

Ras Kamboni Brigade

AT A GLANCE

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SUMMARY

Formed: 2008

Disbanded: February 2010

First Attack: August 20, 2008: The Ras Kamboni Brigade and Al Shabaab conducted a joint attack on Kismayo, one of Somalia’s key port cities. The groups’ battle against Kismayo’s militias, which were composed of the dominant Marehan clan, ended after two days when the Ras Kamboni Brigade and Al Shabaab successfully conquered the city. (unknown killed, unknown wounded).¹

Last Attack: September 2008: Ras Kamboni fighters claimed responsibility for an attack against the Transitional Federal Government presidential compound and clashes with peacekeepers from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). (unknown killed, unknown wounded).²

OVERVIEW

The Ras Kamboni Brigade was an Islamist militia operating primarily in Jubaland, located in southern Somalia near the border with Kenya. It was founded sometime in the 2000s by Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki, a former leader in an Islamist group called Al Ittihad Al Islamiya (AIAI) and its successor, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). The Ras Kamboni Brigade fought against Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and foreign troops. In 2009, the group briefly merged with three other Islamist militant groups to form a new organization, Hizbul Islam. However, over the course of late 2009 and early 2010, the Ras Kamboni Brigade broke away from Hizbul Islam. The group split into two factions: one faction was led by al-Turki and later joined Al Shabaab, while the other faction formed a new group, the Ras Kamboni Movement.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The Ras Kamboni Brigade was an Islamist militia operating primarily in Jubaland, located in southern Somalia near the border with Kenya. It was founded sometime between 2006-2008 by Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki, a former leader of the Islamist group Al Ittihad Al Islamiya (AIAI) and its successor, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU).³ The Ras Kamboni Brigade took its name from a small coastal town near Somalia’s border with Kenya, which allegedly served as a training camp for Al Qaeda and ICU fighters in the 1990s and 2000s.⁴

In the 2000s, the ICU—a group that aimed to rule through Shariah law—sought control of parts of Somalia and briefly gained control of central and southern Somalia in mid-2006. Later the same year, Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Ethiopian forces launched a campaign against the ICU and other Islamist militant groups. During this campaign, from December 2006 to January 2007, Ras Kamboni was the site of a major battle between the ICU and allied militias against Somali and Ethiopian forces.⁵ In the battle, the ICU was defeated and formally disbanded on December 27, 2006. Sometime after, al-Turki formed the Ras Kamboni Brigade, which conducted prominent attacks in 2008 and primarily fought the TFG and Ethiopian troops.⁶

After its formation, the Ras Kamboni Brigade gained control over a number of strategically important towns near Somalia’s border with Kenya, including Jilib Afmadoow and Dhoobley. Al-Turki at one time controlled the city of Ras Kamboni, near Somalia’s border with Kenya, where he imposed a strict system of Shariah law that included a ban on cigarettes, the bearing of firearms, and khat, a semi-narcotic herb popular among Somalis. In October 2008, the Ras Kamboni Brigade enacted similar laws when it—along with other Islamist groups—controlled the town of Kismayo.⁷

In January 2009, after the Ethiopian withdrawal from Somalia and political compromises between the TFG and certain Islamist movements, the Ras Kamboni Brigade merged with three other Islamist groups—the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia-Eritrea, Jabhatul Islamiya, and Anole—to create Hizbul Islam. These four groups were united by their opposition to the TFG and any organizations that cooperated with the TFG. Hizbul Islam had a fluctuating relationship with Somalia’s most prominent Islamist militant group, Al Shabaab; the two organizations were sometimes allies and sometimes rivals. Regardless of the merger, the Ras Kamboni Brigade continued to identify itself as a distinct group within Hizbul Islam.⁸

Ruptures within the Ras Kamboni Brigade as well as between the Ras Kamboni Brigade and Hizbul Islam as a whole became evident around October 2009. One faction of the Ras Kamboni Brigade—led by al-Turki—began to align itself with Al Shabaab, which was in conflict with Hizbul Islam at the time. In February 2010, al-Turki’s faction completely broke away from Hizbul Islam and officially joined Al Shabaab; the faction also pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda. The other faction of the Ras Kamboni Brigade, led by Ahmed Mohamed Islam—more commonly known by the name “Madobe”—also left Hizbul Islam to form a separate group called the Ras Kamboni Movement, which opposes Al Shabaab. While Madobe’s Ras Kamboni Movement continued to exist as a separate entity after leaving Hizbul Islam, the Ras Kamboni Brigade effectively ended after it joined Al Shabaab. The Ras Kamboni Movement and the Ras Kamboni Brigade are sometimes referred to interchangeably. However, the Ras Kamboni

Brigade was much less active than the Ras Kamboni Movement has been. There is little information on the Ras Kamboni Brigade's specific tactics and attacks.⁹

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki (Unknown to February 2010): Turki, a former leader in the AIAI and later the ICU, founded the Ras Kamboni Brigade sometime after the ICU disbanded in the mid 2000s. He helped train militants near the Somalia-Kenya border. Turki was designated by the U.S. in 2004 as a terrorist leader and financier, and he was targeted in an unsuccessful airstrike by the U.S. in 2008. While the Ras Kamboni Brigade was part of Hizbul Islam, Turki served as Hizbul Islam's deputy chairman. Turki died of illness in May 2015.¹⁰

Ahmed Mohamed Islam (Unknown to 2010): Madobe, as Ahmed Mohamed Islam is more commonly known, led a faction within the Ras Kamboni Brigade. Madobe's faction defected around 2010 to form the Ras Kamboni Movement, after the Ras Kamboni Brigade joined Al Shabaab. Madobe and his group have worked with government forces against Al Shabaab. In 2013, Madobe was elected president of Somalia's Jubaland region.¹¹

B. NAME CHANGES

The Ras Kamboni Brigade has not undergone name changes as an independent organization, although it briefly formed part of the group called Hizbul Islam. Later, the Ras Kamboni Brigade broke from Hizbul Islam, with one faction joining Al Shabaab and the other faction forming a new group called the Ras Kamboni Movement.¹² The Ras Kamboni Brigade is sometimes mistakenly interchanged with the Ras Kamboni Movement.

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- February 2010: 500-1,000 fighters (The Long War Journal)¹³

D. RESOURCES

Beginning in 2008, the Ras Kamboni Brigade received direct financial support from the Eritrean government, reportedly around \$40,000 to \$50,000 each month in addition to funds for specific operations.¹⁴ There is little additional information about the Ras Kamboni Brigade's other resources.

E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the militant organization has bases and where it operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

The Ras Kamboni Brigade was based primarily in the Middle and Lower Juba Valley in Somalia's Jubaland, an autonomous region in the country's south. The group controlled a number of strategically important towns near Somalia's border with Kenya, including Jilib Afmadoow and Dhoobley.¹⁵

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY & GOALS

Little information exists on the Ras Kamboni Brigade's ideology and goals. It was an Islamist group that supported the implementation of Shariah law in Somalia. Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki, founder of the Ras Kamboni Brigade, was a Somali warlord involved with other Islamist groups—specifically the AIAI and its successor, the ICU—in the mid-1990s and 2000s. Al-Turki controlled the city of Ras Kamboni, near Somalia's border with Kenya, where he imposed a strict system of Shariah law that included a ban on cigarettes, the bearing of firearms, and khat, a semi-narcotic herb popular among Somalis. In October 2008, the Ras Kamboni Brigade enacted similar laws when it—along with other Islamist groups—controlled the town of Kismayo.¹⁶

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

During its brief existence, the Ras Kamboni Brigade did not engage in political activities.

C. TARGETS & TACTICS

Due to the Ras Kamboni Brigade's brief existence as an independent militant organization and paucity of recognized attacks, it is difficult to draw conclusions on the group's targets and tactics. Its attacks (see below) have included strikes on the Somali Transitional Federal Government and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: These are some selected major attacks in the militant organization's history. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most famous attacks or turning points during the campaign.

There is little information on individual attacks conducted by the Ras Kamboni Brigade as an independent group.

August 20, 2008: The Ras Kamboni Brigade and Al Shabaab conducted a joint attack on Kismayo, one of Somalia's key port cities. The groups' battle against Kismayo's militias, which were composed of the dominant Marehan clan, ended after two days when the Ras Kamboni Brigade and Al Shabaab successfully conquered the city. (unknown killed, unknown wounded).¹⁷

September 2008: Ras Kamboni fighters claimed responsibility for an attack against the Transitional Federal Government presidential compound and clashes with peacekeepers from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). (unknown killed, unknown wounded).¹⁸

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

The Ras Kamboni Brigade is not designated as a terrorist organization by the United States or the European Union.

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Most of the Ras Kamboni Brigade’s members and supporters were from the Ogaden clan, which is partially based in southern Somalia. Since the end of Somalia’s civil war around 1992, the Ogaden and other clans have fought for control of the Lower Juba region, especially the strategically important port city of Kismayo. Just as the Ogaden clan formed most of the Ras Kamboni Brigade, other armed groups in the region are often distinguished along clan lines.¹⁹

The Ras Kamboni Brigade supported the implementation of Shariah law in Somalia, and it reportedly implemented strict legal systems in areas under its control. Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki, founder of the Ras Kamboni Brigade, was a Somali warlord involved with other Islamist groups—specifically the AIAI and its successor, the ICU—in the mid-1990s and 2000s. Al-Turki controlled the city of Ras Kamboni, near Somalia’s border with Kenya, where he imposed a strict system of Shariah law that included a ban on cigarettes, the bearing of firearms, and khat, a semi-narcotic herb popular among Somalis. In October 2008, the Ras Kamboni Brigade enacted similar laws when it—along with other Islamist groups—controlled the town of Kismayo. Flights carrying khat were banned from landing at Kismayo’s airport.²⁰

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

The Ras Kamboni Brigade’s founder, Hassan Abdullah Hersi al-Turki, had links with Al Qaeda dating to the 1990s. In 1996, al-Turki invited Al Qaeda operatives to establish training camps in Ras Kamboni. Whether the Ras Kamboni Brigade itself had direct links to Al Qaeda is unclear.²¹

In January 2009, the Ras Kamboni Brigade and three other Islamist militant groups—the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia-Eritrea, Jabhatul Islamiya, and Anole—formed a new group, Hizbul Islam. The four original groups that formed Hizbul Islam were united by their opposition to Somalia’s Transitional Federal Government (TFG).²²

The Ras Kamboni Brigade, before and during its time as part of Hizbul Islam, had a shifting relationship with Somalia’s most prominent Islamist militant group, Al Shabaab. On August 20, 2008, the Ras Kamboni Brigade and Al Shabaab conducted a joint attack on Kismayo, one of Somalia’s key port cities. The groups’ battle against Kismayo’s militias, which were composed of the dominant Marehan clan, ended after two days when the Ras Kamboni Brigade and Al Shabaab successfully conquered the city. The Ras Kamboni Brigade and Al Shabaab jointly ruled Kismayo for at least one year, although tensions existed between Al Shabaab and Ras Kamboni members. In 2009, Ras Kamboni members produced pamphlets for the local population, claiming that Al Shabaab’s term of rule in Kismayo was over. In September, al-Turki—serving as Hizbul Islam’s deputy chairman—condemned Al Shabaab’s role in Kismayo. However, Al Shabaab consistently denied the existence of any tensions with the Ras Kamboni Brigade or Hizbul Islam as a whole. Throughout late 2009, large numbers of Hizbul Islam and Al Shabaab fighters were moving into the Kismayo area, and violence was expected.²³

However, by the end of 2009, one faction of the Ras Kamboni Brigade—led by al-Turki—had begun to align itself more closely with Al Shabaab. Over the course of late 2009 and early 2010, the Ras Kamboni Brigade broke away from Hizbul Islam. In February 2010, Al-Turki’s faction

of the Ras Kamboni Brigade formally joined Al Shabaab, pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda, and ceased to exist as a separate organization. The other faction of the Ras Kamboni Brigade, led by Ahmed Mohamed Islam—also known as “Madobe”—formed a new organization, the Ras Kamboni Movement, after breaking away from Hizbul Islam in 2010. Madobe and the Ras Kamboni Movement have strongly opposed Al Shabaab and have worked with government forces against it.²⁴

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

The Ras Kamboni Brigade’s main source of external support was the Eritrean government, which has also supported Al Shabaab and other armed groups in Somalia. The Eritrean government established direct links with the Ras Kamboni Brigade in 2008, funneling payments to the group of up to \$50,000 per month. In September 2008, an Eritrean government official traveled through Kenya to the Lower Juba region in order to deliver \$60,000 to a senior member of the Ras Kamboni Brigade.²⁵

MAPS

- Somalia

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