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His nickname and religious background have led some to fear that he would introduce strict Islamic law in the Comoros, but he denied this. He insists that he will encourage the teaching of the "true image of Islam". Still, given that the Comoros have already supplied at least one known al-Qaeda recruit—Fazul Abdullah Muhammad, who was implicated in al-Qaeda's 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania—some of the regional powers are likely to view Sambi's election as a potential security headache. Indeed, these and other countries fear that Sambi may pursue an anti-Western stance and end the country's support for the US-led anti-terrorism war. In 2004, the US Treasury Department designated the Comorian branch of the Saudi Arabia-based Al-Haramain Islamic Foundation as a conduit for international terrorism financing.

Otherwise, it should be mentioned that the previous Comoran administration was supportive of the campaign against terrorism launched after September 11. Comoros is a party to seven out of 13 international counter-terrorism conventions. It has also shown a consistent effort to improve its counter-terrorism measures, though it was possible that terrorist suspects traveled through or sought safe haven in Comoros, where the security forces have limited resources and training in counter-terrorism and maritime security. Moreover, the recent State Department's country report on international terrorism said that "the Comorian government and local religious leaders disapprove of Islamic extremism and have stopped taking money from suspect Islamic charities".

Comoros is a member of the Arab League. The Union of Comoros is located off Africa's southeast coast near Madagascar and is made up of the three islands of Anjouan, Grand Comore and Moheli. Fewer than 700,000 citizens live in the Comoros Islands, of them 98% are Sunni Muslims. The country is considered one of the poorest in the world, with 60% of its citizens living below the poverty line and suffering widespread malnutrition. Therefore, it has no choice, but to rely heavily on foreign aid.

Comoros has undergone 19 coups or attempted coups since gaining independence from France in 1975. In 1997, the islands of Anjouan and Moheli declared independence from Comoros. In 1999, Colonel Azali Assoumani seized power and pledged to resolve this crisis through confederated arrangement. In December 2001, voters approved a new constitution and presidential elections took place in the spring of 2002. Each island in the archipelago elected its own president and Assoumani took office as a new union president in May 2002. Under the Comorian constitution, the union presidency rotates every four years between Comoros' three islands. Under this constitution, the island of Anjouan is holding the presidency, followed by Moheli in 2010.

The 2001 constitution, which was approved by referendum, characterizes Islam as the inspiration for the legal system and gives constitutional status to a religious council but provides that the Comoros will remain a secular state. The federal parliament, which is divided between forces loyal to local bosses and supporters of the outgoing government, remains for the time being outside Sambi's control and might not go along with an Islamist agenda. This being said, one may still regard Sambi's victory as part of a much wider phenomenon, which prevails lately on the Muslim world, i.e., the rise of the Islamists to power.



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But, first of all, Sambi will have to prove himself worthy for the Comorians. During his campaign, he promised to fight corruption, create jobs and build better houses for the poor Comorans. Moreover, he was seen as a relative newcomer to politics, and so untainted by corruption. Will he be able to stabilize the country, to fight corruption and to create jobs? Or, will he be like his predecessors and the office will make him corrupt too? Whatever will be the answer, Sambi might be the right man in the right place since his business acumen may be useful to strengthen the Comorian economy and thus, on the long run, to stabilize the country.

Seyyid Muhammad Abdullah Hassan – An inspiring figure for present Islamists in Somalia

Seyyid Muhammad Abdullah Hassan (1864–1920) was a Somali politico-religious leader and poet. He is considered to be the father of Somali nationalism for his inspiration and leadership of the Dervish resistance movement in a more than twenty years (1898–1920) holy war against European and Ethiopian expansion into his country, in particular against the administration of British Somaliland and their Somali allies. This holy war devastated the Somali Peninsula and resulted in the death of an estimated one-third of northern Somalia's population and the near destruction of its economy.

Seyyid Hassan was born on April 7, 1864, in northern Somaliland and by age 12 he had decided to dedicate his life to the religion of Islam. His subsequent travels throughout Arabia and East Africa in search of knowledge, his reputation for learning, and his abilities as a teacher soon earned him the honorary title of “Sheikh.” While in Saudi Arabia, he joined the fanatical sect of Muhammad Saleh, whose tenets were of a harsh and uncompromising nature as compared with those of the Kadariyyah, which was then the predominant sect in Somaliland. When he returned to Somalia in 1895, he began to condemn all excessive indulgences and luxuries and exhorted his people to return to a strict path of Moslim devotion.

During that era of the European partition of Africa, Seyyid Hassan's contact with Catholic missionaries and British colonial officials convinced him that Christian colonization sought to destroy the Islamic faith of the Somalis. He believed that his passion to deepen Somali faith would never be realized until they were free, so he intensified his efforts by urging his countrymen to remove the European "infidels". In his attempt to create a national movement, he used kinship ties as bases for political alliances and deftly utilized marriage ties to cement alliances with clans with whom his relations were poor. Seyyid Muhammad's success as a mediator between clans and tribes over water and grazing rights – main concerns for the pastoral Somalis back then and still nowadays– and his remarkable abilities as a poet further enhanced his fame, so that by 1899 he had attracted 3000 followers, whom he called "dervishes".

A national figure that appealed to the Somalis as Moslims regardless of their clan and lineage allegiance, Seyyid Hassan had as a formidable weapon of propaganda -- his



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poems. As a poet, he relied on the traditional Somali art of alliterative poetry, which is used as a means to preserve the past and as an effective vehicle for communicating political ideas. He contributed to his charisma by assigning to certain dervishes the sole task of memorizing his poetry. In the innumerable poetic polemics his style alternated from violent denunciation and vituperation to soft words of conciliation, but the content always revealed a shrewd appreciation of the colonial situation in Somaliland. His poetry is still sung in Somali oral form.

Seyyid Hassan acquired great influence in the Dolbahanta country. His followers credited him with supernatural powers. Some were hotfired by his religious and political teachings. Others were attracted by promises of the wealth to be gained by raiding the stock of those tribes, which espoused the infidel's cause. Others were inspired by a dual motive, religious and material: they saw an admirable opportunity to lay up for themselves treasure in the Islamic paradise by confiscating other tribes' treasure upon earth.

At first Hassan began attacking neighboring tribes friendly to the British, and in 1899 declared himself a Mahdi, inspired by the rebellious Sudanese Mahdi, who acted in the Sudan until 1898. After heavy fighting in 1900 and 1901, British forces drove Seyyid Hassan and his followers into Italian Somaliland. By 1903, however, he was a problem again. With the cooperation of the Italians and Ethiopians, and after much fighting, including one battle on January 19, 1904 in the Nogal country where the dervishes suffered over 1000 men killed, he was once again driven out of the colony. The Italians seemed to solve the problem through reaching an agreement with him. In 1909 Seyyid Hassan was once again raiding tribes friendly to the British. The British withdrew from the interior of the colony due to financial stringency, while confining their control to coastal towns. Many Somalis unsympathetic to the Seyyid's movement were then subjected to reprisals, and Somaliland lapsed into a state of unparalleled confusion and chaos. After a while the British decided to retake the interior, and launched an offensive in the summer of 1914. Unfortunately, the military commitments of World War I allowed for little more than defensive operations in their small Somali colony. In January 1920, however, the British government organized a carefully combined air, sea, and land attack on the dervishes. They routed dervish forces by bombing Taleex, the center of the Seyyid's rule, and he was forced to abandon it to reorganize. He rejected a British offer of free pardon upon surrender. Further attacks forced his dwindling forces into eastern Ethiopia, where he eventually succumbed to an attack of influenza and died on December 21, 1920.

Seyyid Hassan should be seen as one in a long line of Moslim zealots in Africa, but also in the Muslim world at large, who revolted against either a foreign "infidel" presence, or a perceived corruption in contemporary Islam. Moreover, the tenets of the Salihyyah sect and the dervish resistance movement serve as an inspiration to the actions of contemporary Islamist Somali groups, such as al-Ittihad al-Islami, which is inspired also by the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia.



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Nigerian Oil "Total War"

On May 10, 2006, an executive with the US-based Oil Company, Baker Hughes, was shot and killed in the southeastern Nigerian city of Port Harcourt. At the time of the shooting, it was not immediately known if the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) had any involvement or not. On May 11, 2006, youths kidnapped three Italians, who have since been released. Recently, MEND kidnapped four foreign oil workers, from Bulgaria, Britain, Honduras, and Patrick Landry of Texas. Moreover, the militants have bombed two pipelines, triggering an international increase in the cost of oil.

These attacks on foreign oil companies took place after the military leader of MEND, Major-General Godswill Tamuno, declared on February 18, 2006, a total war on all foreign oil companies and their employees. This declaration of war came as militants and the army exchanged fire after a government helicopter gunship attacked barges allegedly used by smugglers to transport stolen crude oil. On the same day, MEND kidnapped nine employees of the US petrol company Willbros and threatened using them as human shields. On March 1, 2006, six of them were freed, while two American citizens and one British citizen are still being held.

Information about this kidnapping was widely circulated in the jihadist forums, which published photos of the nine employees under the title "photos of the Lions of Nigeria after having taken prisoner some Americans", with the following text: "Allah supports you oh Lions of Nigeria! These are the photos of the Mujahideen in Nigeria after the seizure of nine hostages from the US oil companies who rob the wealth of Muslim Nigeria and of the world."

MEND is a militant group, which has attacked petrol operators in Nigeria. Its stated goals include demanding President Olusegun Obasanjo to free two jailed ethnic Ijaw leaders – Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, who is jailed and charged with treason, and Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, a former governor of Bayelsa State charged with corruption. Other long-term goals are localizing control of Nigeria's oil, and receiving compensation from the national government for pollution. MEND is closely connected with Asari's Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), a rebel group with similar aims, or may be regarded as its evolutionary descendant.

Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari was born in 1964 as Dokubo Melford Goodhead Jr. into a middle class Christian family. He is a major political figure of the Ijaw ethnic group in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, which is the largest in the entire Delta region with a population of over 7 million. In December 1998, Asari was one of the founding members of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), and was appointed as vice-president of the organization. The organization issued the Kaiama Declaration, in which it called the oil companies to suspend operations and withdraw from Ijaw territory. The IYC pledged "to struggle peacefully for freedom, self-determination and ecological justice." He was president of the Ijaw Youth Council for a time beginning in 2001 and later founded the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, which is one of the most prominent armed groups



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operating in the Niger Delta region. He is a devout Muslim with populist views and an anti-government stance that has made him a folk hero amongst certain members of the local population. Asari is also an outspoken admirer of Osama bin Laden, with whom he has financial links, and has drawn parallels between his war against the Nigerian government and al-Qaeda's struggle against the West.

After the launching of a mission to wipe out NDPVF in 2004, officially approved by President Obasanjo in early September, Asari declared "all-out war" with the Nigeria state as well as the oil corporations and threatened to disrupt oil production activities through attacks on wells and pipelines. This quickly caused a major crisis the following day, on September 26, 2005, as Shell evacuated 235 non-essential personnel from two oil fields, cutting oil production by 30,000 barrels a day and pushing up the price of petroleum worldwide significantly. Due to the oil crisis this precipitated, President Obasanjo called Asari and the leader of its rival military group, the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), Akeke Tom, to Abuja for peace talks, which were in large part a failure. After his refusal to cooperate and due to his public support of independence for the Niger Delta, Asari was arrested in September 2005 and charged with treason by the Nigerian federal government.

Nigeria is Africa's leading oil exporter and the fifth biggest source of U.S. oil imports. After nearly four decades of oil production, Nigeria became by the early 1990s almost completely dependent on petroleum extraction economically, generating 25% of its GDP (this has since risen to 40% as of 2000). Despite the vast wealth created by petroleum, the benefits have been slow to trickle down to the majority of the population, who since the 1960s has increasingly abandoned their traditional agricultural practices. Thus, in spite of the large number of skilled, well-paid Nigerians who have been employed by the oil corporations, the majority of Nigerians and most especially the people of the Niger Delta states and the far north have become poorer since the 1960s.

The Delta region has a steadily growing population estimated to be over 30 million people as of 2005, accounting for more than 23% of Nigeria's total population. The population is also among the highest in the world with 265 people per kilometer-squared. This population is expanding at a rapid 3% per year and the oil capital, Port Harcourt, along with other large towns are growing quickly. Poverty and urbanization in Nigeria are on the rise, and official corruption is considered a fact of life. The resultant scenario is one in which there is urbanization but no accompanying economic growth to find jobs. This has ironically forced the growing populace to begin destroying the ecosystem that they require to sustain themselves.

Thus, conflict in the Niger Delta arose in the early 1990s due to tensions between the foreign oil corporations and a number of Niger Delta's minority ethnic groups who felt they were being exploited, particularly the Ogoni as well as the Ijaw in the late 1990s. Ethnic and political unrest has continued throughout the 1990s and persists as of 2006. Competition for oil wealth has fuelled violence between innumerable ethnic groups, causing the militarization of nearly the entire region by ethnic militia groups as well as Nigerian military and police forces.



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MEND emerged independent of either the Wahhabi Shari'ah movement in northern Nigeria or the Nigerian Taliban that first appeared in Yobe state in December 2003 (these developments will be surveyed broadly in the following issues of this newsletter). Therefore, it is unlikely for a number of reasons that it is aligned with either group. Its members are mainly Catholics, though Asari is an exception and maybe there are several more Muslims, but they are still few in number. The Nigerian Taliban movement appears to have been defeated, while the Wahhabi Shari'ah movement seeks to use the power of the state to establish an environment favorable to Wahhabi Salafists, at least at the local level. MEND and its Ijaw backers believe that the Nigerian government already has too much power and favor stronger local control.

However, a possible link with al-Qaeda might be the former Bayelsa state governor, Depriye Alamieyeseigha, MEND's main financial supporter, who is currently facing extradition to the United Kingdom where he skipped bail on money laundering charges. He is suspected of backing terrorism and—based on intelligence reports forwarded to the British by the Nigerian authorities—of smuggling arms and of enjoying close links with Osama bin Laden. Assuming he will be extradited to the UK, his trial will be most important to understand whether MEND has really any connection whatsoever with al-Qaeda.

Fierce Fighting in Mogadishu – Clan Fighting or Ideological Battleground?

After seven days of fighting between heavily armed militias in which at least 190 people were killed, hundreds more injured, and thousands more had been displaced, a ceasefire was signed between the warring sides on May 14, 2006. The fighting began on May 7, 2006, between rival militias in Mogadishu. Initially, the fighting started between militias loyal to Nur Daqle and those led by the chairman of the Islamic courts, Shaykh Sharif Shaykh Ahmed to gain supremacy in the Si Si area of north Mogadishu dominated by the Agoon Yar sub-clan of the Abgal. Both Daqle and Ahmed belong to the Agoon Yar sub-clan of the Abgal community. However, what originated as an internal feud became a battle between the Islamic courts and the newly created Alliance for Peace and the Fight against International Terrorism, which according to rumors is supported by the U.S.

Though the latest fighting in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, started on May 7, 2006, the violence goes back to as far as February 18, 2006, when Mogadishu-based faction leaders and their business associates formed an alliance to fight Islamic courts. The two heavily armed militias are the Union of Islamic Courts and the Alliance for Peace and the Fight against International Terrorism, which calls itself "the alliance". Members of the alliance include warlords and government ministers. The perception among the Somalis is that the West supports the alliance in order to reduce the power and influence of the Islamic courts upon the population. This perception makes the Islamic courts even more popular. Furthermore, the Islamic courts have earned some popularity for bringing a semblance of order in areas under their control, something the faction leaders have been unable or unwilling to do. It should be mentioned that the first Islamic court was set up in



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Mogadishu in 1994, to establish law and order after Somalia descended to anarchy in 1991.

The situation in Mogadishu is still tense since neither side had committed to a permanent ceasefire. Thus, a close doors meeting between the intellectuals of Ayr and Sa'ad sub-clans of Habar-Gidir clan over removing the checkpoints on the road in southern Mogadishu outskirts that took place on May 16, has ended in deadlock. Both sides disagreed on the issue of reopening the road that links Mogadishu and Afgoie, which has been conditioned initially to clear all checkpoints erected by the Islamic militiamen in the capital.

Moreover, lethal weapons continue to flood into Somalia, despite a 15-year arms embargo imposed by the United Nations. According to a United Nations' report published on May 10, arms and other military material flow into Somalia "like a river". In its latest report to the UN Security Council, the Monitoring Group on Somalia, which was set up to investigate the UN arms embargo, blamed the flow of weapons on a "widening circle of states, each with its own agenda, arms trading groups, economically powerful individuals, and the business elite." The committee found that Somalia's transitional federal government, the Mogadishu-based opposition alliance, Islamist groups, the business elite, pirate groups and feuding sub-clans continued to receive weaponry, material and financial support in spite of the embargo. The report further said that Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Italy, Saudi Arabia and Yemen provided military equipment and supplies to the Somali militia groups during the later part of 2005 and the first quarter of 2006. On May 10, the Security Council voted unanimously to extend the monitoring group's mandate and called on all UN member states, particularly those in the region, to strictly abide by the arms embargo and to take all necessary steps to hold violators accountable. It also urged Somali leaders to continue political dialogue and refrain from violence.

What further contributes to this chaos and fighting in the capital is that Somalia lacks a functioning government. The transitional Somali government has achieved very little since its formation in October 2004 in Kenya, following the signing of the Somali peace accord. The principal duty of the transitional parliament is to initiate the reconciliation process and rebuild democratic institutions. In April 2006, the transitional parliament voted to make Baidoa the seat of government since the fighting and insecurity in Mogadishu has prevented the government from settling there. Since the signing of the Somali peace accord, President Yussuf has been pleading for a regional intervention force to help establish his government, in addition to calling for the lifting of the UN arms embargo to allow the transitional federal government to arm itself.

But, various civil groups supported by some warlords have been opposed to the deployment of troops from the frontline states of Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti on the grounds that these countries, which have been deeply involved in the affairs of the country since the fall of Siad Barre in 1991, are pushing for their own interests. However, the transitional government has started putting the various militia groups in garrisons and training them to be part of a new military and police force.



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Darfur Peace Agreement – Will it last?

On May 5, 2006, the government of Sudan and the largest rebel group operating in Darfur, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA), signed a comprehensive peace agreement in Abuja, Nigeria. The peace agreement came after three years of fighting in Darfur that has killed about 300,000 people. Some two million more have been displaced. The Sudanese government and allied Arab militias are accused of carrying out a campaign of genocide against mostly black farmers. The peace agreement does not include the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), or a breakaway of the Sudan Liberation Army.

There are two rebel groups in the Darfur region jointly fighting the Sudanese government but with different ideologies. The SLA, which is the larger faction, has its roots from an unrest that took place in 1987 in Darfur. In that year, following a devastating famine, an Arab alliance was established, with official encouragement to oppose the African farming communities of Fur, Zagawa, and Nassalit. The government quietly armed the Arabs while disarming the Africans. The first SLA recruits were from a Fur self-defense militia that opposed the Arabs. The Zagawa joined the movement later, in 1989, after the government failed to implement a peace deal that required Arab nomads to pay compensation for Zagawa people killed including prominent tribal leaders. The SLA stands for a united democratic Sudan. On the other hand, the JEM came into existence only in 1989 when Omar al-Bashir threw Sadeq al-Mahdi in a coup that was backed by the National Islamic Front of Hassan al-Turabi. From this platform, Turabi offered African Muslims whom he recruited into his movement, prominent places in government. In 1999, Turabi came into open conflict with President al-Bashir for trying to reduce the powers of the president. The African Muslims who Turabi put in government were consequently dropped and it is this group of people who formed the JEM, accusing the Arab of disproportionate representation at the top levels of government and the administration.

The chances of implementing the peace agreement may prove difficult. One challenge on the road to really implementing the agreement is to get those factions, which refused to sign the agreement, to sign it. The second challenge is to find everyone with arms on Darfur, which is the size of France, and confiscate it from them. This may prove to be very difficult and will surely require a good deal of political will combined with international pressure to ensure compliance by the signatories.

Another obstacle on the way to implement the peace agreement is that the people of Darfur know very little about the agreement. Moreover, they have not been party to the talks. This is an imposed and partial peace between the Sudanese government and the faction of the SLA that is led by Minni Minawi, who represents at most only 8% of the population of Darfur. Hence, the people of Darfur are demonstrating against it, recognizing in the signatories two narrowly based parties who believe in domination through force and preferring continued struggle to what they perceive as surrender.



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Furthermore, there are many in the Khartoum government who believe they can crush the movements by force and who will try, even if given half a chance. Rushing an agreement that some factions still oppose could, in a worst-case scenario, give them that chance.

Another surprising challenge is the possibility of the showing up of al-Qaeda activists, who might fight against a future United Nations peacekeeping mission in Darfur. On April 23, 2006, al-Jazirah TV channel broadcasted a bin Laden audiotape in which he called "on Mujahideen and their supporters, especially in Sudan and the Arab peninsula, to prepare for long war against the Crusader plunderers in Western Sudan." He further said, "our goal is not defending the Khartoum government but to defend Islam, its land and its people."

In response to this message, the Islamist JEM rejected bin Laden's appeal since the real danger comes from Khartoum, "which is a Muslim government killing other Muslims." The SLA declared the aim of bin Laden is to "exterminate the peoples of Darfur." Even the Sudanese government announced that Sudan would not play host to terrorists. On the other hand, the Sudanese government will not tolerate a future decision to replace African Union forces stationed in Darfur with UN troops. However, on May 16, 2006, the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution calling for the deployment on the ground of a joint UN-African Union (AU) assessment team within one week to lay the groundwork for the operation, which would take over from the AU mission now monitoring the area. The Council further called on all parties to the Darfur peace agreement to work with the AU, the UN, regional and international organizations and member states to accelerate the transition to a UN operation.

If one looks at the agreement, he can see that its security provisions are good. According to the agreement, the Sudan government must withdraw its forces from many areas it currently occupies, and must disarm the Janjaweed within five months – before the rebels even begin to lay down their arms. Guarantees include an independent advisory team that both Canada and Norway are keen to head up. The government must downsize the paramilitary Popular Defense Force (PDF) and Border Guards in which Janjaweed have been hidden. The PDF must be abolished in three or four years. Thousands of rebels will be integrated into the Sudanese Armed Forces and some will even be given command posts.

However, from Darfur's viewpoint, the agreement's weakest point is its provisions for power sharing. At the federal level, the rebel movements have won few concessions and have the fourth place in the national hierarchy. The government has won the battle to keep Darfur divided into three states, until a referendum on a single region, and controls 50% of state legislatures to the rebels 30%, with the remaining 20% going to independents – a division that could, in reality, produce an anti-government majority. Until the merger of Darfur within Sudan, the movements will control the Transitional Darfur Regional Authority (TDRA). It is the TDRA, which will be the real power until elections. It will implement the peace agreement, supervise reconstruction and economic development, and help the return and resettlement of the refugees. All the TDRA's commission heads will be the movements' nominees.