

## Somalia's Current Security and Stability Status

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank Chairman Flake, Ranking member Booker and the other members of the Subcommittee on African Affairs for inviting Crisis Group to testify today on Security and Governance in Somalia. Crisis Group has been working on Somalia since 2002, and we continue to follow events there closely from our office in Nairobi, with frequent visits to the country's various regions.

Crisis Group is an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental organization that provides field-based analysis, policy advice and recommendations to governments, the United Nations, the European Union and other multilateral organizations on the prevention and resolution of deadly conflict. Crisis Group publishes some 80 reports and briefing papers annually, as well as a monthly CrisisWatch bulletin. Our staff covers over 60 countries and is focused on conflict prevention and mitigation, as well as post-conflict peacebuilding.

### *Drone strikes are not enough: the primacy of politics*

The U.S. cannot defeat Al-Shabaab solely with targeted killings, special forces operations and military training. At best this approach will degrade Al-Shabaab's military capability and ability to strike domestic and foreign targets, but, as we learned in Vietnam and again in Afghanistan and Iraq, these efforts are not sustainable unless the Somali federal and state governments address the chronic political infighting, poor governance and corruption that drive communities to support, or at the very least tolerate, Al-Shabaab. Yet the most significant U.S. efforts are military, and other efforts to promote good governance and development are hampered by the lack of a U.S. ambassador to Somalia and onerous State Department and USAID security restrictions (most U.S. government officials cannot leave the Mogadishu airport), as well as poor coordination among external actors.

What, then, is the most effective way to counter Al-Shabaab? The answer is not necessarily more money. Rather it is smarter assistance, based on a sound understanding of local political dynamics, that employs carrots and sticks to nudge Somali leaders to support governance reform and better administration. Otherwise expensive technical assistance and training programs may have only temporary and limited impact.

We can draw some lessons from the record. Somalia, which is roughly divided into three major regions, can be thought of as a natural experiment in terms of how much international assistance—be it money or military support—is necessary to promote stability, with Somaliland receiving the least, Puntland some more, and South and Central Somalia the most. Instructively, Somaliland, which relies the most on local political compromise, is the most stable, while South and Central Somalia, the region that gets the most international attention and military support, is the most insecure.

### *The government is winning, kind of*

Admittedly, the federal government of Somalia has made tremendous strides since 2010, when it controlled only a small district in Mogadishu. Since then it has, with enormous

support from the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), pushed Al-Shabaab out of most urban centers. The government has also helped establish, sometime grudgingly, five federal member states (not counting the self-declared independent Somaliland) to provide more local administration. But Al-Shabaab is resilient. The gains are fragile and very dependent on international military and donor support.

Popular support for the government also continues to wax and wane. The widespread euphoria that greeted the election of a new president, Mohammed Abdullahi “Farmajo”, in February 2017 has been replaced by acute anxiety. The huge expectations of change and reform are unmet; politics remains as fractured as ever; AMISOM is planning its withdrawal at a time when the threat from Al-Shabaab remains potent; and many of the country’s familiar governance and security challenges are compounded by new external and geopolitical pressures.

Progress in rebuilding the state is fundamentally limited because there is no national political settlement and the allocation of power and resources is poorly, if at all, defined. (One of the biggest problems is the ill-defined division of power between the president, prime minister and parliament.) The government has continued to rule based on the 2012 Provisional Constitution. Despite much prompting, even threats, from international donors, efforts to draft and promulgate a permanent constitution have been stymied by disagreements and political infighting. The lack of an agreed political settlement at the national and federal levels has meant that governance tends to be based on ad-hoc deals and arrangements.

Farmajo’s challenges have been compounded by several political missteps. He campaigned with a nationalist message, saying he would stand up to meddling foreign powers, and lost much domestic goodwill when the government handed over an Ethiopian-Somali rebel commander to Addis Ababa and declared the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), fighting for the self-determination for Somalis in the Somali Region of Ethiopia (also known as the Ogaden), a terrorist group.

Another misstep was an ill-advised decision to authorize a deadly December 2017 raid on opposition leader Abdirahman Abdishakur’s residence in Mogadishu, in which five of his bodyguards were killed. This raid was a serious setback for democratization and reconciliation processes. Abdishakur claims it was an assassination attempt. The government denies this.

A day after the raid a federal government minister was sent to meet with elders of Abdishakur’s Habar Gedir clan to apologize and offer compensation. The minister admitted “a mistake occurred”. In the absence of an independent probe and with two sharply contrasting, highly partisan narratives, the truth may never come to light. Irrespective, the government has come out badly. The opposition claims the raid reflects the regime’s “growing authoritarian tendencies”.

These tendencies stem in large part from the pressure, from its nationalist support base and even the wider public, to act tough. But in seeking to appear tough it is upsetting the unwritten rules of governing the fragile state. Instead of building alliances and winning new friends, it is antagonizing powerful clan constituencies and fomenting new tensions, especially in Mogadishu.

For example, observers blame federal government official's abrasive style and provocative rhetoric for stoking tensions in the disputed territories of Sool and Sanaag, where a dangerous military standoff between Somaliland and Puntland risks escalating into open conflict.

In addition, there is an unresolved and knotty issue of whether the capital Mogadishu, estimated to have over two million inhabitants (out of an estimated fourteen million for the whole country), should also be its own federal state would have been easier to manage had the government used more tact and discretion. Instead, Villa Somalia picked a fight with then Mayor Thabit Abdi Mohammed, who championed the city's statehood, and used rough tactics to have him removed. The mayor's own alleged corruption and unbridled ambitions ultimately served as a good pretext to fire him, but the manner of his ouster has solidified the opposition in Mogadishu and cost the federal government huge support.

### *Corruption*

Government corruption remains a massive problem in Somalia, which is rated the most corrupt country in the world by Transparency International. Official fraud, theft and malfeasance have undermined decades of international efforts to rebuild a Somali state. Official venality is a major recruiting point for Al-Shabaab. Although some international donors now give stipends directly to troops (the U.S. recently suspended its payments because of corruption and human rights concerns), many government soldiers are poorly paid and provisioned. It is worth noting that several important areas in the Shabelle river valley are now in the control of Al-Shabaab after government troops pulled out in protest because some of them have not received salaries for months. On 14 December 2017, the U.S. suspended food and fuel aid for most of Somalia's armed forces over corruption concerns.

According to the Somalia Monitoring Group's 2 November 2017 report, "despite limited improvements in public financial management, federal institutions remain incapable of addressing pervasive corruption. Mechanisms established to review Government contracts have continued to be circumvented, and the lack of transparency regarding company ownership leaves all Government contracts open to concerns of nepotism. Government ministries continue to bypass the Treasury Single Account at the Central Bank of Somalia, avoiding oversight of their revenues by the Federal Government's fiscal authorities. The misappropriation and misuse of public land in Mogadishu is ongoing, despite pledges from the previous administration to address the problem. The printing of counterfeit Somali currency in Puntland continues to undermine economic stability and has prompted outbreaks of civil unrest".

### *Federal tensions*

The government has finalized the broad outlines of the federal system, comprising five member states (Somaliland continues to insist it is independent, and calls for a Benadir state, centered on Mogadishu, remain politically contentious). Unfortunately, the process of federal member states creation was often arbitrary, contested by local communities, and designed to lock out certain minority clans from power. As a result, it has lacked broad legitimacy. It also failed to precisely demarcate state borders and the new federal state borders clash with traditional notions of clan "boundaries" or "ancestral homelands". Unclear territorial claims increase tensions and feed grievances, which can trigger armed conflict.

Nevertheless, the five existing states have been broadly accepted and the government is moving forward—if very slowly—with efforts to implement federalism. Unfortunately, the provisional constitution is vague about resource and power sharing between the government and member states, which has led to chronic tensions between Mogadishu and regional capitals.

### *Clan reconciliation*

National and sub-national state-building cannot occur without a national political settlement and reconciliation. Every Somalia federal government has paid lip service to reconciliation but balked at crucial implementation stages. National reconciliation must not be about restoring a romanticized organic relationship among clans but rather about fostering peaceful resolution of conflicts, rebuilding cohesion and mutual solidarity, encouraging inclusive local governance, addressing material resource disputes, and where possible seeking hybrid ways to address past crimes. To achieve this, the federal and state governments should be co-facilitators of a bottom-up reconciliation process, providing resources, security, strategic guidelines and oversight, but desisting from attempts to control the process.

### *Spill-over of Middle East Rivalries*

There are also increasingly assertive new players trying to influence developments in Somalia and all of the Horn of Africa. Somalia has traditionally enjoyed financial support from Saudi Arabia and Egypt; more recently Turkey, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have emerged as big players. Farmajo's pragmatic style and preference to keep Somalia out of the feud between Saudi Arabia and its ally the UAE, on one side, and Qatar and Turkey, on the other, has had limited success. Relations sharply deteriorated with the Saudi-led bloc in early 2017, triggering temporary suspension by Riyadh of direct budgetary support.

The Saudis seem keen to avoid severely punishing Farmajo's administration. The Emiratis, who have built a diverse portfolio of military and commercial interests, with huge stakes to protect, seem less constrained. They have greatly stepped up their covert funding of opposition politicians and cultivated close direct relations with Somalia's federal states. A decision by the states in late 2017 to issue a joint communique critical of Mogadishu's neutral position, inflaming tensions between Mogadishu and the federal states.

Suspicion that the UAE is actively fomenting opposition to the Farmajo administration triggered a violent crackdown on politicians accused of receiving Emirati funds in December 2017. More recently, President Farmajo declared illegal a deal that the Emirati firm DP World negotiated with Somaliland, and Ethiopia, to upgrade and operate Berbera Port. The Lower House of Parliament went further by banning it and declaring DP World a threat to the country's sovereignty, independence and unity. Also at stake is a \$336 million agreement that Puntland negotiated with DP World to allow it to run and upgrade Bosaso port (a Turkish company operated Mogadishu port).

Somaliland President Muse Bihi Abdi has described Somalia's rejection of the port deal the former signed with Ethiopia and DP World as a "declaration of war". An upcoming trip by Farmajo to Qatar – widely viewed as an attempt to spite the UAE – marks an escalation and is almost certain to worsen relations.

### *Insecurity*

A year ago, Farmajo promised to prioritize security, rebuild the national army and crush the Islamist Al-Shabaab insurgency in two years. In May 2017 the government unveiled a national security pact to donors at the London conference to address many of the systemic and structural challenges that have stymied progress on security. Crucially, the strategy was backed by the federal states and Somalia's international partners. To complement these efforts, the government declared an amnesty that saw a modest increase in the number of high-profile defections from Al-Shabaab, among them Mukhtar Robow, who had been a senior commander.

Despite these early positive steps, the overall security situation is far from improved and the implementation of the security plan is much more daunting than anticipated. Al-Shabaab stepped up its attacks from the start of 2017. The 14 October 2017 attack at the Zoppe Junction in Mogadishu was the deadliest, claiming the lives of over 500 people. A six-month deadline for the re-integration of 18,000 Somalia National Army troops, and the establishment of federal/ regional state police departments has since been missed, partly as a result of tensions between the national government and the federal states. An internal Operational Readiness Assessment commissioned by Prime Minister Kheyre highlighted the extent of the dysfunction within the army and the security services.

Against this backdrop, the security challenges the government faces are formidable. Al-Shabaab remains resilient (see Crisis Group Commentary, "Somalia's Al-Shabaab Down but Far from Out", 27 June 2016, and Crisis Group Briefing, "Managing the Disruptive Aftermath of Somalia's Worst Terror Attack", 20 October 2017). It controls tracts of rural land in south central Somalia and supply routes between towns, pursues a steady campaign of car bombings, assassinations and other attacks in Mogadishu and has targeted and in some cases overrun isolated AMISOM and Somali army bases. Beginning in 2016, a militant faction loyal to Islamic State established a following in Puntland (see, Crisis Group Commentary, "The Islamic State Threat in Somalia's Puntland State", 17 November 2016). This group has grown from a few dozen in 2016 to as many as 200 this year, according to the UN. Although the Somali Islamic State, is the sworn enemy to Al-Shabaab, their growing presence highlights how armed extremists exploit state disorder and local tensions to develop safe havens and rebuild after otherwise debilitating defeats.

#### *The AMISOM drawdown*

AMISOM played a key role in pushing Al-Shabaab's conventional forces from most urban centers, but the mission costs approximately \$800 million a year and, by protecting the government from most Al-Shabaab attacks, has perversely reduced the incentive for Somali officials to spend the resources and make the necessary political compromises to create effective security services able to defeat Al-Shabaab. Thus last year international donors began the process of implementing the mission's "exit strategy" and tentative drawdown, as well as yet another effort to build up and professionalize the army. This work on professionalization is important for Somalia's future stability and ought to be assisted, even those efforts are severely undermined by endemic corruption and nepotism as well as clan fears that the military will be used to enforce the domination of certain other clans at their expense (as happened during the rule of President Siad Barre, from 1969 to 1991).

The plan for AMISOM's withdrawal requires a sustainable national force to take over security responsibility and mitigate the negative effects of regional competition. Plans are to

train and equip an 18,000 strong army with units answering to both the federal and state governments. Yet, it is not clear how feasible this plan will be. Moreover, without a clearer and institutionalized division of power, resources and security responsibilities between the federal government and federal member states, as well as among federal state administrations, current security gains against Al-Shabaab will be difficult to sustain.

Although there have been some attempts to coordinate efforts to build the Somali security services, more could be done to harmonize and synchronize the efforts of the EU, U.S., UK, Turkey and Gulf states which all are involved in troop training. In addition the U.S. has increased drone and special forces operations in an effort to degrade Al-Shabaab's military capacity, but increased involvement carries risks of delegitimizing the government. More training and equipment could help, but increased airstrikes - especially ones that lead to civilian deaths - could inflame public opinion and exacerbate clan tensions.

Complicating U.S. efforts, Al-Shabaab is strategically astute. Rather than hold hard-to-defend towns and villages, it has increased suicide bombings in Mogadishu and attacks against exposed African Union peacekeepers and Somali government forces as they try to reopen Somalia's main supply roads. Currently AMISOM and Somali National Army forces are trying to reopen the highway linking Mogadishu to Baidoa 150 miles to the west. On Friday, Al-Shabaab militants ambushed an AMISOM supply convoy about 25 miles north of Mogadishu, killing at least ten soldiers and destroying most of the twenty trucks. It was the latest of many deadly attacks the militant group has waged against the AU forces.

While the mission is dangerous, it is also lucrative for individual soldiers and their countries. The AMISOM troop-contributing countries now want the UN Security Council to reconsider its September 2017 resolution on phased withdrawal and handover of security responsibility to Somali security forces. The countries Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia and Djibouti now claim, with some grounds, that the resolution's timeline is not realistic and would lead to a reversal of the gains made by the peacekeepers, but the Security Council is right to put the onus on the federal government to deliver.

*Recommendations to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:*

1. Insist the administration of President Donald Trump identify an experienced diplomat to become the U.S. Ambassador to Somalia, and quickly act on this nomination. Ensure that the ambassador designate has the necessary resources, staff and the latitude to robustly promote U.S. goals in Somalia. Ideally the ambassador should be in place before the embassy in Mogadishu opens in August. Furthermore, require the State Department to identify focal points in the Bureaus of African Affairs and Near Easter Affairs to coordinate efforts to mitigate the destabilizing impact of Gulf state rivalries in the Horn of Africa.
2. Correct the imbalance of U.S. funding supporting military engagement versus diplomatic and development assistance. Appropriate or shift money to good governance programs, both at the federal and states levels, in Somalia and instruct the State Department and USAID to develop an incentives strategy to promote more effective governance and administration.
3. The U.S. and its allies must prioritize the strengthening and institutionalization of relations between the federal member states and federal government, so they can work together to complete the agreed-upon roadmap and milestones designed for Somalia's recovery,

including finalizing the permanent constitution and federalization process, preparing for direct elections, and promoting bottom up reconciliation.