

## PRESS MATERIALS



# WARRIORS FROM THE NORTH

A documentar by  
Nasib Farah & Søren Steen Jespersen

International premier at IDFA 2014. Selected for Mid-length Competition  
To download press materials: <http://www.madeincopenhagen.dk/en/presserum>  
Press contact: Mira Bach, [mira@madeincopenhagen.dk](mailto:mira@madeincopenhagen.dk) // tlf. +45 3112 1003  
Watch the trailer: <https://vimeo.com/104595740>

made in  
**COPEN  
HAGEN**



Directors: *Nasib Farah and Søren Steen Jespersen*  
Producer: *Helle Faber* // Production Company: *made in copenhagen*  
Duration: 58.5 min

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Screenings at IDFA		LOCATION	TYPE
Fri 21-11	15:45	Tuschinski 3	Industry Screening
Sat 22-11	20:45	Munt 10	Regular Screening, short Q&A
Sun 23-11	10:00	Munt 11	Vrij Nederland Day, short Q&A
Tue 25-11	18:00	Tuschinski 2	Regular Screening, extended Q&A
Wed 26-11	19:30	Podium Mozaïek	Regular Screening
Fri 28-11	21:30	Munt 09	Regular Screening
Sun 30-11	10:00	Munt 11	Regular Screening

## **INTRODUCTION**

WARRIORS FROM THE NORTH is a unique look into an otherwise hermetically sealed world, a world where young Danish-Somali men leave Denmark to fight a Holy War and are willing to die for al-Shabab.

This is the first time an insider talks about the al-Shabab recruitment. Out of a group of young Danish-Somali al-Shabab sympathizers, two have died in suicide attacks in Mogadishu, killing several innocent people, including a group of doctor graduates and two UN peacekeepers. A third member, Mohammed, remains a holy warrior in Somalia. We meet his father, Abukar, who has devoted his life to bringing his son back safely. The fourth member, "The Shadow," recounts the entire story in a new Danish documentary, WARRIORS FROM THE NORTH.

The film reveals the consequences of growing up at the bottom of society, divided by two cultures and without a sense of belonging. It shows how tempting it is for these marginalized men to join Islamic militant groups such as al-Shabab or IS – and how difficult it can be to leave such an organization and return home.

Even though "The Shadow" has left al-Shabab, he still considers his time in the Danish cell as the best in his life, a period defined by strong bonds. This begs the question whether we, as a society, could have provided "The Shadow" with an alternative before he fell prey to al-Shabab's propaganda? And what will happen to Mohammed should he ever return to Denmark? Will he be forever labelled as a terrorist, or can he be re-integrated as an equal citizen in Danish society – a hope to which his father clings?

The documentary is an important voice in the current political debate about the increasing number of western European citizens who choose to become soldiers in the Holy War. In Denmark the Danish Security and Intelligence Service estimates that more than 100 Danes are currently or have previously been participating in the Holy War, and this is in Syria alone. It is estimated that 35-40 young Danish-Somalies have joined al-Shabab's fight in Somalia.

## **SYNOPSIS**

December 3, 2009: A young man detonates a suicide bomb during a graduation ceremony for doctors in a hotel in Mogadishu, killing himself and 24 other people. The young man is a Danish-Somali from Copenhagen. How did he end up in this tragic situation? Why did he make such a radical decision?

WARRIORS FROM THE NORTH is a documentary about a group of young Danish-Somali men, who decide to join the Somali rebel group al-Shabab. They form a secret group in Copenhagen, and some of them turn extremists. So far two of them have blown themselves up, taking with them several innocent people.

A third member, Mohammed, is still an al-Shabab warrior. The film follows his father's desperate attempts to find him and convince him to come back to Denmark. Abukar spends each day fearing that his son will be the next suicide bomber in Somalia.

“The Shadow” is the fourth group member and the narrator of this film. For the first time, we learn what these men are thinking and their motivation for joining al-Shabab. How is it even possible to convince young men to kill and to die for the Islamic cause?

WARRIORS FROM THE NORTH explores why an increasing number of young Danish-Somali men choose to join al-Shabab and thus might end up as suicide bombers in Somalia. The film seeks to provide a nuanced picture of the young Danish-Somalis and the reasons behind their choices, which most people find difficult to understand.

We also meet a number of current and former al-Shabab warriors from Holland, Norway, Finland and England.

## **BACKGROUND**

The documentary, WARRIORS FROM THE NORTH, is the result of the close collaboration between Danish-Somali journalist, Nasib Farah, and journalist and director Søren Steen Jespersen. It can be challenging for an outsider to penetrate the Somali community in Denmark, so Nasib Farah’s direct access to this community has been critical to the realization of this documentary. Over a period of four years, Søren Steen Jespersen and Nasib Farah persistently nudged their way into the community and – with the help of Nasib Farah’s stringers in Somalia – all the way into the very heart of al-Shabab in Mogadishu.

### **“The Shadow” and His Anonymity**

One of the main characters is the young anonymous Danish-Somali whom we’ve chosen to call “The Shadow”. Through his account we get a picture of the young Danish-Somali men’s thought processes when they choose to become warriors for al-Shabab. There are many reasons “The Shadow” can’t reveal his identity. As important as it is to tell his story, he fears that doing so will draw the attention of potential al-Shabab sympathizers, and he is scared that he will be labelled as terrorist by the Danish authorities.

Director Søren Steen Jespersen has completed and recorded several hour-long conversations with “The Shadow.” Afterward Jespersen transcribed the interviews, and based on this material, he wrote “The Shadow’s” story, which is pivotal to the film. A few facts were intentionally changed in agreement with “The Shadow” and with the purpose of protecting his identity. “The Shadow” approved the final version of the story before it was recorded a young actor.

### **Abukar – A Father’s Story**

The other main character is the Somali man, Abukar. His son Mohammed is an al-Shabab warrior, and it is Abukar’s greatest wish to bring him back home safely. The fact that Abukar has decided to come forth with his story is in itself highly unusual. Talking about al-Shabab is taboo in the Somali community, and it is connected with great shame and fear.

## **The young warriors from the North**

We have worked closely with Nasib Farah's journalism partners in Mogadishu in order to trace and interview the young al-Shabab warriors from Norway, Finland, Holland and England who appear in the film. Most of the warriors hide their faces when they appear on camera. But we know the identity of every single one.

### **Director's Motivation**

*By Søren Steen Jespersen*

I respect and admire "The Shadow" and Abukar, because when they choose to come forward and speak about al-Shabab, they break a taboo. That takes courage. The film wants to start the debate as to why the young al-Shabab recruits make such radical decisions. Why do they decide to kill themselves and innocent people in suicide bombings? It is easy to condemn them, but it is far more interesting and important to try to understand them. This is a human story about what can happen when people don't feel welcome, when they feel excluded from society, when they are reduced to second-class citizens in an affluent society.

### **Co-Director's Motivation**

*By Nasib Farah*

I have been around young Somali men my entire life - at school and in the youth club. It is important to me that we do something about the isolation that many Somalis in Denmark feel. They deserve a voice - even if it is to speak out about angry young men, who let themselves be recruited by al-Shabab. I know several of the warriors personally. I went to the same youth club as Abdi, who killed himself and the medical school graduates in a suicide bombing. I have always thought of him as a long-lost younger brother. My background and my life are very similar to his and to that of the other al-Shabab warriors. We are Danes with Somali heritage. We came to Denmark in the beginning of the nineties. We are the same age. We were young, had fun, went out together and enjoyed ourselves. We moved in the same circles, and we were there for each other. We were friends. They were far from extremists - as far away as you can get - but like so many other young people in Denmark with dark complexion and a foreign name, they too felt unwanted and out of place. Seeing people cross to the other side of the street and being turned down repeatedly from job interviews, internships and even at the entrance of a nightclub, all added to the feeling that they didn't belong. Humans have a fundamental need for acceptance and belonging. This is probably one of the main reasons my former friends were susceptible to al-Shabab's manipulation. Who doesn't want to be valued? Who wouldn't want to live a meaningful life, serving a higher purpose?

### **Søren Steen Jespersen – Biography**

For many years director Søren Steen Jespersen has worked with journalistic documentaries produced for television in the areas of programming and production. He is also an experienced producer of several award-winning documentaries, but *WARRIORS OF THE NORTH* marks his directorial debut. Jespersen has his own production company, *Larm Film*.

2014 **Documentary, *WARRIORS FROM THE NORTH***, director, 58 min.

2013 Documentary, *Carbon Crooks*, producer

- 2012 Documentary, *The Power of Words*, producer
- 2009 Documentary, *The Invisible Gang*, producer
- 2008 Documentary, *69*, producer
- 2006 Documentary, *BZ*, producer

### Nasib Farah – Biography

Nasib Farah was 11 years old when he came to Europe as an unaccompanied minor and illegal refugee from the civil war in his homeland, Somalia.

Nasib has dedicated his adult life to working with young Somalis in Denmark, in part through his various media projects addressing the Somali community.

- 2014 Documentary, **WARRIORS FROM THE NORTH**, co-director, 58 min. Premieres October 12, 2014, at 22:00 on DR1
- 2012 Documentary, *MY COUSIN THE PIRATE*, co-director. Director: Christian Sønderby Jepsen.

#### CREDITS:

DIRECTOR	Søren Steen Jespersen
CO-DIRECTOR	Nasib Farah
PRODUCER	Helle Faber
CINEMATOGRAPHER	Henrik Bohn Ipsen
SCRIPT WRITER:	Lars K. Andersen & Søren Steen Jespersen
EDITOR	Steen Johannesen
SOUND	Reda El-Kheloufi
MUSIC	Morten Svenstrup
Graphics:	Rune Birk Hansen

#### In co-production with:



DET DANSKE FILMINSTITUT

**Det Danske Film institut, DR, Danida, Undervisningsministeriet, Media, YLE, NRK, STV**

#### About Made in Copenhagen

The production company, *made in Copenhagen* was founded in 2010 by producer Helle Faber, who is also the company's director. Previous productions include award-winning films such as *Shady Chocolate*, *Au Pair* and *Putin's Kiss*, as well as the current films *A Civilized Country* and *Naked*. // WWW: <http://www.madeincopenhagen.dk/en>



## **Al-Shabab fact sheet**

- Al-Shabab is a militant Islamic movement in Somalia. The movement was formed in 2006 as an off-shoot of the Islamic Courts Union.
- Members of al-Shabab think of themselves as jihad warriors fighting against enemies of Islam, and their goal is to impose a strict form of Sharia law.
- Ideologically al-Shabab is similar to the terrorist organization al-Qa'ida, and in February 2012 al-Shabab became the official Somali branch of the al-Qa'ida terrorist network.
- Al-Shabab was behind the killing of 76 people at a football stadium in Kampala, Uganda, in 2010. The movement is suspected of being responsible for several acts of terror in other African countries, such as Kenya.
- Al-Shabab also claimed responsibility for the attack on Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2013 where at least 67 people were killed, including several westerners.
- The movement is waging a guerrilla war against the Somali government. At the beginning of September 2014, it was behind an ambush of the Somali president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, who escaped the attack on his convoy without injuries.
- Al-Shabab has also attacked peacekeeping forces from the African Union, the UN and western relief organizations in Somalia.
- Al-Shabab consists mostly of young war veterans from the Somali civil war, and the movement has gained increased support after their fight against American-backed leaders in Mogadishu in 2006.
- On September 6, 2014 Ritzau and AFP issued a statement from al-Shahab, which confirmed that its leader, Ahmed Godane, was killed in a U.S. airstrike. Abii Ubeyda Ahmad Omar was appointed his successor.