, 'Hotel Security Guys' on the Inside," *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-026, 22 January 2009; "New Developments in the Amanda Lindhout/Nigel Brennan Kidnapping," *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-106, 18 May 2009; "French Radio: Canadienne Amanda Lindhout fears she will die in Somalia," *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-110, 25 May 2009; "A Second Phone Call from a Desperate Hostage," *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-124, 11 June 2009; and "Heart-wrenching Audio from Hostage Amanda Lindhout," *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-133, 24 June 2009. Above all, we cannot stress enough the importance of this *INSIDER* report: "Islamist Weapons Smuggling: Not Online, but on the Flight Line," *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-107, 20 May 2009. This report is vital to understanding the "ownership" of the infamous Afgooye Road on which the Canadienne and Aussie were kidnapped and the likely involvement in their abduction and maltreatment by the road's "owner," Osman Hassan Ali (*Caato*). Somali for "Skinny," *Caato* is a close ally of Somali President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed with whom he is frequently photographed.

virtually all media worldwide was based on a report filed by Mr. Hirabe.³

In mid-May, Islamists warned reporters to use their heads when covering the insurgency or risk losing them:⁴ While his primary message was a vow to continue *jihad* until Islamic law was spread worldwide and Jerusalem “liberated,” Afghanistan AL QAEDA alumnus Ahmed Abdi Godane (Abu Zubeyr)⁵ warned journalists that they must “work professionally.” By that, he meant, work the way the insurgents want or pay with your life (*emphasis probably in the original*):

It is your duty to take part in the current *jihad*. Don't misrepresent the facts, don't mislead the people.

Somaliland suspects that Godane the Sociopath was the mastermind of the Hargeisa bombing that killed some 20 people including the suicide bomber who committed the terrorist act, Shirwa Ahmed from Minnesota.⁶



SHABELLE RADIO NETWORK director Mokhtar Mohamed Hirabe, assassinated by AL SHABAAB on 7 June in Bakaara market.
(Photo courtesy of the Committee to Protect Journalists.)

Assessment: While France has not identified the branch of government to which the two men are assigned – and should not – it is difficult to fathom operators with either France’s *DIRECTION GÉNÉRALE DE LA SÉCURITÉ EXTÉRIEURE* (DGSE) or her *BRIGADE DES FORCES SPÉCIALES TERRE* (BFST) putting themselves up *anywhere* in Mogadishu, much less allowing a dozen gunmen to whisk them away. If the consultants were there to provide a security assessment of the Presidential Palace, we cannot imagine them staying anywhere other than the palace, inside the AMISOM security perimeter. Outside that perimeter, you don’t venture alone. For a stay in Mogadishu today, something along the lines of a MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT would be the opening argument.

Clearly, someone on the inside at TFG tipped off al Shabaab to the French men and their role in Mogadishu. For the sake of argument, suppose there was *no* tip-off. Would they have been safer then? Resoundingly, no. **It is startling beyond belief that individuals with a modicum of security awareness of Mogadishu would dream of identifying themselves there as “journalists,”** tantamount to hanging a sign around their necks labeled “Abduct me.” The only profession arguably more despised by Islamists there is “humanitarian aid worker.” **To be blunt, since AL SHABAAB or HIZBUL ISLAM already view reporters as spies, pick a “cover” like “florist” or “wedding planner” – anything but “journalist.”**⁷

³ War correspondent DAVID AXE, a gent whose work we follow, raised the money to get Mr. Tajir outa Dodge. By late June, he was safe in another African nation. BRAVO ZULU, David.

⁴ “P.P.S.” under “More Gains by AL SHABAAB.” FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER 09-104, 13 May 2009.

⁵ In Somali, Axmed Cabdi Godane Abu Soobeyer, also Mukhtaar Cabdiraxmaan Godane, with the middle name often abbreviated “C/raxmaan.”

⁶ “The WHAT’S THIS WORLD COMING TO? Department,” FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER 09-093, 14 April 2009. “Domestic Terrorism: A Future for Minnesota’s Missing Men,” FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER 09-051, 24 February 2009. “Minnesota’s Missing Men Arrested in Somaliland,” FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER 09-032, 29 January 2009. “We have one of his arms!” FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER 09-029, 25 January 2009.

⁷ On 10 July, AL SHABAAB reportedly beheaded seven in Baidoa (Somali: *Battdhabo*, capital of the Bay Region in south-central Somalia), after a Shari’a court found them guilty of being “Christian followers and spies.” It is important to note the insurgents’ choice of words – and journalists there usually report them faithfully as the consequence for error is terminal. The Somali word used consistently by AL SHABAAB to describe a Westerner (or Western sympathizer) is *Nasaaro*, meaning Christian (probably derived from Nazarene). The Somali word for non-Muslim is *gaalo*, but it is a neutral, descriptive word. *Nasaaro* incites hatred. A Westerner could be as atheistic as Karl Marx, no matter: he would be called a “Christian.” In the case of the beheadings on 10 July, however, a relative of one of those slain used the word *raacsane*, meaning “follower.” So, in

SOMALIA: HUMANITARIAN AID AS “SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY”

As we note above, one targeted profession in Somalia is that of humanitarian, and the reason is important to grasp. Chris Cassidy worked humanitarian projects in Somalia with Michael Maren in the late 1980s and 1990s. The horrifying experience prompted Mr. Maren to write a book about it. In **THE ROAD TO HELL**, he explains how misguided foreign aid, development and food aid promoted corruption. Sadly, Mr. Cassidy’s knowledge of that corruption would become painfully intimate.



Cathedral of the Sacred Heart in Mogadishu today.

(Photo by ALEX STRICK OF FLICKR and used in accordance with the Creative Commons License.)

For months, thugs working for dictator Siyad Barre roughed-up Mr. Cassidy’s English-speaking Somali co-workers, pressing them to reveal the information they were passing along to the humanitarian worker. (There was no information passed.)

One night, as Mr. Maren writes in his book, Mr. Cassidy returned home from the agricultural project in Afgooye on the infamous Afgooye-Mogadishu corridor and took his wife and their toddler, Bernie, to supper at the ANGLO-AMERICAN CLUB, a brief walk from their flat in Mogadishu. Suddenly, they realized little Bernie was missing. Mr. Cassidy leaped up and searched everywhere. All the doors were shut, the gates to the facility locked. Frantically searching, Mr. Cassidy forced a jammed door open, only to find a cesspool covered with a concrete cap three-inches thick.

Scared, the Cassidys looked everywhere. They couldn’t find their son. Then, one of the waiters told Mr. Cassidy, “I think he is in there,” gesturing toward the cesspool. Can’t be, the father responds. *(Emphasis in original:)*

He says, No, I think he’s in there. He’s really insistent this time – really saying, I **know** he’s in there.

addition to alleged spies (*jaajuns*), one or more of the *Nasaaro* killed may have been Christian in the genuine sense of the term. (From “AL SHABAAB Beheads Seven ‘Christians.’” **FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER** 09-141, 10 July 2009.)

Mr. Cassidy found the body his son at the bottom of the cesspool, his head smashed in.

“Chris [Cassidy] and hundreds of others,” Mr. Maren wrote, “realized that **charity and development work are political**, that doing relief and development work in the context of oppression is counterproductive. **Any real commitment to development requires political action, speaking out against the powers** that keep populations from developing themselves. **In the Somali context, doing real development work was truly a subversive activity.**” (*Emphasis added.*)⁸

P.P.S.S. Little Bernie Cassidy was laid to rest in 1987 at an Italian cemetery near the now-ruined CATHEDRAL OF THE SACRED HEART and adjacent to the SOS CHILDREN’S VILLAGE-MOGADISHU.

- On 9 July 1989, the first and last Bishop of Mogadishu, Bishop Salvatore Colombo, was assassinated on the steps of the Cathedral.
- In January 2005, an ISLAMIC COURTS UNION militia destroyed the Italian cemetery near the Cathedral, discarding remains in a garbage dump. **The desecration was led by Ahmed Hashi Ayro,⁹ the commander of AL SHABAAB.**
- On 13 September 2006, Sister Leonella Sgorbati arrived in Mogadishu to establish a medical training school in the hospital operated by SOS CHILDREN’S VILLAGE-MOGADISHU, a project she began in 2002. On 17 September, two Islamists assassinated her as she left the hospital.¹⁰



“Foreign Man.” At a Twin Cities press conference today, Abayte Ahmed, mother of slain Minnesotan Jamal Bana, whispered through her veil to Omar Jamal, SOMALI JUSTICE ADVOCACY CENTER, who interpreted for her: **“My son had no clue about Somalia. We left Somalia when he was one year old....Someone must have put something in his mind.”** Mr. Jamal noted that the family first discovered the photo of their son at a website called DAYNIILE, a site we peruse several times a day. Unmarked, possibly TFG-sourced and from a Somali website, the photograph above of Jamal Bana is labeled simply *Nin Abnaji*. Somali for **“Foreign man.”**

[CNN video here.](#)

⁸ From “The Church & Mogadishu,” *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 08-051, 26 December 2008.

⁹ Source: Bashir Goth. Awdal News Network.

¹⁰ The day before she arrived in Mogadishu, Pope Benedict XVI delivered a lecture at the UNIVERSITY OF REGENSBERG. Titled “Faith, Reason and the University,” his lecture contained these words: “Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.” The Vatican would later explain, correctly, that the Holy Father was quoting a Byzantine emperor and “did not mean, nor does he mean, to make that opinion his own in any way. He simply used it as a means to undertake — in an academic context ... — certain reflections on the theme of the relationship between religion and violence in general, and to conclude with a **clear and radical rejection of the religious motivation for violence, from whatever side it may come.**” (*Emphasis in original.*) Nevertheless, the sentence infuriated Islamists and in Somalia, Islamist cleric Sheikh Abubakar Hassan Malin issued a *fatwab*, and the insurgent gunmen acted on it.

- On 12 April 2007, Ethiopian and TFG troops bombarded SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGE-MOGADISHU, killing one and injuring four. The staff fled with five Somali families, the first time CHILDREN'S VILLAGE was ever evacuated and abandoned in its 20-year history of selfless service to Somali children.

CUTTING THE CARDS WITH SOMALIA'S PRESIDENT

Fighting was intense over the weekend, with both sides claiming territory in northern Mogadishu. President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed claimed that his government forces wrested control of key areas from AL SHABAAB *without the help of AMISOM¹¹ troops from Uganda and Burundi.* In a report Monday morning, however, AL SHABAAB claimed the government lost most of the city "in less than 12 hours."

Who is right? Probably and unfortunately, the bad guys are.

Among others, an outlet in Jowhar Monday morning reported: *Xoogaga Islaamiyiinta buuxiyay goobihii shalay kadib markii ay isaga soo caraeen Ciidamada Donladda.* That means something along these lines:

"The TFG military [or possibly pro-government militia] ran away when encircled yesterday by the smallest Islamist unit."

AMISOM soldiers were indeed deeply involved in the fighting this weekend, but whatever gains they wrought collapsed when *baxeen jüda dagaalka AMISOM* (AMISOM troops withdrew).



24/7 for Months. That Burundi officer is one of thousands of AMISOM troops from Uganda and Burundi who have been protecting President Sharif, center, night and day since Mr. Sharif returned to Mogadishu 7 February 2009. (Photo courtesy of AMISOM.)

Assessment: The more fragile his government becomes, the more Mr. Sharif "bends the arrow." The West says foreign fighters there number in the "hundreds." He says thousands. Last week, he claimed Somali pirates were ferrying fighters into the country. We didn't report it, because it rang hollow. While there might be *some* who come via skiff, why chance running across a coalition warship? Simply rely on the route taken by Minnesota's missing men: go through Nairobi. Sheikh Umul will put you up in the Eastleigh neighborhood and get you to Mombasa and on to Merka or Kismayo in no time.

¹¹ AFRICAN UNION MISSION IN SOMALIA.

Mr. Sharif's latest tall tale was his claim Sunday that government troops alone re-claimed vast portions of the city this weekend. That simply did not happen – plus it insults Ugandan and Burundi troops who are fighting and dying to keep his government just this side of comatose.

A deeply respected XO of a frigate once said, “trust everybody but always cut the cards.” With every fast-and-loose statement by Mr. Sharif, we get closer to the time to fold.

Postscript: In late June,¹² we were struck once again with the wisdom of the firm's neighbor, Dr. J. Peter Pham, director of the NELSON INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS at JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY who suggested last month it was time to cash out (*emphasis added*):

[Dislike] of the extremist agenda should not be confused with support for the TFG. In truth, the TFG's continuing existence on life support says more about the international community's stubborn refusal to admit **the failure of its top-down approach and general lack of investment in any alternatives** than it does about the interim regime's viability. In short, the TFG's chances of success are non-existent ...

In short, ... the TFG is "fiddling" while Somalia burns, [and] it is doing so with a full orchestral accompaniment provided by an international community that apparently lacks either the will or the imagination (or both) to do anything else.



A rare shot of what may be AMISOM's only RHIB operating off the Mogadishu port. (That duty certainly beats walking the streets of that city.) Those are two Dutch Navy personnel forward of the conning station who may have boarded the RHIB from a Dutch frigate screening a U.N. WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME cargo ship. The RHIB is flying the flag of the African Union. (*Public domain photo by the Royal Netherlands Navy.*)

In the last 19 years, no fewer than **14 internationally sponsored attempts to establish a government in Somalia failed, miserably and utterly.** The government there is not only dead, he wrote, but “putrified” and “reanimation is not longer in the realm of the possible.” Dr. Pham recommends a “bottom-up or building block approach.” That means working with government entities there that enjoy a semblance of legitimacy and popular support – notably Somaliland and Puntland. **That is a resounding endorsement for business ventures in Puntland and Somaliland.**

As we've noted for months, **AL QAEDA is poised to move to a beachfront home in Somalia.** Dr. Pham concurs and says it is time to ... take names:

¹² “Somalia Disintegrating.” *FORWARD-LEANING INSIDER* 09-133, 24 June 2009.

[Forces] like the U.S. Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) based in nearby Djibouti or the U.S. Fifth Fleet in the Arabian Sea [and Indian Ocean] will have to take preemptive action to prevent terrorists from gaining a foothold in Somalia when the nascent forces of order within Somalia and the AMISOM peacekeepers redeployed to guarding the perimeter may prove themselves unwilling or simply unable to do so.

If you didn't read Dr. Pham's vital and sober analysis back in June, **LOOK FURTHER**.

Note how Dr. Pham's analysis tracks with the straight-forward words of one man we follow in Somali chat who lives in Puntland (he despises AL SHABAAB, by the way):

The hapless Sharif has thrown the government into the gutter. Today [13 July], he does not control a single village or area, and the war is largely between AMISOM and AL QAEDA. [On Sunday, it was] AMISOM [that] gained him a few districts. As soon as their *taangi* (tanks) left, his militia ran away in panic. It is time for a rethink.



Circle that word *taangi* or tank. AMISOM troops have always had the tanks but never truly used them, but they figured in the engagements this weekend. That's a significant ratcheting-up for AMISOM. Our contacts with combat experience in Mogadishu say armor is of limited value in Mogadishu, despite much of the city lying in ruins. That said, AU's T-55s can play a key role at the Presidential Palace and strikes in certain districts and major arteries. Those uses aside, tanks are chockfull of intimidation factor. (Photo courtesy of AMISOM.)

P.P.S.S. All that said, Mr. Sharif did hit perfect pitch this weekend when he appealed to Somali-Americans to stay home. Yesterday, he urged young men from the Twin Cities and other Somali-American communities to reject AL SHABAAB and its recruitment effort in the diaspora.

I call on the Somali-American community not to send [its] youth to Somalia to fight alongside AL SHABAAB. I am saying to those young men from abroad: Your families fled your home to America because of insecurity. You should not return here to foment violence against your people.

MINNESOTA'S MISSING MEN

There's a good compilation of Minnesota's missing Somali-Americans in the **NEW YORK TIMES** today with good interactive links there to criminal records and FACEBOOK accounts where applicable.

Below are a few observations from that coverage with additional information from other sources:

- Virtually all the men listed by the Times attended the ABUBAKAR AS-SADDIQUE ISLAMIC CENTER in St. Paul, with many in leadership positions (e.g., youth program volunteers).
- Zakaria Marout (also Maroof), 30. Left the U.S. about the same time as his friend, Hargeisa bomber Shirwa Ahmed. **He used to sing**

the “call to prayer” at **ABUBAKAR mosque** and a recording of his voice is said to still be a ringtone on friends’ cell phones in the Twin Cities. He may be a **recruiter for AL SHABAAB**.

- Another cohort of Shirwa Ahmed is **Mohamed Hassan**, 17, nicknamed “Miski,” who reportedly assisted Marout with conference calls for AL SHABAAB recruitment.

Ahmed Ali Omar, 24, a former EMT, **served on the ABUBAKAR recreation committee**. He appeared in AL SHABAAB’s recruitment video that starred Sheikh Abu Mansuur al Amriki (also al-Imriki). Another Shirwa Ahmed friend was Khalid Abshir, 26, **active in ABUBAKAR mosque’s youth programs**.



Fast-Rope Ex. On Sunday last, Marines of the 22ND MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT (22nd MEU) fast-rope from a Navy **MH-60S Sea Hawk helicopter** on the flight deck of amphibious assault ship **USS BATAAN (LHD 5)**. BATAAN is flagship for the BATAAN Amphibious Ready Group (ARG), operationally attached to COMFIFTHFLT in the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden. *(Public domain photo by MC2 Kiona Miller, U.S.N.)*

PROPRIETARY CLASSIFICATION: BUSINESS –IN- CONFIDENCE
TURN TIGHTER, GO FASTER, LOOK FURTHER™

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