



# Journal of Terrorism Research

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## **Opinion Piece - Gangs and Terrorist: Dangerous Classmates in Minnesota's Somali Community.**

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### *School Bells to Police Sirens*

Morning television programs are suddenly interrupted across the world as pictures of frightened people running panicked through downtown city streets fill the airwaves. In the background, smoke and flames billow from a towering icon of the cityscape. Panic grips the US as security goes on high alert across the nation, bringing a virtual standstill to transportation and commerce. The Commodities Exchange closes during the middle of the day sending shockwaves through the global financial establishment.

Hold the presses. This is not the World Trade Center of New York City on 9/11/01 or 2/26/93 nor is it the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City on 4/19/95. The camera's focus on the former Sears Tower of Chicago in the not too distant future. Al-Queda linked Al-Shabab has attacked the tallest building in the US in the middle of the heartland. More terrifying, the ground work was laid not in the training camps of Sub-Saharan Africa, but the playgrounds of Minneapolis, MN.

### *Somali Gangs Come of Age*

Somali refugees began settling in Minnesota in the early 1990's to escape the turmoil of their native land as the government failed and militants took control. While the community as a whole was welcoming, the inner city schools where the children found themselves were not. Born out of the need for self protection from existing gangs, the Somali teens formed loosely organized gangs beginning in 2000. The Somali gangs eventually turned to criminal activities, beginning with muggings and burglary. Recently, the gangs changed revenue streams to sex trafficking and credit card fraud due to lower risk with a higher profitability. [1] The Somali gangs are driven by monetary gain and show a high adaptability to new opportunities.

### *Term Papers to Terrorism*

While gangs are not uncommon to modern urban America, a more disturbing trend has beset the same community. Beginning in 2007 and continuing through January of 2009 [2] as many as

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two dozen Somali teens have disappeared from the Minneapolis community. [3] Of the missing Minnesotan Somali teens, 5 have been killed [4] in actions including suicide bombings. [5]

NPR's Dina Temple-Raston reports that some of the young men have returned from Somalia. [6] Community leaders say that the youth were disillusioned by what they saw and do not pose a threat. [7] However, their return poses a more disturbing issue than their departure. No one knows how they were able to re-enter the country. Their documentation was confiscated at the training camps. [8]

### *BFF: Bomb-transporting For Funds*

Looked at in a vacuum, the troubles with the Minnesota Somali youth populations raise concern for any local and state government. But across the country on the opposite border, trends are developing that should raise the Minneapolis trouble to the level of National Security Risk.

Mexican drug trafficking organizations maintain the overland routes for drugs and other illicit materials. Although, the Mexican drug traffickers produce little heroin and cocaine, they account for a large share of heroin and an estimated 90% of cocaine transported into and distributed throughout the US. [9] With money as their motivation, drug traffickers have set their sights on an industry worth \$15 to \$20 billion a year in Mexico. [10] Drug traffickers are diversifying into human smuggling. [11]

At the same time the US Customs and Border Patrol has seen a significant increase in the numbers of Other Than Mexicans (OTMs) caught crossing border. In 2001, OTMs numbered only 5,251. [12] By 2006 the number had soared to 108,025 and included individuals from Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. [13] Beyond the increasing numbers of prayer rugs and Arabic marked trash, Border Patrol agents found a book titled, "In Memory of Our Martyrs." This treatise celebrates the lives of Islamic suicide bombers and other militants who died carrying out jihadist attacks. [14] The Mexican drug traffickers are demonstrating an affinity for transporting anyone across the border that pays the price irrespective of ideology.

Furthermore, half way across the world, evidence has surfaced of Al-Shabab doing business with Somali Pirates. During a recent interview, Saeed Yare, a Somali pirate from Bosasso stated, "(Pirates) in other towns give cash to Islamist in order to continue their business. Al-Shabab is just another pirate group." [15] Like the Mexican drug traffickers, Al-Shabab does business with anyone who can forward their cause without consideration for ideology.

### *Head of the Class*

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Back on the Minneapolis playground, gang members and jihadists have been classmates and friends for years. No need exists for introductions through seedy business partners and possible federal agents. No discussions take place to establish a tense partnership between two organizations that don't completely trust each other. The gang members and jihadists feel a kinship; both chose a different path to deal with the same disenfranchisement that they feel towards the larger community around them. The fire was lit long ago, the water is already to a boil, if the situation is not handled quickly and carefully, the pressure cooker will explode.

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## Notes:

[1] A Forliti, (March 2011) 'Somali Gangs Move Into Sex Trafficking, Fraud', <http://www.msnbc.com/cleanprint/CleanPrintProxy.aspx?1297181536316>

[2] D Temple-Raston, (November 2009) '8 Charged In Terrorism Probe Of Missing Somalis', <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=120683051>

[3] D. Temple-Raston, (January 2009) 'Missing Somali Teens May Be Terrorist Recruits', <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=99919934>

[4] *Ibid.* 2

[5] NPR Staff, (March 2009) 'Somalis Missing From Minn. May Have Returned', <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=102416429>

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] C. Cook, (2007) *Mexico's Drug Cartels: October 16, 2007* (Washington DC) Congressional Research Service

[10] A. Brice, (August 2010) 'Human Trafficking Second Only To Drugs in Mexico', [http://articles.cnn.com/2010-08-26/world/mexico.human.trafficking\\_1\\_human-trafficking-cartel-human-rights?\\_s=PM:WORLD](http://articles.cnn.com/2010-08-26/world/mexico.human.trafficking_1_human-trafficking-cartel-human-rights?_s=PM:WORLD)

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Fox News Staff, (July 2005) 'Other Than Mexican? Welcome to America',

[13] W. La Jeunesse, (January 2011) 'Iranian Book Celebrating Suicide Bombers Found in Arizona Desert', <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2011/01/27/iranian-book-celebrating-suicide-bombers-arizona-desert/>

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Reuters Staff, (March 2011) 'Somali Pirate: I Made \$2.4M From Ransoms in 2010', <http://www.foxbusiness.com/markets/2011/03/11/somali-pirate-24m-ransoms-2010/>

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