

Abdiqadir Odweyne, a senior police commander, told REUTERS:

We understand [Marc Aubrière] killed three AL SHABAAB guys who were guarding him. I cannot understand how this good story happened, but now he is in the hands of the government.

REUTERS talked to an unnamed source, claiming to be an AL SHABAAB fighter, who said three of his “friends” were killed last night, but he doesn’t know who did it. He also said they were expecting a ransom delivery last night.

“Guided by the Stars.” For his part, Mr. Aubrière says he slipped away when his captors – HIZBUL ISLAAM, *not* AL SHABAAB – dozed off, leaving a door improperly fastened or locked. He told *RADIO FRANCE INTERNATIONALE*:

Tuesday night around midnight, I took advantage of my jailers being asleep and tired from Ramadan. I saw my cell was not closed properly, so I took off without violence. I walked at night for almost five hours guided by the stars, to get back to the area that I was looking for. Mogadishu is deserted at night, and the only people you cross are armed. I was shot at, I ran, I hid and luckily they missed.

Later today, he would tell the *NEW YORK TIMES* that he was well cared for, worked out and spent a lot of time toughening his feet. (Remember the rubble in the photo on page one?)



So we’re square, at midnight Mr. Aubrière said he left Gubta (upper left green diamond). Barefoot in a strange, crater-riddled part of the city controlled by AL SHABAAB, he walked past the notorious *Sunqa Bakaaraha* (Bakara Market) and, “guided by the stars,” found his way to VILLA SOMALIA (on the lower right, find the Boondheere district in yellow letters; Villa Somalia is the green diamond just below and to the left of the word “Boondheere.”) **Unarmed, he must have used his BATMAN UTILITY BELT to find his way, in part because at midnight last night, it was cloudy.** He says he was shot at during the trek, but escaped by running and hiding. In a strange town. **Barefoot.**

A Somali source suggests he was released at *Isgoska Floresa*, or “Floresa Junction” or “Crossroad” (upper left-most corner of “Boondheere,” also marked “Inset 2” above.)

The Western press never picked that up, because **Somali reports misspelled the junction “Isgoska Frolenca.”** That’s oral tradition for ya.

Farhan Asanyo, a TFG Army officer, told the U.K.'s DAILY MAIL FOREIGN SERVICE that Mr. Aubrière approached his soldiers early this morning. The soldiers were surprised. The man identified himself and said he had escaped. The officer said:

The man told the soldiers he escaped after killing three of his captors.

Paris says No Violence, No Ransom. The French foreign ministry repeatedly emphasized that there was no violence in the escape, perhaps to quell rumors and avoid jeopardizing the other *Haystayaashii Faransiiska* (French hostage) being held by AL SHABAAB, the more ruthless of the two Islamist factions. In Paris, Foreign Ministry spokesman Eric Chevallier said (emphasis added):

Despite certain allegations and rumors this happened without violence, **and France did not pay a ransom.**

Curious: unnamed sources with HIZBUL ISLAM said a ransom *was* paid. Before we get to that, let's observe this:

Assessment: If HIZBUL ISLAM truly screwed up, fell asleep and left the cell door ajar or unlocked, a trumped-up tale that the Frenchman's release was in exchange for ransom would be necessary to save face. Face is not just critical in Somali society. In the case of the rebels, **saving face is vital.** Islamist kingpin Hassan Dahir Aweys is seeking to join his HIZBUL ISLAM group with AL SHABAAB. However, if **"The Lads" had the slightest inkling that HIZBUL ISLAM fighters were, in fact, sleepers, that wouldn't cut it with the cutthroat AL SHABAAB.** These "Lads" amputate, behead and desecrate graves for grins. (In fact, **the two groups fought over the *Faransiiski*, almost to the point of bloodshed, until "The Lads" won certain concessions for dealing with the Frenchmen.)** **There's no crying in baseball – and absolutely no sleeping in *jibaad* (Somali for *jihad*, holy war).**

As it happens, HIZBUL ISLAM is not the only entity claiming that a ransom was paid. **Confirming a ransom payment was an unnamed source with the Sharif government.**



Marc Aubrière is escorted to a plane at *GAROONKA DIYAARADAHA MUQDISHO* (MOGADISHU AIRPORT). He is the bearded gent wearing white slacks and light blue-and-white-striped shirt. (Un-marked photo from a Somali source.)

First, though, let's hear from HIZBUL ISLAM. A senior official with that faction told AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE:

Some government forces had been waiting for the release in the Gubta neighborhood (in southern Mogadishu). He was handed over at around 4:00 am (Somali time) this morning.

Said an official with the TFG:

The French agent did not escape by himself. Some negotiations had been going on for a while between the government and [HIZBUL ISLAM]. The initial ransom demanded was five million dollars but the amount has decreased.

That TFG official suggested to AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE that talks had broken-down and **some HIZBUL ISLAM fighters struck their own deal without the authority of the faction's leadership.**

Reporters with AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE and FRANCE 24 have crafted the most credible, insightful stories in the Horn of Africa country, despite near-impossible odds.⁴ Their conclusion is compelling:

If a deal was indeed struck, neither side was likely to advertise it.

Our Conclusion? You can guess it already. We will permit voices in the Somali *diaspora* to provide their **assessments** (some paraphrasing and feeble translations follow):

The Frenchmen was held in a place secret even to people familiar with Mogadishu, escaped with ease and managed to find his way to VILLA SOMALIA. [And another: He is hiding some facts now for security reasons.] *Aad ayaanan u nasiib badnaa.*

The Somali phrase means Mr. Aubrière must have “incalculable luck.”

Tolow ma chip GPS ah baa maskaxdada kaga jirey.

Our guess: Mr. Aubrière benefits from having a GPS chip in his head.

Our assessment: We have expressed our admiration for France under Nicholas Sarkozy and the performance of her Navy and Marine Commandos countless times. Marc Aubrière is a free man today, and we are grateful, but his partner is still in peril, and the Western press, albeit slowly, is picking up on the completely conflicted stories, inconsistencies on a grand scale – even for Somalia.

Memo for Mr. Sarkozy: It's time to shut the door and focus on Mr. Aubrière's partner, as we know you are. When the press calls again, it's time for them to hear a recorded message from Mr. Aubrière. The message? “Gone fishing.”

Somali culture is built on an oral tradition that became a written language just years ago. Reporters are not fools and react bitterly when treated as such. Channeling that oral tradition, a Somali proverb comes to mind:

The wise man points to the moon, but when the fool looks, he sees only a finger.

Reporters are not fools. Right now, all they see is a finger.

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

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⁴ One of the level best is a FRANCE 24 broadcast by journalist Stéphanie Braquehais. Last month, she reported that Mr. Sharif didn't even have enough uniforms to clothe his troops. Also, trucks loaded with goods at the Mogadishu seaport must pay a “tax” to “owners” of the route from the port to the Bakaara market where the goods are sold. Impressed with her reporting, we were frankly surprised (and gratified) she made it out without being kidnapped. **M^{lle} Braquehais' report is a must-see.**