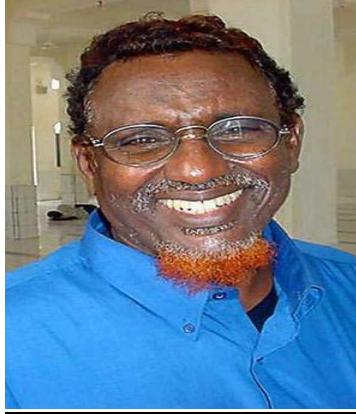


Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys



Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys was born in the Galgaduud region of Somalia between 1935 and 1943. He is a member of the Ayr sub-clan of the Habargadir group of the Hawiye clan. Although not the most powerful sub-clan in Somalia, Ayr is reportedly one of the most powerful clans in Mogadishu.¹

Aweys began preaching Wahhabi ideology in the late 1970s, but he first achieved notoriety as a Somali colonel decorated for bravery in 1977 during Somalia's war with Ethiopia.² Several sources indicate that he was a "prisons Colonel,"³ although his citation for bravery and his later position as Military Chief of al-Ittihad al-Islami suggest that he assumed an operational role during wartime.

Al-Ittihad al-Islami (Islamic Unity, AIAI), established in the early 1980s, was one of several Islamist organizations that sought to overthrow Siad Barre, Somalia's dictator of 22 years. The organization began its ascent in the Gedo region of Somalia, a crossroads for Islamic fundamentalists.⁴ In the absence of effective government services, AIAI offered protection for businesses and localities, established schools, and provided rule-of-law in a country ravaged by warlords. Sheikh Hassan Aweys served as both a spiritual and military leader for the increasingly profitable and powerful organization. In both of his roles, Aweys promulgated AIAI's ultimate goal of establishing an Islamic caliphate in the horn of Africa governed exclusively by *sharia* law.

¹ "Somalia Government Tries to Confirm Terrorist's Death," *Voice of America*, January 10, 2007.

² Winter, "Profile: Somalia's Islamist Leader," *BBC News*, June 30, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/5120242.stm>.

³ Sii'arag, "The Birth and Rise of Al-Ittihad Al-Islami in the Somali Inhabited Regions in the Horn of Africa," Nzwili, "Terrorism Focus: Leadership Profile: Islamic Courts Union."

⁴ *Ibid.*

AIAI rose to prominence in the early 1990's upon Siad Barre's ouster. The organization claimed responsibility for two fatal attacks in 1996: the shooting of two Ethiopian businessmen in Somalia and the bombing of a hotel in Addis Ababa that killed 4 and injured 20 civilians.⁵ AIAI has also been implicated in a second 1996 bomb attack in Ethiopia, the assassination and attempted assassination of Ethiopian cabinet ministers, support of al-Qa'ida's 1998 embassy bombings, and a suicide-bomb attack on the Paradise Hotel in Mombasa in 2002.⁶

While serving as AIAI's Military Chief in the 1990's, Aweys maintained a relationship with Adan Hashi Ayro. Ayro was trained in Afghanistan, served as a militia commander in AIAI and later in the Council of Islamic Courts, and reportedly sustained direct ties to al-Qa'ida.⁷ The exact nature of Aweys' relationship to Ayro is unclear; the Jamestown Press reports that Aweys mentored Ayro, planned military operations in conjunction with him, and organized terrorist training camps with him.⁸ Although Ethiopian military strikes reduced AIAI's size and potency in 1997, both Aweys and Ayro continued to play prominent leadership roles through the establishment of Islamic courts and their associated militias.

Sheikh Hassan Aweys established the first Islamic court in the southern region of Mogadishu following AIAI's retreat from Gedo. In 1999, he became the head of the Southern Mogadishu Islamic Courts, and used the courts to promote Islamist goals similar to those of AIAI.⁹ On June 24, 2006, Sheikh Hassan Aweys was appointed to the senior leadership role in the Council of Islamic Courts (formerly referred to as the Islamic Courts Union), a collection of previously disassociated courts.¹⁰ The Council of Islamic Courts has two administrative bodies: an executive committee of 8 persons recently headed by the more moderate Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, and an 80 person shura, or decision-making body, led by Aweys.¹¹ In this position, Aweys was one of the most influential individuals in Somalia. He used his position to contest the transitional government in Somalia, prior to the Ethiopian-backed military intervention which expelled the Islamists from Mogadishu in December.

With the status of the Council of Islamic Courts in flux, and Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aways' personal future in jeopardy, his next role is uncertain. In February, 2006, on a jihadi website, Aweys purportedly authorized the use of suicide terrorism to attack targets in Ethiopia and Kenya.¹² More recently, however, Aweys has consistently disavowed any personal links to al-Qa'ida or terrorism. It is difficult to predict whether or not

⁵ MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base, Group Profile: al-Itihaad al-Islami, <http://www.tkb.org/Group.jsp?groupID=4329>.

⁶ Rabasa et. al, *Beyond Al Qaeda*, p. 132.

⁷ On January 7, 2006, a U.S. Special Operations-coordinated air strike targeted and killed Ayro in Somalia near the Kenyan border. Gordon and Mazzetti, "US Used Base in Ethiopia to Hunt Al Qaeda."

⁸ Nzwili, *op.cit*

⁹ Sii'arag.

¹⁰ "Somalia's Islamic Courts name Radical Cleric as Head of New Parliament."

¹¹ Shinn, "Somalia: US Government Policy and Challenges."

¹² "Somali Islamists threaten suicide attacks in Kenya, Ethiopia."

Aweys will overtly support jihad in the near future, but he is unlikely to back down from his vocal pursuit of an Islamic state.¹³

¹³ Harmony documents concerning Aweys are: AFGP-2002-600114, AFGP-800611, and AFGP-2003-001293H.

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