# Spy fears: Somali militants ban mobile internet

January 10 2014, by Abdi Guled

Somalia's al-Qaida-linked group has ordered telecom companies to shut down mobile internet services over fears the U.S. can use the data to target militants.

Al-Shabab this week set a 15-day deadline for the telecoms, whom the group accused of being "enemy collaborators." The two affected mobile operators that offer 3G data service declined to comment.

Al-Shabab said the service "corrupts the morals of society" and allows the enemy "to know your movements." Al-Shabab said mobile internet services allowed the targeting of some fighters, an apparent reference to drone strikes or other military operations.

Its statement said the decision comes amid "the spying scandals practiced by the Americans," according to a translation by the intelligence service SITE.

Taliban fighters in Afghanistan also order phone operators to shut down at night over fears the U.S. uses the data to track movements. Extremists in northeast Nigeria followed similar tactics in the early days of a 4-year-old Islamic uprising, bombing cellphone towers to disrupt communications in areas that they were attacking.

More recently, the Nigerian military in May cut all cellphone communications in northeast Nigeria, saying insurgents were using networks to coordinate attacks. Landlines do not work in Nigeria so

cellphones are the sole form of communication.

In Somalia, many of al-Shabab's harsh social rules—strict dress codes and rules on watching TV, for instance—result in a lack of support from average Somalis. Mohamed Ali, a resident in Mogadishu, said the militant group's latest restriction is "ill-advised" and prevents the country from living a "contemporary life."

"I am not surprised but that decision is meant to take Somalia backward," said Ali.

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