



Structural Impediments to Reviving Somalia's Security Forces

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Acronyms

AFRICOM	United States Africa Command
AMISOM	African Union Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia
EUTM	European Union Training Mission
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
FOB	Forward operating base
FMS	Federal Member States
ICG	International Crisis Group
IED	Improvised explosive device
JTA	Joint Threat Assessment
MoD	Ministry of Defense
MoIS	Ministry of Internal Security
MSR	Major supply routes
NISA	National Intelligence and Security Agency
NSA	National Security Architecture
NSC	National Security Council
PBIED	Person-borne improvised explosive device
PMP	Puntland Maritime Police
RSO	Regional security offices
SNA	Somali National Army
SPF	Somali Police Force
SSF	Somali security forces
SSR	Security sector reform
STP	Somali Transitional Plan
UN	United Nations
VBIED	Vehicle-borne improvised explosive device
WAM	Weapons and ammunitions management

1. Executive summary

For over a decade, successive Somali governments and the international community have been earnestly trying to revive Somalia's security forces (SSF)¹ as part of a broader effort to stabilize the country following the collapse of the state in 1991. Billions of dollars were spent on training and equipping tens of thousands of military, police and intelligence personnel so that they could stabilize their country and liberate from the grip of the militant group al-Shabaab and enforce the rule of law. Nearly 15 years later, neither of the two objectives is fully realized, and the country's security forces remain perpetually weak, deeply fractured and increasingly politicized.

Somali security forces were originally slated to take over core security responsibility from the African Union Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) by the end of 2021. However, according to an elaborate stabilization plan, crafted by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), the goalpost is now moved to 2023. The "able, accountable, affordable and acceptable" security force that was envisioned by the London Security Pact of 2017 is not in sight. Instead, the nation's security forces are still reliant on external assistance for financing, training, equipment and operational capability.

Central to this profound is a convergence of factors, notably political irreconcilability among Somalia's cantankerous political elite who has failed, quite spectacularly, to find a common ground on the outstanding statebuilding issues such as the architecture of the security forces. Politicization of the security forces is rampant and leaders of the FGS and federal member states (FMS) tend to prioritize regime security over national security. Instead of fighting al-Shabaab and enforcing the rule of law, some or many of the country's disparate security forces are subjected enforcing the law of the ruling elite, deepening the mistrust that many Somalis and international partners harbor about Somali security forces.

Corrosive misgovernance is also besetting the security sector. Although commendable progress had been made over the past few years in the fight against corruption through the purging of 'ghost soldiers' and the introduction of biometric registration and electronic salary payments, the underlying corruptive cultures remain entrenched. Officers are promoted through nepotism and clan affiliation to buy off loyalties and consolidate power, destroying the morale of the security forces. High turnover of the top brass is also destabilizing the security forces and weakening command and control, resulting in poor accountability.

¹ Somali security services refers to all the government's armed personnel including military, police and intelligence.

Persistent financial crisis is another major impediment limiting the security sector's ability to recruit, train and equip officers. Together with high attrition rates, the FGS is struggling to generate adequate forces to achieve its goal of "clearing, holding and rebuilding" communities. By and large, the security sector is heavily reliant on few, highly trained special forces, notably the US-trained Danab Brigade and the Turkish-trained Gorgor and Haram'ad units. By one estimate, Danab leads 80 percent of all operations and 100 percent of counterterrorism operations.

With the anticipated drawdown of AMISOM forces in the coming years, and the geopolitical rivalry among external actors, the years ahead could be defining for Somalia's fledgling security forces. Perhaps one silver lining is that al-Shabaab no longer poses an existential threat to the FGS, although it remains a deeply disruptive and potent force across the country. It has proven to be adept and agile under intense US air strikes and ground operations. Relying on a sophisticated underground network, the militant group has morphed into a criminal-like syndicate and is collecting as much revenue as the FGS from Mogadishu, Bossaso and other major cities.

2. Methodology

Drawing primarily on qualitative approach, This report is based on semi-structured interviews with current and former senior Somali government officials who have an insider's understanding of the Somali security sector. They include three former defense ministers, two former internal security ministers, two former National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) directors, and senior officials in three different FGS ministries responsible for security and stabilization. These officials represent different generations and viewpoints. The interviews and follow-up questions provided unique perspectives that form the basis of this report. We have also reviewed five documents ranging from security plans to joint assessments prepared by the FGS, UN and AMISOM. Moreover, we reviewed and analyzed independent assessments on the security sector made by Somalia's closet allies. Finally, an extensive literature review was also conducted as a critical part of drafting of this report.

3. Introduction

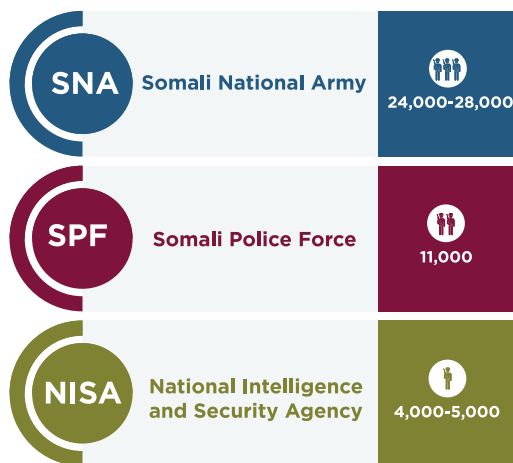
The key finding of this report is that the revival of an “able, accountable, affordable and acceptable” Somali security forces, as envisioned by the National Security Architecture endorsed in 2017, is hampered by five mutually reinforcing structural impediments. The first and most acute factor is irreconcilability among the country’s political leaders at the federal and state levels. At both levels, security forces are routinely oriented to suppress political dissent, allowing extremist groups to not only survive, but thrive. The second factor is a deeply corrosive misgovernance in the form of nepotism and weak command and control. The third factor is inadequate financing, which is inhibiting the Somali security forces’ overall capability to expand and sustain. The fourth is the continued potency of al-Shabaab and its ability to disrupt peace and stability. The fifth is the role of external actors whose divergent agendas are pulling the security forces into opposite directions. Taken together, these factors represent a profound structural impediment to reviving capable Somali security forces in the near future.

4. Overview of Somali Security Forces

“*Somalia spends more on its security sector as a percentage of the budget than any other fragile country in the world except Afghanistan*”

Somalia spends more on its security sector as a percentage of the budget than any other fragile country in the world except Afghanistan, according to a 2017 review by the World Bank.² The country has three main security institutions under the command of the FGS.³

Three main security institutions



2 See “Somalia Security and Justice Public Expenditure Review” (SJPER). (2017). World Bank, page 28, Accessed at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/26030?show=full>

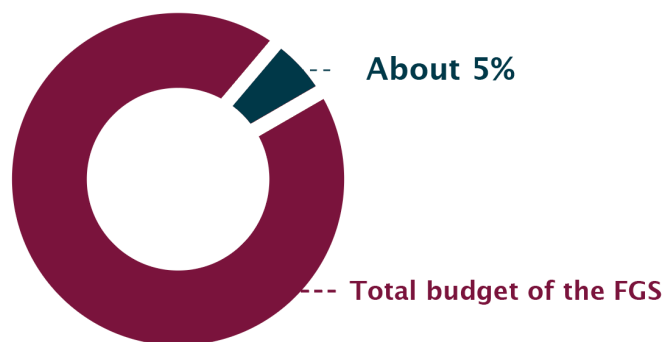
3 In addition to SNA, SPF & NISA, there are other smaller branches such as the custodial corps, marine forces and air force. However, only the military, police and intelligence services are engaged in fighting al-Shabaab and are the focus of this report

The largest and the most important is the military, known as Somali National Army (SNA). Over the past 15 years, it is estimated that more than 100,000 soldiers have been trained and equipped by multiple countries.⁴ Yet the precise number of SNA soldiers is unclear. One senior FGS official said that there are 28,000 military personnel on the payroll of the Ministry of Defense (MoD).⁵ However, another senior FGS official, who is closer to the MoD, put the SNA strength at 24,000 personnel.⁶ As part of the National Security Architecture (NSA) agreed during the London Conference on Somalia in May 2017, the FGS and federal member states agreed to form an 18,000-strong SNA, with each of the five states contributing 3,000 soldiers. Special forces, the air force and navy were excluded from this figure.⁷ The idea was to reconstitute a small, agile and inclusive national army that could degrade and ultimately defeat al-Shabaab. Like many agreements in Somalia, the NSA was never implemented due to the political imbroglio between the FGS and the FMS.⁸

The second largest institution is the Somali Police Force (SPF). Like the SNA, its force strength is imprecise. AMISOM has trained nearly 5,000 police officers from 2009 to 2015.⁹ However, one FGS official said 11,000 police officers are on the payroll of the Ministry of Internal Security (MoIS). The vast majority of these officers work in Mogadishu and its environs as each FMS has its own local police force. The security pact in London called for the establishment of 32,000 police officers which were supposed to be divided between federal and state police.¹⁰ Under the leadership of the UK, the penholder of the Somalia file at the UN Security Council, international partners pushed for this figure on the assertion that stabilizing recently liberated towns was a greater priority for Somalia than defending its porous borders from external enemies.¹¹

The smallest of the three main Somali forces is NISA, an opaque spy agency “engaged with various elements of security, including both policing and militarized operations”.¹²

Budget For NISA



4 Interview with senior FGS official. (December 2020).

5 Ibid.

6 Interview with senior FGS defense official. (December 2020).

7 See “London Conference on Somalia: Security Pact”. (2017), page 5, Accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact>

8 See “2019 State of Somalia Report”. (2019). Heritage Institute, page. 11, Accessed at: <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/the-state-of-somalia-sos-report/>

9 See SJPER World Bank report, *ibid*, page 40.

10 See London Security Pact, *ibid*.

11 Many Somali politicians, including MPs, have decried the London Security Pact as a concoction of neighboring countries who were determined to keep Somalia weak and divided.

12 See SJPER report by the World Bank, *ibid*, page 41.

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Somalia’s security forces have a long and checkered history of prioritizing regime security over national security and ignoring the rule of law in favor of what critics call “law of the ruling

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ethnic favoritism and manipulation of the senior ranks, over time, destroyed the military’s reputation as a national institution

Its reported force strength is about 4,500 and typically receives about five percent of the total budget of the FGS—a disproportionately high figure in comparison to other forces.¹³ Unlike the other two, NISA’s legal status is questionable. Established by the military dictator Mohamed Siyad Barre in a presidential decree and widely used to intimidate opponents, the agency lacks the establishment act that is necessary to function as a legal entity in post-war Somalia.¹⁴ Political leaders exploit this legal limbo and regularly use NISA to quash opponents, as it is difficult to litigate the agency in statutory courts.¹⁵ In December 2017, NISA agents raided the Mogadishu house of opposition leader, Abdirahman Abdishakur, and killed five of his security guards. They also injured him and took him to custody on the allegation of treason, although the charges were later dropped.¹⁶ A former NISA director said “Somali presidents view NISA as an extension of Villa Somalia and a blunt instrument to cudgel opponents into order.”¹⁷ The last several directors of NISA are known to be political operatives more than security experts, and are often close allies of the sitting president.¹⁸

Somalia’s security forces have a long and checkered history of prioritizing regime security over national security and ignoring the rule of law in favor of what critics call “law of the ruling.”¹⁹ Most experts postulate that, following Somalia’s defeat in the 1977 war with Ethiopia and the subsequent coup attempt in 1978, General Siyad Barre consolidated power by empowering his loyalists in the security services to protect his regime. Colin Robinson, a leading historian, observed “the ethnic favoritism and manipulation of the senior ranks, over time, destroyed the military’s reputation as a national institution.”²⁰ He added that, 20 years later, the same clannism is bedeviling its revival.²¹

5. Elite irreconcilability

For security sector reform (SSR) to succeed in post conflict societies, scholars assume “the existence of an agreement between belligerent parties that the international community supports, and a process that will lead to the state’s monopoly of coercion or reforms that lead to the state’s all-but guaranteed monopoly of coercion.”²² In Somalia, state building initiatives are essentially beholden to the revival of national security forces acceptable to all stakeholders. Key outstanding issues include genuine political reconciliation, fixing the dysfunctional federalism²³ and power and resource sharing.

13 Ibid.

14 Interview with former NISA director. (December 2020).

15 Ibid.

16 See, for example, “Former PM apologizes over NISA attack in opposition leader’s house”. Garowe Online (2020). Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/former-pm-apologizes-over-nisa-attack-in-opposition-leaders-house>

17 Interview with former NISA director. (December 2020).

18 Current NISA Director, Fahad Yasin, who’s a former journalist, is president Farmaajo’s closest ally. Former directors include Abdullahi Sanbaloooshe, Gen. Abdullahi Gafow, Gen. Abdirahman Tuuryare and Ahmed Fiqi. All of them are prominent politicians today.

19 Interview with former Somali defense minister 1 (December 2020).

20 Robinson, C. “Revisiting the rise and the fall of the Somali armed forces”. (2016). Defense and Security Analysis. 32:3, page 241.

21 Ibid, page 243.

22 Beyene, A. “The Security Sector Reform Paradox in Somalia.” LSE. (2020), page 4, Accessed at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/103683/1/Dribssa_Beyene_security_sector_reform_paradox_somalia_published.pdf

23 For a detailed treatment on this, see “Dysfunctional Federalism: How Political Division, Constitutional Ambiguity and Unitary Mindset Thwart Equitable Distribution of Power in Somalia.” Heritage Institute. (2020). Accessed at: <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/dysfunctional-federalism-how-political-division-constitutional-ambiguity-and-a-unitary-mindset-thwart-equitable-distribution-of-power-in-somalia/>

“Genuine reconciliation is a precondition to an inclusive agreement on the rebuilding of effective and inclusive security services,” said former security minister Abdirizak Omar.²⁴

A recent assessment on the European Union Training Mission (EUTM) in Somalia noted that lack of political reconciliation is hampering the building of professional security services.²⁵ Virtually all local actors are deeply nervous about a powerful security service, similar to that of the military dictatorship, which can be used by one group or one clan to subjugate others. The mistrust is so deep that a review by the World Bank discovered that “stakeholders are reluctant to ‘give up’ their means of ‘armed protection’ while the political settlement remains fragile.”²⁶ And a 2019 joint threat assessment (JTA) conducted by the FGS, AMISOM and the UN found that “protracted political stalemate” between the FGS and FMS is hampering the rebuilding of national security forces.²⁷

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The most important manifestation of elite irreconcilability is the lack of permanent settlement on the outstanding issues in the provisional constitution

The most important manifestation of elite irreconcilability is the lack of permanent settlement on the outstanding issues in the provisional constitution. There are at least 15 articles that remain deeply contested and require elite compact.²⁸ “There is no clarity on how security responsibility is shared and divided between the FGS and FMS,” said a former NISA director.²⁹ The 2017 London Security Pact outlined an interim framework for the FGS and FMS to collaborate on security forces. Among other things, it envisioned a National Security Council (NSC) comprising of presidents of FGS and FMS and including key federal ministries. As a policy and strategy organ, the NSC was designed to provide guidance³⁰ to regional security offices (RSOs) that were formed to implement the National Security Architecture (NSA).³¹ Civil servants have been hired for the RSOs at FMS levels to support the Somali Transitional Plan (STP), which called for systemic integration of FGS and FMS forces so that Somalia could take over its security responsibilities from AMISOM by end of 2021.³²

However, experts believe that “moving forward with integration is inextricably linked to the overall federal state building project. Progress will remain superficial unless confidence is actively built in the broader federalization process.”³³ Since the London Security Pact, the relationship between the FGS and most FMS was animated by a deep political upheaval, which made it harder for the two sides to work together.

24 Interview with former security minister Abdirizak Omar (December 2020).

25 Williams, P. and Ali, H. “The European Union training mission in Somalia: An assessment”. (2020). SIPRI, page 14, Accessed at: <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-background-papers/european-union-training-mission-somalia-assessment>.

26 See “Somalia Security and Justice Public Expenditure Review” (SJPER). (2017). World Bank, page 28. Accessed at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/26030?show=full>

27 “Joint Threat Assessment” (JTA) report confidentially shared with HIPS. (2019). FGS/AMISOM/UN, page 5,

28 Ibid, page 2.

29 Interview with former NISA director, *ibid*.

30 One of the key responsibilities of the NSC was to agree on the appointment of commanders and the location of army bases across the country, which was to be reconfigured based on the federal structure.

31 See London Security Pact, *ibid*.

32 JTA, page 7. *Ibid*.

33 Keating, M. and Abshir, S. “The Politics of Security in Somalia”. Center on International Cooperation. (2018), page 7, Accessed at: https://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/politics_of_security_in_somalia_2018_final_0.pdf



The Somali government has consistently failed to collaborate with the federal member states on security, a key part of its commitments in the 2017 Security Pact

A report by the inspector general of the US Department of Defense (Pentagon) found that “the Somali government has consistently failed to collaborate with the federal member states on security, a key part of its commitments in the 2017 Security Pact.”³⁴

Social reconciliation is also a central part of why many Somalis are deeply reluctant to see powerful security forces controlled by politicians in Mogadishu. For many, this “harkens back to the painful memories of the military dictatorship which used the security services to oppress opponents,” said a former Somali defense minister.³⁵ Another former defense minister observed that “there’s a deep trust deficit among the Somali people, and there’s a need to rebuild that trust especially with the peripheries in order to build an inclusive and unified security forces.”³⁶

5.1 Gedo and Hiiraan conflicts

To illustrate the reason why mistrust runs so deep among the Somali people when it comes to powerful security services, many current and former officials interviewed for this report cited the ongoing conflicts in Gedo (Jubbaland), which has been intensifying since late 2019 and Hiiraan (Hirshabeelle), which sparked a new wave of conflict in November 2020. Although the dynamics of the two localized conflicts are fundamentally different, the intervention of FGS forces in each context provides a clear picture as to why politicization of the security forces remains a major impediment to reviving a truly national security force.

In the Gedo case, the FGS deployed hundreds of Turkish-trained SNA units belonging to the Gorgor (military) and Haram’ad (police) units to the region following a 2019 disputed local election where the incumbent president, Ahmed Madoobe, orchestrated a highly contested reelection.³⁷ A battalion of armed forces was sent to Gedo to dislodge the local administration, which was loyal to president Madoobe, and replace it with one that is loyal to the FGS president, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo. The mission was the first in Somalia that led to the dismemberment of a federal member state by the FGS. The deployment of the FGS force to Gedo was sharply criticized by international partners, such as the US: “The deployment of FGS forces to a politically motivated conflict in Gedo is unacceptable,” said Rodney Hunter, the political coordinator of the US mission to the UN during a Security Council meeting.³⁸ It was a rare public rebuke of the FGS by one of its key allies and a reflection of the growing international frustration with the politicization of the security forces.

34 See “Lead Inspector General Report to the US Congress on East Africa and North and West Africa.” (2020), page 25, Accessed at: <https://www.dodig.mil/Reports/Lead-Inspector-General-Reports/Article/2427451/lead-inspector-general-for-east-africa-and-north-and-west-africa-counterterrori/>

35 Interview with former Somali defense minister 1. (December 2020).

36 Interview with former Somali defense minister 2. (2020).

37 See Hassan, A., “Leader of Somalia’s Jubbaland, at Odds with Mogadishu, Wins New Term.” Reuters. (2020). Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-politics/president-of-somali-state-of-jubbaland-re-elected-in-divisive-vote-idUSKCN1VC15B?il=0>

38 See “Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on the Situation in Somalia.” (2020). Accessed at: <https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-at-a-un-security-council-briefing-on-the-situation-in-somalia-5/>

Another layer of the Gedo crisis is the highly combustible clan conflict between two dominant communities, the Ogaden and Marehan. FGS president Farmaajo belongs to the latter and Madoobe to the former. “The frictions in Gedo reflect political fault lines that cut from national politics down to local clan tensions and constitute a major source of instability for Somalia,” noted the International Crisis Group (ICG).³⁹ As it turned out, the conflict in Gedo became a major flashpoint in the federal parliamentary and presidential elections that were scheduled for late 2020 and early 2021.⁴⁰

The Curious Case of Abdirashid Janan

A central figure in the Gedo conflict is the former security minister of Jubbaland State, Abdirashid Hassan Abdinur commonly known as Abdirashid Janan. For many years, he was a key player and a strongman in several border towns in Gedo and has had cooperated with both Ethiopia and Kenya. After joining the Kismaayo-based Jubbaland administration, president Madoobe outsourced the security of Gedo province to him given his deep ties to the area. Following the 2019 disputed presidential election in Jubbaland, Janan was arrested by the FGS in Mogadishu in September 2019 and was charged with committing serious human rights abuses. His high-profile capture was welcomed by human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.⁴¹

In January 2020, Janan escaped from FGS prison in Mogadishu, embarrassing the Farmaajo administration.⁴² As soon as he emerged in the Kenya-Somalia border, tensions have risen again in the Gedo region. A year after his daring escape, the FGS alleged that Janan’s Kenya-backed forces, who were aligned with Jubbaland, have attacked government forces in the border town of Beled Hawo, resulting in high casualties.⁴³

Two months later—in March 2021—the FGS announced that Janan ‘surrendered’ to the government and defected from Jubbaland.⁴⁴ In early 2021, the federal attorney general dropped all charges against Janan.⁴⁵ This dramatic reversal of fortunes for Janan is illustrative of the volatility and politicization of Somalia’s security systems. Within a few weeks, Janan moved from a fugitive of the law to an ally of the FGS in the conflict in Gedo.

39 See “Ending the Dangerous Standoff in Southern Somalia.” ICG Briefing Note 158. (2020). Accessed at: <https://d2071andvip-0wj.cloudfront.net/b158-standoff-in-southern-somalia.pdf>

40 Mussa, Y. “State of Somalia: Electoral Impasse and Growing Insecurity.” ACCORD. (2021). Accessed at: <https://www.accord.org.za/analysis/the-state-of-somalia-electoral-impasse-and-growing-insecurity/>

41 See, for example, “Somalia: Arrest of Jubbaland Security Minister Must Yield Justice for Victims.” (2019). Amnesty International. Accessed at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/09/somalia-arrest-of-jubaland-security-minister-must-yield-justice-for-victims/>

42 See “High-Profile Jailbreak Undermines Somalia’s Fight for Justice.” (2020). Human Rights Watch. Accessed at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/24/high-profile-jailbreak-undermines-somalias-fight-justice>

43 See “Somalia Says 11 Killed, 100 Arrested in Fierce Clashes Near Border Town.” (2021). Xinhua. Accessed at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/africa/2021-01/26/c_139697059.htm

44 Dhaysane, M. “Somalia: Wanted Fugitive Minister Surrenders.” (2021). Anadolu. Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-wanted-fugitive-minister-surrenders/2187196>

45 See “Somalia Drops All Cases Against Ex-Minister Accused of Serious Crimes.” (2021). Garowe Online. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somali-govt-drops-all-cases-against-ex-minister-accused-of-serious-crimes>



This conflict in Hiiraan “exposes the hypocrisy of the FGS: in Jubbaland, it is actively dismantling the state using national armed forces for purely political reasons, while it is buttressing Hirshabeelle state to achieve short-term electoral objectives

The Hiiraan crisis, on the other hand, was sparked by the presidential election of Hirshabeelle state in November 2020. A former vice president, Ali Guudlaawe, was elected president in a contest widely considered to have been tipped in his favor by the FGS. He received 86 out of the 99 votes of the state legislature.⁴⁶ The thrust of the conflict is about power-sharing among the two dominant clans in the state, Abgaal, to which Guudlaawe belongs, and Hawadle, to which the former president belongs. During the formation of the state in 2016, a gentleman’s agreement between the two clans gave one the capital city (Jowhar) and the other the presidency. The Hawadle feel that their cousins, the Abgaal, violated that pact and grabbed both privileges without due consideration. That is why many of their political elite are supporting what they consider to be a legitimate uprising in their bastion of Hiiraan, with a declared objective of ultimately seceding from the state.⁴⁷

So far, the FGS has dispatched senior officials, including the current interior minister, to Beledweyn, the epicenter of the uprising, in order to calm the situation. But unlike Gedo, the FGS is supporting the state president Guudlaawe against what it believes to be a rebellious movement.⁴⁸ This conflict in Hiiraan “exposes the hypocrisy of the FGS: in Jubbaland, it is actively dismantling the state using national armed forces for purely political reasons, while it is buttressing Hirshabeelle state to achieve short-term electoral objectives,” said a former defense minister.⁴⁹

5.2 Role of FGS security services in state elections

Over the past few years, the FGS has deployed hundreds of security forces to all federal member states except Puntland during local elections. In Southwest, Galmudug and Hirshabeelle, the FGS installed its allies as regional presidents by deploying security forces trained and equipped by partners to fight al-Shabaab, stabilize the country and enforce the rule of law.⁵⁰ In all three cases, FGS forces have intimidated politicians deemed unaligned with the government. In some cases, AMISOM forces have helped the FGS in installing its handpicked candidate.⁵¹ Jubbaland is the only state where the FGS deployed forces to influence a local election and ultimately failed. That is entirely due to the strong backing of Kenya for the incumbent, president Madoobe, who has deep clan ties to Kenyan-Somali politicians.⁵²

46 See, for example, “Villa Somalia ‘Candidate’ Wins Hirshabelle Election”. Garowe Online. (2020). Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/villa-somalia-candidates-win-in-hirshabelle-election>

47 Both former education minister, Abdullahi Godah and former NISA Director Abdullahi Sanbaloooshe, have publicly supported the uprising in Hiiraan and accuse the FGS of using the SNA to suppress legitimate grievances.

48 Interview with a senior FGS official, *ibid.*

49 Interview with former defense minister 2, *ibid.*

50 For a detailed treatment of these interventions, see, for example, “The 2019 State of Somalia Report”. *Ibid.*

51 Sheikh, A. and Omar, F. “Mogadishu-Backed Candidate Wins Test-Case Regional Election.” Reuters. (2018). Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-politics-idUSKBN10I1QX>

52 See, for example, “Ending the Dangerous Standoff...”, ICG, *ibid.*

These actions “have unfortunately deepened the belief among the Somali people that our security forces are blunt instruments for the occupant of Villa Somalia,” said a former senior FGS official.⁵³ Some federal member states and many opposition figures publicly equate the security forces to militias loyal to president Farmaajo as opposed to national forces. This has the effect of discrediting all security services, exasperating social cleavages and further rupturing the tenuous elite compact.⁵⁴

6. Corrosive misgovernance

One of the most profound challenges bedeviling Somalia’s security forces is misgovernance by their political leaders. From frequent changes of the top commanders for personal or partisan reasons, to corruption and the failure to institutionalize and professionalize the various security forces, successive governments have failed to meet their own targets. As Professor Paul D. Williams has aptly observed, Somalia lacks “the basic building blocks of a national security architecture, let alone policy or operational frameworks into which to plug the various international [assistance] programs.”⁵⁵

For what it’s worth, there are no shortage of constitutional guidelines and impressive strategic plans. Article 127 of the provisional constitution is unequivocal in calling for the neutrality of the security forces and their obligation to uphold the constitution and enforce the rule of law.⁵⁶ In the past few years, the FGS has developed good plans such as the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the Somali Transitional Plan (STP), both of which aim to build “an able, affordable, accountable and acceptable” security force.⁵⁷ The STP set the end of 2023 as a deadline for Somalia to take over security responsibility from AMISOM. Unfortunately, that doesn’t seem to be a realistic target anymore. As the inspector general of the Pentagon noted in his seminal report to US Congress, the implementation of the STP is “badly off track.”⁵⁸

A few months ago, the FGS shared a revised STP with the international partners at the behest of the UN Security Council. Partners have nudged the government to set achievable targets in the new plan. But the United States African Command (AFRICOM), which oversees the estimated 700 US troops in Somalia, described the revised STP as “overly ambitious” and “a solid draft as opposed to an actionable plan.”⁵⁹ International partners have urged the FGS to revise it and make it “realistic” and in line with the government’s capabilities.⁶⁰

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“the basic building
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national security
architecture,
let alone policy
or operational
frameworks

“
As the inspector
general of the
Pentagon noted in
his seminal report
to US Congress,
the implementation
of the STP is
“badly off track”

53 Interview with former FGS official. (2020).

54 For detailed treatment on this, see “Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Somalia Case Study” by Prof. Ken Menkhaus. UK Stabilization Unit. (2018). Accessed at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/766049/Somalia_case_study.pdf

55 Williams, P. “Building the Somali National Army: The Anatomy of Failure: 2008-2018”. (2020) *Journal of Strategic Studies*. 43:3, page 378.

56 See article 127 of the Provisional Constitution of Somalia.

57 Draft of the revised Somali Transitional Plan, confidentially received by HIPS. (202). Page 10.

58 See “Inspector General...” *ibid*, page 19.

59 *Ibid*, page 20.

60 *Ibid*.

6.1 Nepotism



The EU training mission found that “the mission has faced problems from some Somalis who want to promote their own clan at the expense of others”

Political leaders in Somalia often view the security force’s *raison d’être* as protecting the regime at all costs. Almost everyone interviewed for this report acknowledged that nepotism is wreaking havoc among the rank and file. A review of the EU training mission found that “the mission has faced problems from some Somalis who want to promote their own clan at the expense of others.”⁶¹ A former security minister observed that “nepotism is widespread, especially on promotion of officers who are rewarded for their loyalty and not for their performance.”⁶² This creates a domino effect where almost all officers exert tremendous pressure on their clansmen in high offices for promotions, according to one FGS official. “Young officers spend a great deal of their time lobbying politicians to receive a higher rank, and with every change of a commander, a minister, a prime minister or president, a new crop of officers are promoted to create a clan equilibrium—a truly vicious cycle,” he said.⁶³

The FGS is trying to fix this problem. In 2020, the council of ministers approved a new merit-based policy to regulate wanton promotions within the security forces, according to a senior FGS official. This official added that, “if implemented, the [policy] will ensure fair appointment and promotion of officers.”⁶⁴ Veteran military officials acknowledge that nepotism is not only chronic but devastating to the morale of the security forces. General Abdulqadir Diini, a former defense minister and onetime chief of defense forces, lamented on what he called “systemic dismantling of the SNA” by political leaders with very short objectives. “You can never rebuild an army through clan nepotism,” he said.⁶⁵

As the country enters an electoral season, experts worry that promotions of officers will spike as political leaders try to win votes. “Election season is also a promotions season,” said a former defense minister who said that a former president routinely promoted officers without merit. The EU training mission also noted that “frequent turnover of senior SNA officers” impacted the coherence of the plans submitted to them.⁶⁶ Other international partners are keenly aware of this phenomenon. The US Embassy in Mogadishu noted that “electioneering has soaked up political bandwidth, and progress on security sector reforms is now likely to slow and even be reversed in the coming year.”⁶⁷

61 See “The European Union training mission in Somalia...” *ibid*, page 14.

62 Interview with former security minister Abdirizak Omar, *ibid*.

63 Interview with senior FGS official, *ibid*.

64 Interview with senior FGS defense official, *ibid*.

65 Interview with Gen. Abdulqadir Dini, former defense minister.

66 See “The European Union training mission in Somalia...” *ibid*, page 14.

67 See “Inspect General”, *ibid*, page 25.

6.2 Improving transparency

When the US government suspended funding to the SNA in December 2017 due to systemic corruption,⁶⁸ the FGS began a highly regarded reform effort aimed at winning back American support. Tangible steps were taken to purge the notorious “ghost soldiers” from the rolls of the SNA through a biometric registration system, which was completed in March 2019.⁶⁹ The SNA biometric database ultimately produced only 16,000 “real soldiers”, and saved up to \$13 million, according to a senior FGS official.⁷⁰ The official added that the FGS has since recruited additional 8,000 soldiers to the SNA, generating a force strength of 24,000 soldiers.

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The biometric registration of SNA soldiers and their enrollment in electronic mobile money payment systems, as well as the introduction of a competitive tendering process for logistics contracts, have helped to address issues of corruption and accountability

Key international partners have welcomed the demonstrable campaign against graft in the SNA. “The biometric registration of SNA soldiers and their enrollment in electronic mobile money payment systems, as well as the introduction of a competitive tendering process for logistics contracts, have helped to address issues of corruption and accountability. Somali and international monitors are now able to verify the amount and timelines of soldiers’ pay,” noted the Pentagon inspector general.⁷¹ In September 2019, the Somali president signed into law a landmark anti-corruption bill aimed at systemically combating graft within the government, including within the security forces.⁷²

Still, a number of experts interviewed for this report highlighted that, while the biometric system reduced corruption, it did not eliminate it altogether, particularly the scourge of nepotism. A former defense minister asserted that “as long as the control and command of the SNA is based on clan affiliation, promotions are not on merit but loyalty to political leaders, then it will be fair to say that corruption will remain rampant within the SNA.”⁷³ A senior FGS official said that contracts supporting the SNA are consistently awarded to business people associated with president Farmaajo and former PM Hassan Khaire when he was in office.⁷⁴

68 Houreld, K. “US Suspends Aid to Somalia’s Battered Military Over Graft”. Reuters. (2017). Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-military-exclusive-idUSKBN1E81XF>

69 See “JTA”, *ibid*, page 5.

70 Interview with senior FGS defense official, *ibid*.

71 See “Inspector general...” *ibid*, page 24.

72 Dhaysane, M. “Somali Presidents Signs Anti-Corruption Bill into Law”. Anadolu Agency. (2019). Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somali-president-signs-anti-corruption-bill-into-law/1590257>

73 Interview with former defense minister 1, *ibid*.

74 Interview with senior FGS official, *ibid*.

6.3 Weak command and control

In the revised Somali Transitional Plan, success for Somali security forces is defined as “clear, hold and build.”⁷⁵

Somali Transitional Plan



“*Somali security forces continue to rely on international support for operations, and al-Shabaab is not degraded to the point where Somali security forces can contain its threat independently*”

In other words, the forces should be capable of clearing a territory from al-Shabaab, hold onto it for an extended period of time and help local communities build an administration that ultimately stabilizes the area. After nearly 15 years of training, capacity building and untold financial investment, the Somali security forces remain largely incapable of achieving those objectives on their own. “The Somali security forces have not met many of the milestones related to operational capability,” observed the Pentagon inspector general in his report to US Congress, adding that “Somali security forces continue to rely on international support for operations, and al-Shabaab is not degraded to the point where Somali security forces can contain its threat independently.”⁷⁶

“*There are an estimated 750,000 weapons of all types in the country*”

These challenges are inextricably linked to the corrosive misgovernance permeating the entire system, but they manifest themselves in many ways. The weapons management system is a good example. The FGS has been receiving considerable training and resources to ensure that it can count, register and track weapons in the country. There are an estimated 750,000 weapons of all types in the country,⁷⁷ and for that reason, weapons and ammunitions management (WAM) is extremely important.

⁷⁵ See “revised STP”, *ibid*, page 13.

⁷⁶ See “Inspector general...” *ibid*, page 18.

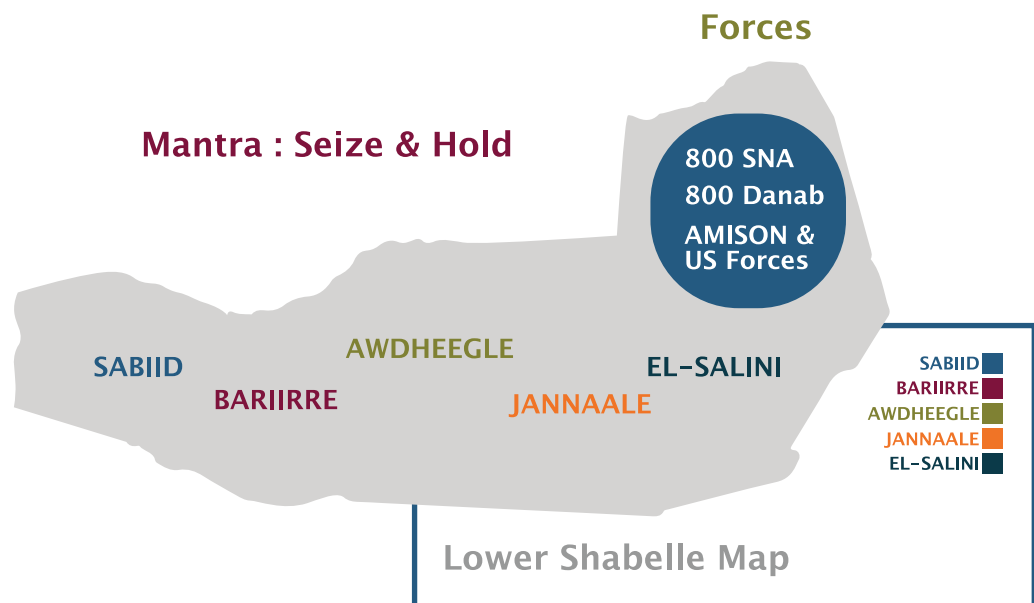
⁷⁷ See “SJPER”, *ibid*, page 29.

By its own admission, the FGS has yet to develop a WAM system. “The absence of a national weapons registration system, including an electronic central national registry or database allowing for the recording and tracking of all internal transfers of weapons to units and individuals, remains a gap in the management system,” said a recent joint assessment with the UN and AMISOM.⁷⁸

6.4 Operational capability

In terms of operational capabilities, a recent military operation in Lower Shabelle illustrates the extraordinary challenges confronting Somali security forces. Dubbed “Operation Badbaado 1”, its mantra is to “seize and hold” territory from militants.

Operation Badbaado



⁷⁸ See “JTA”, *ibid*, page 7.

Its objective was “not only to recover areas under al-Shabaab control in Lower Shabelle, but also to consolidate the security of Mogadishu by disrupting al-Shabaab’s capacity to plan and execute terror attacks targeting the city”.⁷⁹ Some 8,300 SNA soldiers and 600 Danab special forces conducted the operation with the help of AMISOM and US troops based at the nearby Ballidogle airbase.⁸⁰

The operation succeeded in liberating the towns of Sabiid, Bariire, Awdheegle, Jannaale and El-Salini. Except El-Salini, the other four towns have bridges that cross over the Shabelle River to and from Mogadishu. The bridges were part of a network of major supply routes (MSR) used by al-Shabaab to transport explosives from their vast production facilities in Lower Shabelle. Experts believe that the vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) used in the October 2017 attack in Mogadishu which killed over 500 people, was driven over one of those bridges.⁸¹ Importantly, the SNA set-up forward operating bases (FOBs) in each town. The FGS, together with South-west state officials, started the laborious work of stabilization through localized reconciliation and establishing local administrations.⁸²

In early April 2021, al-Shabaab fighters have launched a major predawn attack to recapture Bariire and Awdheegle from the FGS. Both the FGS and al-Shabaab claimed victory for what appears to be a high-casualty attack. Government officials have confirmed to media the killing of over 70 Shabaab gunmen but admitted that the militant group have briefly entered the strategic village of Bariire. The FGS, said that its forces have ultimately recaptured it.⁸³ However, that al-Shabaab was able to penetrate at least one of the towns liberated 18 months earlier raises questions about the “seize and hold” strategy of the entire operation. In theory, the FGS should be able to hold onto to these relatively small towns given that it has over a third of its entire force strength committed to protecting them from militant attacks.

79 Hassan, H. “Lower Shabelle Stabilization: Lessons from Badbaado 1”. Report commissioned by FGS ministry of interior and UNSOM, page 5.

80 “Inspector general...” *ibid*, page 21.

81 See “JTA”, *ibid*, page 4.

82 See “Lower Shabelle...”, *ibid*.

83 Maruf, H. “Al Shabaab Attacks Military Bases in Southern Somalia.” (2021). VOA News. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/al-shabab-attacks-military-bases-southern-somalia>

Operation Badbaado 1

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In a paradoxical way, the FGS instrumentalized clan identity in selecting the soldiers it dispatched to the operation on the pretext that doing so would mitigate long-simmering conflict in the area between local clans

In many ways, Operation Badbaado 1 is a tale of the complexity of running counterterrorism operations in Somalia. Together with AMISOM and other partners, the FGS spent months planning for this operation. Much of that planning focused on the intricate stabilization work that was needed after liberation. In a paradoxical way, the FGS instrumentalized clan identity in selecting the soldiers it dispatched to the operation on the pretext that doing so would mitigate long-simmering conflict in the area between local clans.⁸⁴ “This deliberate approach is in contrast to the past when communities felt the SNA forces were predominately from a clan that was part of the complex conflict dynamics,” wrote a consultant hired to review the operation.⁸⁵

This dismayed a number of officials we interviewed for this report. A former defense minister lamented at what he described as “affirmative action run amok and the mainstreaming of clannism in the security forces---the very ailment that led to its downfall decades ago.”⁸⁶ A senior FGS official who works with the security forces said that Badbaado 1 operation “has effectively ghettoized the SNA into subclans whose only capability is to stabilize the villages of their clansmen where they tend to have deep family ties.”⁸⁷

Regardless of how it’s perceived, the FGS appears to be intent on continuing this practice in future operations. As highlighted in the report it commissioned, “the need to ensure the sensitivity in the clan composition” is paramount to successful stabilization.⁸⁸

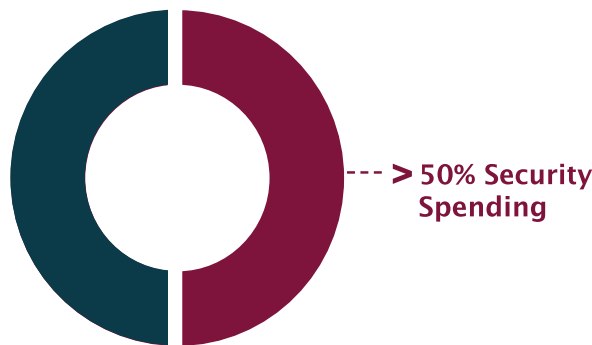
7. Inadequate financing

One of the biggest structural impediments to rebuilding competent and capable security forces in Somalia is inadequate financing.

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One of the biggest structural impediments to rebuilding competent and capable security forces in Somalia is inadequate financing

Security Budget



National Budget

84 Biyomaal and Habar Gidir clans were fighting in parts of Lower Shabelle for years. In September 2020, they signed a peace pact. See “Reconciliation in Marka: Foes Turned Friends Recount Road to Peace. UNSOM. (2020) Accessed at: <https://somalia.un.org/en/91955-reconciliation-marka-foes-turned-friends-recall-road-peace>

85 See “Lower Shabelle...”, *ibid*, page 13.

86 Interview with former defense minister 1, *ibid*.

87 Interview with senior FGS official, *ibid*.

88 See “Lower Shabelle...”, *ibid*, page 16.

Even though the FGS spends over half of its budget on security, the vast majority of that funding goes to support the security sector’s wage bill.⁸⁹ The budget required to recruit, train and equip professional security forces far exceeds the current revenue capacity of the FGS. A recent assessment found that “lack of resources still remains a pressing concern” for the security sector.⁹⁰ The chronic underfunding is unleashing a domino effect where security services are perpetually unable to carry out their duties, often creating the conditions for al-Shabaab to exploit the vacuum. A senior FGS official who is privy to the financing of the security sector said the “lack of resources is [undermining] the long-term sustainability of the force.”⁹¹

The impact of the underfunding is most acutely felt in force generation—the ability to regularly recruit, train and equip new forces in proportion to attrition rates. A joint threat assessment found that “force generation and suitable training and sustainment of the SNA has generally been slow to materialize thereby reducing AMISOM to shoulder more of the burden,” adding that “the threat posed by not generating such Somali forces to replace AMISOM cannot be understated.”⁹² Force generation is crucial because Somali security forces have an abnormally high attrition rate caused in part by “insufficient and untimely pay,” according to a revised Somali Transitional Plan.⁹³ Attrition (and desertion) are also caused by lack of medical care for wounded soldiers. In most cases, families are “left to their own devices to provide long-term care as the government’s support ends almost immediately after emergency treatment,” lamented a former defense minister.⁹⁴ In the new STP, the FGS is hoping to overcome this challenge by ramping up its recruitment and, crucially, retention of the force. But the plan is bereft of specific details on how officials aim to accomplish what has proven to be an expensive and a daunting task.



The Somali government has consistently struggled to fund weapons, vehicles, and communications equipment for existing and newly trained troops and police

The upshot of the persistent funding crisis is that the FGS relies heavily on external partners for not only operational costs but for capital costs in equipment. As the Pentagon inspector general noted, “the Somali government has consistently struggled to fund weapons, vehicles, and communications equipment for existing and newly trained troops and police.”⁹⁵ Despite saving a considerable amount of money as a result of the successful reforms of last few years, “the FGS is simply not in a position to allocate additional funding to capital expenditure for the security sector, given its meager national budget and focus on salary payments,” said a former defense minister who lobbied for increased spending on equipment.⁹⁶

89 See “SJPER”, *ibid*, page 55.
90 See “JTA”, *ibid*, page 5.
91 Interview with senior FGS defense official, *ibid*.
92 See “JTA”, *ibid*, page 24.
93 See “revised Transitional Plan”, *ibid*, page 24.
94 Interview with former defense minister 2, *ibid*.
95 See “inspector general...” *ibid*, page 26.
96 Interview with former defense minister 2, *ibid*.

FGS officials noted that some international partners instrumentalize this weakness by leveraging their equipment donations for political reasons. Two former defense ministers said that both Arab and African countries have raised political and diplomatic matters during discussions on their contribution. “Although it was not overtly packaged as conditionality, the subtext was clear,” said a former defense minister.⁹⁷ The FGS buys the majority of the light weapons and ammunitions it needs mainly from “neighboring countries that are strategically adversarial to Somalia,” added the minister. This generates substantial revenue for these countries who do not always have the best interest of Somalia at heart.

8. The disruptive effect of al-Shabaab

Since 2006 when it burst into the national stage as part of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), the militant group al-Shabaab⁹⁸ has been the deadliest insurgency in Africa and a formidable force in Somalia. Four successive administrations in Somalia⁹⁹ and AMISOM have collectively failed to meaningfully degrade the group’s capabilities, let alone defeat it altogether. The group’s resilience and adaptiveness¹⁰⁰ in the face of extraordinary assault, including regular US airstrikes that sometimes decapitate its top leadership,¹⁰¹ is remarkable by any measure. Paradoxically, those qualities are also central to the persistent failure to revive “able and acceptable” security forces, because the militant group deftly exploits chronic misgovernance on the part of the FGS.

While the FGS is struggling to command and control less than 40,000 security forces,¹⁰² al-Shabaab is destabilizing the nation with an estimated force of 5,000-10,000 fighters.¹⁰³ By all accounts, the group is active in most parts of south-central Somalia (that is anywhere except Somaliland and Puntland).¹⁰⁴ And even in Puntland, the Islamic State (IS), a rival group, is very active. It carries out operations from its base in the Galgala mountains and has an estimated force of 350 fighters, although it is far less potent than al-Shabaab.¹⁰⁵ Despite the comparably small force strength of al-Shabaab, “the group continues to operate with relative impunity, particularly in areas that lack adequate government administration or security presence.”¹⁰⁶

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The group’s resilience and adaptiveness¹⁰⁰ in the face of extraordinary assault, including regular US airstrikes that sometimes decapitate its top leadership,¹⁰¹ is remarkable by any measure

97 Ibid.

98 For a detailed description of the evolution of al-Shabaab, see “The Anatomy of al-Shabaab,” by Abdi Aynte. (2010). <https://www.scribd.com/doc/34053611/The-Anatomy-of-Al-Shabaab-by-Abdi-Aynte>

99 When the group emerged, the late Abdullahi Yusuf was the president. Since then, presidents Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo have all failed to defeat al-Shabaab.

100 See “inspector general...” Ibid, page 12.

101 Alexander, D. “US Confirms Death of Al-Shabaab Leader Godane in Somalia Strike”. Reuters. (2014). Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-usa-islamist-idUSKBN0H01OO20140905>

102 Includes SNA, police and NISA.

103 FGS estimates it at 4,000-7,000 (see JTA page 9) but the US estimates it to be 5,000-10,000 (see inspector general... page 15).

104 See, for example, <https://acleddata.com/2020/01/15/acledd-resources-al-shabaab-in-somalia-and-kenya/>

105 See JTA, ibid, page 11

106 See “inspector general...” ibid, page 13

8.1 Taxes for services

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Enshrouded deep in al-Shabaab's brutality is bureaucratic efficacy, especially in the provision of justice, seen by many as fast, fair and enforceable in comparison to statutory FGS and FMS courts

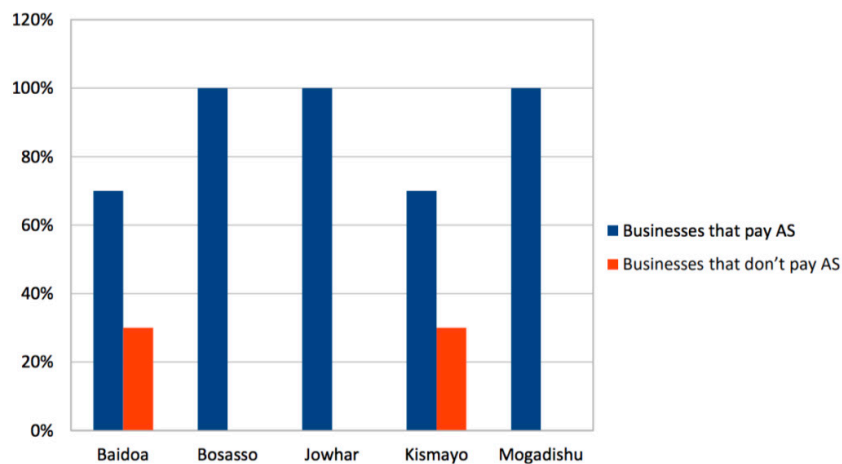
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The tax collection by [al-Shabaab] is enabled by little or no security protection afforded to businessmen in much of the country

Enshrouded deep in al-Shabaab's brutality is bureaucratic efficacy, especially in the provision of justice, seen by many as fast, fair and enforceable in comparison to statutory FGS and FMS courts.¹⁰⁷ The FGS concedes that the group is exploiting “gaps in the justice system”. In a recent joint threat assessment, it was highlighted that “attention to justice is a crucial aspect for Somalia's national security architecture because Somalia's security structure and development of local governance will be supported in large part by the return of an effective and capable Somali justice system.”¹⁰⁸ The National Stabilization Strategy (NSS), co-drafted by the FGS and FMS, concedes that access to justice is barely available in the federal and state capitals, and describes reforming the sector as a critical priority for stabilization.¹⁰⁹ Al-Shabaab also generates a considerable amount of money from fees it levies on citizens seeking justice in their courts, with most cases involving property disputes or marital and inheritance issues.¹¹⁰ These matters often involve significant financial disputes which generate funding for al-Shabaab's activities.

A recent study by the Hiraal Institute, a Somali think tank, found that the militant group is raising the same amount of money as the FGS through a sophisticated system of extortion across the country, particularly Mogadishu. “The tax collection by [al-Shabaab] is enabled by little or no security protection afforded to businessmen in much of the country. Its punitive operatives are active in almost all areas of Mogadishu, including the Villa Somalia neighborhood; most of Bossaso and Jowhar; and, to a lesser extent, much of Baidoa and Kismayo,” the report said.¹¹¹

Businesses that pay AS



Source: Hiraal Institute

107 See “Rebuilding Somalia's Broken Justice System”. Heritage Institute. (2021). Accessed at: <https://heritageinstitute.org/rebuilding-somalias-broken-justice-system-fixing-the-politics-policies-and-procedures-2/>

108 See JTA, *ibid*, page 11.

109 See “National Stabilization Strategy: 2018-2020”, page 4.

110 See JTA, *ibid*, page 8.

111 See “A Losing Game: Countering Al-Shabaab's Financial System”. Hiraal Institute. (2020). Page 2, Accessed at: <https://hiraalinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/A-Losing-Game.pdf>

Oddly, al-Shabaab is also levying taxes on imports that come through Mogadishu’s seaport, which is the primary revenue source for the FGS. Al-Shabaab “is able to assess tax obligations of businesses because importation manifests are provided to the group by government employees, especially those that work at the seaport. Al-Shabaab uses this detailed information to demand customs duties of all imports. Businesses confidently pay the taxes because they expect al-Shabaab to heed its part of the deal as it has always done; those that pay taxes are free to go wherever they want, while those that refuse are punished and their lives are endangered.”¹¹²

9. External actors

A phalanx of international partners are engaged in Somalia’s security sector with the declared objective of creating the enabling environment for the FGS to resume responsibility for its own security as soon as the end of 2021.¹¹³ However, it’s becoming abundantly clear that this target is both unrealistic and unachievable due in part to the shambolic nature of external actors’ role, which is shaped by bilateral priorities, geostrategic interests and counterterrorism efforts.



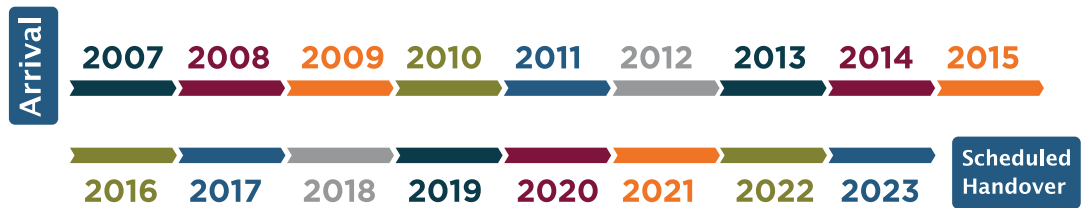
The most prominent actor in Somalia’s security arena is AMISOM, which has over 20,000 troops in the country. Although its primary mandate is to support the FGS in pacifying and stabilizing the country, its 14-year-long mission has evolved considerably.¹¹⁴

112 Ibid, pages 3 and 4.

113 According to the Somali Transitional Plan (STP). See STP, page 10.

114 For a detailed treatment, please see Williams, P. and Hashi, A. “Exit Strategy Challenges for AU Mission in Somalia.” Heritage Institute. (2016). Accessed at: <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Exit-Strategy-Challenges-for-the-AU-Mission-in-Somalia.pdf>

AMISOM's 14 Year Evolution



Many experts believe that AMISOM is now trapped in a quagmire.¹¹⁵ Currently, the mission has two mutually reinforcing priorities: first, it supports FGS forces in counterinsurgency and stabilization operations, and second, it trains a significant number of security forces. Neither effort is going well. AMISOM began its drawdown when it sent 1,000 troops home in early 2020 as part of its exit strategy.

“As the Jubbaland debacle crystalized, Nairobi and Addis Ababa are in it to advance their own security interests and are even willing to break the cohesion of AMISOM to pursue their interests

Somali officials—both former and current—underscored a number of issues concerning AMISOM. First, the fact that Ethiopia and Kenya—two historical rivals of Somalia—continue to be part of the AU peacekeeping mission remains a disquieting reality to Somalis. “Force commanders sometimes receive orders from their capitals, which at times hinders operations,” said a senior FGS official who works with them.¹¹⁶ As the Jubbaland debacle crystalized, Nairobi and Addis Ababa are in it to advance their own security interests and are even willing to break the cohesion of AMISOM to pursue their interests.¹¹⁷ While not providing lethal weapons to FGS forces, Kenya and Ethiopia are routinely training and equipping FMS forces near their borders.¹¹⁸

“Senior Somali security officials grudgingly note the exorbitant amount of money partners spend on AMISOM¹¹⁹ under the backdrop of chronic underfunding of FGS forces

Second, senior Somali security officials grudgingly note the exorbitant amount of money partners spend on AMISOM¹¹⁹ under the backdrop of chronic underfunding of FGS forces. They point to what they view as systemic deprivation of Somali forces from developing stronger capabilities. They suspect that big nations fear that powerful Somali security forces would ultimately pose a strategic threat to Ethiopia and Kenya and rekindle the erstwhile irredentist agenda of Somalia.¹²⁰ Most partners do not provide lethal support to Somali forces, a point highlighted by AFRICOM in the Pentagon report: “While the Somali security forces have benefited from training provided by international partners, foreign governments are often reluctant to provide these forces with weapons and equipment required for deployment.”¹²¹ There are different reasons for the partners’ reluctance to provide weapons and ammunition. Some, like the EU, were legally disallowed, but a new EU policy would permit its training mission to provide lethal support.¹²² The lack of stronger capability is a deeply frustrating predicament for FGS officials who continue to call for the complete lifting of the 1992 UN arms embargo on Somalia, which was partially lifted in 2013.¹²³

115 Interview with former defense minister 1.

116 Interview with FGS defense official, *ibid*.

117 See “Ending the Dangerous Standoff...” by ICG, page 9.

118 See “The Politics of Security...” by Keating and Abshir, page 7.

119 Since 2007, the US spent nearly \$2 billion on AMOSM. See “Understanding US Policy in Somalia” by Paul Williams for Chatham House. (2020). Page 12. Accessed at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/07/understanding-us-policy-somalia>

120 See “Building the Somali National Army..”, page 369.

121 See “Inspector general...” *ibid*, page 22.

122 See “EUTM...”, page 7.

123 Mukami, M. & Dhaysane, M. “Somalia Protests ‘Outdated’ UN Arms Embargo”. Anadolu Agency. (2019). Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-protests-outdated-un-arms-embargo/1648236>

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Abu Dhabi continues to support the Puntland Marine Police, initially established as an anti-piracy mission, but which has since morphed into the complex security and trade ecosystem of the UAE in the Horn of Africa

Other actors concede that their support is not entirely strategic. A recent review of the EU training mission found that they “had to carry out a largely technical and tactical agenda in a context where the politics of the security sector were not conducive to building a professional set of national security forces.”¹²⁴ The UAE has also been training Somali security forces for nearly a decade, and may have graduated as many as 10,000 from its courses in Mogadishu and Puntland.¹²⁵ Although it closed its Mogadishu training facility in 2018 following a spat with the FGS, Abu Dhabi continues to support the Puntland Marine Police, initially established as an anti-piracy mission, but which has since morphed into the complex security and trade ecosystem of the UAE in the Horn of Africa.¹²⁶ The haphazard training programs provided by Arab and neighboring countries run the risk of further disintegrating the security forces, as noted by the ICG: “The threat of greater factionalism is all the more worrying given the dysfunction that already wracks the security forces.”¹²⁷

9.1 Eritrea: a new kid in the block?

Over the past few years, Eritrea has joined the growing list of external actors training forces for the Somali government. According to an investigation by the VOA, the number of Somali forces receiving training in Eritrea is between 3,000 to 7,000 soldiers.¹²⁸ Although the FGS has never confirmed that Asmara is training troops for Somalia, there are allegations that some of these troops were deployed to the conflict in Tigray in northern Ethiopia.¹²⁹

Until a few years ago, Eritrea was under UN sanctions for its role in arming al-Shabaab and contributing to the destabilization of Somalia. Following the historic thawing of the relationship between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 2018, the Somali government, together with Ethiopia, advocated for the lifting of those sanctions. And soon after that, president Farmaajo joined prime minister Abiy Ahmed and president Isaias Afwerki on a trilateral bonding of the three Horn of African leaders.¹³⁰

Eritrea’s role in training Somali forces is extremely controversial in Somalia. Opposition leaders and some federal member states cite this engagement as an example of what they describe as ‘the authoritarian streak’ of president Farmaajo. Some international partners are also deeply uncomfortable with this arrangement as they view Eritrea as a destabilizing actor in the Horn of Africa.

124 See “EUTM training...”, page 14.

125 See “Somalia and the Gulf Crisis”, page 12.

126 Ibid.

127 See “Somalia and the Gulf Crisis”, page 11.

128 Maruf, H. “Clandestine Training of Somalia Forces in Eritrea Stris Families’ Concerns.” (2021). VOA News. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/ clandestine-training-somali-forces-eritrea-stirs-families-concern>

129 Ibid

130 See “Leaders of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia Vow to Deepen Ties.” (2020). Xinhua. Accessed at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-01/28/c_138737839.htm

9.2 Turkey and US: a league of their own

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Turkey trains and equips more Somali security forces than any other country

Among the external actors, supporting the Somali security forces, Turkey and the US stand out for their comprehensive and successful training programs.¹³¹ And that is because they’re the only two players who are systemically implementing the five-step process¹³² required to build an effective security force. Together with the EU and UK, they were also instrumental in nudging Somalia to switch its training procedures from Soviet-era to NATO standards.¹³³ Turkey, arguably the most popular actor in Somalia, has built a \$50 million training facility on the outskirts of the capital as part of its wider assistance package.¹³⁴ By far, Turkey trains and equips more Somali security forces than any other country. Nearly 10 percent of Somalia’s security forces were trained in “TurkSom”, Ankara’s behemoth training facility in Mogadishu, making Turkey the most indispensable player in the sector.¹³⁵

Some of the most elite FGS forces, such as Gorgor and Haram’ad, are also trained by Turkey, and their senior officers are sent to Turkey for specialized training. Crucially, Turkey provides weapons and ammunition to its trainees, and, in recent months, has provided armored vehicles.¹³⁶ Current and former FGS officials interviewed for this report speak highly of Turkey for “staying above the Somali political fray and consistently providing predictable and strategic support for Somalia”.¹³⁷ In December 2020, a coalition of more than a dozen presidential candidates urged Turkey to stop arming Harm’ad, an elite police unit trained by Ankara, alleging that president Farmaajo was going to use them to “hijack” the elections.¹³⁸ It marked the first time that Somali political elites criticize Turkey since Ankara became a major player in Somalia in 2011.

In addition to Turkey, the US role in the security sector is largely seen in a positive light among current and former FGS officials, as well as many experts. Although the Trump administration’s decision to withdraw from Somalia the approximately 700 American troops has rattled some quarters,¹⁴² Washington plays an outsized role in degrading al-Shabaab through its kinetic attacks. The US has also built-up the Danab Brigade, by far the most capable unit within the security sector. Unlike other countries whose training programs are largely based on the “train and release” principle, the US mentors Danab special forces in the battlefield.¹⁴³ Although the London Security Pact authorized the establishment of 3,000 Danab forces (500 in each FMS), AFRICOM reported that there were only 945 soldiers in the brigade as of the end of 2020.¹⁴⁴ Remarkably, Danab is responsible for 80 percent of SNA’s offensive operations, and nearly all the counterterrorism operations.¹⁴⁵

131 See “EUTM training...”, page 9.

132 Ibid. The 5 steps are: (a) assessing the intended purpose of the mission, the available budget and the type and number of personnel required; (b) selecting the people to be trained; (c) training trainees to a high standard; (d) equipping trainees to operate effectively in the field; and (e) mentoring trainees on their field operations.

133 Interview with FGS defense official.

134 For detailed treatment of Turkey’s unique intervention in Somalia, see, for example, “Turkey’s Assistance Model in Somalia.” Heritage Institute. (2016). Accessed at: <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Turkeys-Assistance-Model-in-Somalia-Achieving-Much-With-Little-1-1.pdf>

135 Ilhan, Z. and Demirci, Z. “1 in 3 Somali Troops Trained by Turkey: Envoy”. Anadolu Agency. (2020). Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/1-of-3-somalian-troops-to-be-trained-by-turkey-envoy/1931275>

136 Dhaysane, M. “Turkey Donates 12 Armored Vehicles to Somalia.” Anadolu Agency. (2020). Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-donates-12-military-vehicles-to-somalia/1955609>

137 Interview with former FGS defense minister 1.

138 Sheikh, A. “Somalia Opposition Urged Turkey Not to Send Arms to Police Unit”. (2020). Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-politics/somalias-opposition-urges-turkey-not-to-send-arms-to-police-unit-idUSKBN28Q29G>

142 Cooper, H. “Trump Orders All American Troops Out of Somalia.” New York Times. (2020). Accessed at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/world/africa/trump-somalia-troop-withdrawal.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

143 See “EUTM training...”, page 11.

144 See “Inspector general...”, page 21.

145 Ibid, page 20.

Danab Brigade after US withdrawal

FGS officials and experts are deeply worried about the fate of Danab Brigade following the departure of US troops from Somalia in early 2021. The US has invested heavily in building the superior capabilities of the unit for almost a decade. But the brigade is entirely reliant on continued US support for survival. Many fear that the unit would crumble without the robust financial support and mentorship of US troops. A senior FGS official said principals are discussing concrete strategies to “harness and preserve” the unit.¹⁴⁶

However, others are worried that FGS leaders will deploy Danab forces to advance political objectives, much like other Turkish-trained special forces such as Gorgor and Haram’ad.¹⁴⁷ In the past, the US has never allowed the FGS to politicize Danab forces. But one incident raises questions. A few weeks after former prime minister Hassan Khaire was ousted in July 2020, FGS security forces arrested Danab Brigade commander Ismail Abdimalik Maalin, who happens to hail from the same sub-clan as Khaire. In Somalia’s hyper-clannish society, the arrest was criticized by elders of the Murusade clan as a “politically motivated move.”¹⁴⁸ In December 2020, the FGS released Maalin from prison and dropped all charges against him. Whatever the motivation, there is no doubt that the abrupt US withdrawal and abandonment of Danab Brigade raises serious questions about America’s reliability as a partner. Critics like Tommy Ross have long argued that US support has always been “limited and erratic,” and that it was “largely tactical, mostly targeting the development of counterterrorism capabilities in special operations units.”¹⁴⁹

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Scholars highlight that “there’s a need for management of a multiplicity of actors” in the security sector

Scholars highlight that “there’s a need for management of a multiplicity of actors” in the security sector.¹⁵⁰ The FGS appears to be trapped between its desperate need for security sector assistance and its disdain for the often ineffective and duplicitous efforts by multiple external actors. In this regard, both the FGS and its international partners can find solace in the fact that, after 15 years of investment in the revival of Somali security forces, al-Shabaab no longer poses an existential threat to the Somali government, according to the assessment of independent observers.¹⁵¹

146 Interview with senior FGS defense official .

147 Interview with former defense minister 2 .

148 Watch a press conference by elders claiming to be associated with commander Maalin: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MYydeomjwr8>

149 Ross, T. “The Dangers of Incoherent Strategy: Security Assistance in Somalia: 2008-2018”. Texas National Security Review. (2019). Accessed at: <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-the-pros-and-cons-of-security-assistance/#essay3>

150 See “The Security Sector Reform...”, page 3.

151 “See inspector general...”, page 13.

10. Conclusion

International partners have provided considerable financial and other support to revive Somalia's moribund security sector. Their efforts have been inhibited by a confluence of factors, principally the failure of the Somali political actors to achieve a grand settlement on key outstanding issues around security architecture in a federal system, particularly as it relates to power and resource sharing. Mistrust is deepened by recent events such as the deployment of Turkish-trained special forces for a political conflict in Gedo in the state of Jubbaland. And another conflict is now brewing in Hirshabeelle.



Politicization of the national security forces, which is the single most poignant factor, is amplified by salient misgovernance permeating government state institutions at federal and state levels

Politicization of the national security forces, which is the single most poignant factor, is amplified by salient misgovernance permeating state institutions at federal and state levels. Although excellent efforts have been made in the fight against corruption, especially as it relates to the so-called 'ghost soldiers,' nepotism remains a big problem. Junior officers are routinely promoted for loyalty and clannish reasons. This destroys the morale of the security forces and reorients their loyalty to their clans—the Achilles' heel of the security forces 30 years ago.

Chronic underfunding is another major factor hindering the revival of Somali security forces. Poor revenue generation is forcing the FGS to rely heavily on financial support to maintain its roughly 40,000 security forces. The effect is a high attrition rate and low force generation. The many external actors, supporting the FGS in the security sector are notoriously uncoordinated, and some, such as Kenya and Ethiopia, are pursuing their national interests at the expense of Somalia's long-term stability. Many others are training and releasing forces without providing lethal weapons, creating a large pool of unarmed soldiers. The US and Turkey are prime examples of successful "train and mentor" programs. As a result, the US-trained Danab Brigade carries out 80 percent of offensive operations and all counterterrorism operations. The Turkish trained Gorgor and Harma'ad are also successful in operations, though their involvement in politically motivated conflicts in recent years have dented their credibility.

Meanwhile, the militant group al-Shabaab continues to disrupt progress and exploit misgovernance and lack of political reconciliation. US airstrikes and recent operations such as Badbaado 1 forced the group deeper underground. From there, they raise as much revenue as the government from big cities like Mogadishu and Kismayo. However, they no longer pose an existential threat to the FGS.

11. Recommendations

Structural impediments to rebuilding Somalia's security sector can seem like a prohibitively daunting task, but with a committed leadership, these challenges can be addressed, if the following steps are taken by the political actors at the federal and state levels after the federal elections:

First, FGS and FMS leaders need to return to the London Security Pact as an interim cooperative framework with the National Security Architecture as a foundation. In this regard, the FGS and FMS (at senior officials level) should open an urgent dialogue within the National Security Architecture aimed at de-escalating the conflagrations in Gedo and Hiiraan and recommitting to the London principles. Moreover, the leaders should commit to depoliticize security forces during (and after) the federal election, in line with article 127 of the provisional constitution. Politicization of security forces at federal and state levels is having the most adverse effect on long-term rebuilding of an able, accountable and acceptable security force.

Second, within the framework of the National Security Architecture, FGS and FMS leaders should establish the National Security Commission as stipulated by article 111G of the provisional constitution. This council should be the permanent replacement of the National Security Council, and should be able to set broad policy guidelines for the provision of security in a post-conflict and federal Somalia.

Third, the FGS should immediately implement the recent policy on promotions and demotions of the security sector, in line with article 111G of the provisional constitution. This would make it harder for politicians to incentivize promotions based on loyalty or clan affiliation. It would also lead to professionalization and institutionalization of the security sector.

Fourth, the FGS and FMS leaders must discuss and compromise on the 15 outstanding articles in the review of the provisional constitution. The continued rivalry over long-term constitutional issues is a key factor of all political contestations in Somalia. Even if the opposing sides can't finalize the discussions on all 15 articles during this electoral cycle, they should at least agree on the relatively easier ones with a patriotic spirit.

Fifth, the United States should seriously consider returning its troops to Somalia. President Biden was a vice president when these troops were sent to Somalia, and many of his senior officials understand the strategic importance of their role in the long-term stability and security of Somalia. The investment put in Danab Brigade is too big to fail.

Sixth, leaders of the FGS and FMS should (after elections) objectively review the role of external actors in the rebuilding of a competent security force. Within the National Security Council, an effort must be made to end duplicity and streamline training and equipping efforts by partners. The NSC should also review the continued presence of Ethiopian and Kenyan forces in Somalia. If they determine that they're not helping the nation in its earnest attempt to revive its forces, they should order them out of the country immediately. There is plenty of evidence to support our neighbors' bad intentions. However, the FGS should maintain good neighborly relationship with both.

HERITAGE

I N S T I T U T E