

# BACKGROUNDER

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## U.S. Must Press Somalia to Deliver Competent Governance

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### Abstract

*For decades, violence in Somalia has frustrated U.S. efforts to steady the country. However, the military defeats and territorial losses that the Islamist terror group al-Shabaab has suffered since 2011 allowed a permanent federal government to form, and provided the best chance in decades for Somalia to stabilize itself. The government has done poorly thus far. However, the window of opportunity for Somalia remains open, justifying continued U.S. stabilization efforts. To assist the long, difficult, and uncertain process, the U.S. should construct a series of benchmarks with which to hold the Somali government accountable and judge the efficacy of U.S. engagement; mobilize allies to keep the Somali government accountable; better monitor the aid it sends into the country; mediate regional powers' competition for influence in Somalia; and help Somalia develop its security institutions in tandem with training its military.*

Instability has gripped the East African country of Somalia for more than 20 years. The complete breakdown in governance in the early 1990s created a void first filled by warlords and then by a series of Islamist terrorist groups. Hundreds of thousands of Somalis have died in the violence, and millions have fled the country or are internally displaced. The instability strains the region and created recurrent famines that took a further toll on the Somali people.

The current dominant terrorist group, and the most powerful in Somalia's history, is al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda affiliate. Despite military setbacks beginning in 2011, it still controls significant territory and launches frequent attacks into neighboring countries,

### KEY POINTS

- The current Somali government has many deficiencies and may not be viable. However, there has been enough progress in Somalia that the U.S. should continue engaging with the government as long as it remains on a sufficiently positive trajectory.
- The U.S. must create benchmarks to hold the government accountable and gauge its progress. Failing to do so will encourage irresponsible governance and fuel corruption that are counterproductive to stabilizing the country.
- If the government makes insufficient progress in the coming years, the U.S. should stop supporting it and focus on counterterrorism until a potentially viable, friendly system of authority emerged. One option in this scenario would be to bilaterally engage with responsible states.
- AMISOM has too few troops to make further significant gains against al-Shabaab. A continuing stalemate works to the group's advantage, so the Somali National Army must be quickly made competent to further pressure al-Shabaab.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/bg3252>

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particularly Kenya. Thousands of non-Somalis have supported the group during its existence, including scores of U.S. residents and citizens.

For years Somalia's disarray resisted U.S. efforts to steady the country. However, al-Shabaab's battlefield losses provided an opportunity unprecedented in two decades. In 2012, Somalia established a permanent federal government, which the international community strongly backed in the hopes of stabilizing Somalia.

Since then, the government has made insufficient progress toward delivering the type of governance and security that can steady the country. Yet the stabilization effort, though hugely difficult, is still viable. A stable, competent Somali government would be able to serve U.S. interests in the region, which are strong enough to necessitate more patience with the Somali government than the U.S. should otherwise have. The government, however, must quickly improve its performance.

The U.S. should continue supporting the government, but must construct a series of benchmarks to facilitate strict oversight and accountability. Other components of the U.S. effort should include mobilizing allies to keep the Somali government accountable; better monitoring the aid it sends into the country; engaging directly with federal member states when appropriate; and helping Somalia develop its security institutions in tandem with training its military.

If the Somali government remains mired in corruption and fecklessness, the U.S. should decrease its support and focus strictly on counterterrorism. Only after a system of accountable authority has established itself with a chance of creating stability in the country would the U.S. want to consider supporting stabilization activities again. Counterterrorism is not the solution to Somalia's instability, but the U.S. should not pour money and lives into an open-ended commitment to a government that does not have a reasonable chance of succeeding.

## A Brief History

General Mohamed Siad Barre took power in Somalia in a coup in 1969, nine years after southern Somalia joined with Somaliland (a former British colony) to form the Republic of Somalia. In accord with his "scientific socialism" philosophy, Barre imposed a heavily centralized political and economic system, and undertook a range of social engineering projects.<sup>1</sup>

Barre's economic mismanagement, divisive clan policies, and abuse of his people led to a proliferation of clan-based rebel groups in the 1980s. After a ruinous struggle, Barre fled Somalia on January 26, 1991, leaving the rebel groups to rip the country to pieces as they struggled for power.

In early 1993, the U.S. landed troops in Somalia to join a U.N. peacekeeping operation guarding food aid shipments that militias routinely looted. After one of them killed more than 20 Pakistani peacekeepers, the U.S. began targeting its leader, Mohamed Farah Aideed. A botched raid against Aideed's operation led to a pitched battle in Mogadishu during which militiamen shot down two U.S. Black Hawk helicopters and killed 18 U.S. servicemen (dramatized in the 2001 movie *Black Hawk Down*). The U.S. withdrew from Somalia soon after.<sup>2</sup>

Following the Black Hawk Down fiasco, the international community focused on counterterror efforts and supporting a string of weak transitional governments. Somalia remained chaotic until 2006, when 11 clan-based and sub-clan-based Islamic courts, which formed in different pockets of Mogadishu, coalesced into the Islamic Courts Union (ICU). The ICU rapidly took control of Mogadishu and then most of southern Somalia, enjoying significant popular support.

The rise of the ICU concerned neighboring Ethiopia and the United States. The ICU harbored an unknown number of al-Qaeda members,<sup>3</sup> and some of its leaders trained in Afghanistan with al-Qaeda and made irredentist claims on eastern Ethiopia.<sup>4</sup> It

1. Mary Harper, *Getting Somalia Wrong* (New York, NY: Zed Books, Ltd., 2012), pp. 54–59.

2. Ibid., pp. 60–61.

3. Ken Menkhaus, "Violent Islamic Extremism: Al-Shabaab Recruitment in America," testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate, March 11, 2009, <https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:u6RZaRk8H7kJ:https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/download/031109menkhaus+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>. (accessed August 16, 2017), and Evan F. Kohlmann, "Shabaab Al-Mujahideen: Migration and Jihad in the Horn of Africa," The NEFA Foundation, May 2009, <https://web-beta.archive.org/web/20100601062036/http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefashabaabreport0509.pdf> (accessed August 16, 2017).

4. Harper, *Getting Somalia Wrong*, p. 83.

also had a number of Western citizens fighting for it.<sup>5</sup> The ICU refused U.S. requests to expel the al-Qaeda members,<sup>6</sup> and in December 2006 called for jihad against Ethiopia.<sup>7</sup> Backed by U.S. intelligence and surveillance capabilities, Ethiopia promptly invaded Somalia and routed the ICU.

One of the ICU's hardline components, Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen, better known as al-Shabaab, rallied to lead an anti-Ethiopian insurgency. The Ethiopians pulled the last of their troops from Somalia in December 2008, leaving the latest internationally backed transitional government trapped in a sliver of Mogadishu, with al-Shabaab held at bay only by the U.N.-backed African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) force.

In July 2010, al-Shabaab perpetrated a double bombing in Uganda, one of two countries contributing troops to the approximately 5,000-strong AMISOM force.<sup>8</sup> The bombing galvanized the international community to broaden AMISOM's mandate and eventually increase its size to about 22,000 troops. The bolstered force—with some support from the nascent Somali National Army (SNA) and several anti-al-Shabaab militias—began pushing al-Shabaab back, eventually driving it from all its major strongholds.

Al-Shabaab today is diminished but remains dangerous. It still controls significant territory, and is able to field units large enough to penetrate AMISOM bases.<sup>9</sup> It routinely launches terror attacks in Mogadishu and in neighboring countries, especially Kenya. It has a significant number of foreign fighters, including an unknown number of Westerners.

Nevertheless, the success of AMISOM and allied forces gave Somalia the chance to create a permanent

central government for the first time since Barre fell. In August 2012, the country adopted a provisional constitution. The following month, parliament elected Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to serve as the country's eighth president.<sup>10</sup> The process was corrupt and driven by clannism, but many within the international community nonetheless greeted Hassan Sheikh's ascension with optimism. The United States re-established official ties with the Somali government in January 2013, ending a 20-year hiatus in diplomatic relations between the two countries.<sup>11</sup>

## The Islamic Courts Union refused U.S. requests to expel al-Qaeda members, and in December 2006 called for jihad against Ethiopia.

In 2015, Hassan Sheikh announced that expected one-man, one-vote elections in 2016 (a change from the process used to select the president in 2012) would be impossible due to ongoing insecurity. Instead, the National Leadership Forum (NLF)—a group of federal and regional Somali leaders—negotiated an alternative electoral framework that expanded on the electoral process the country used in 2012. In the expanded format, 135 elders drawn from various clans chose 14,025 delegates, who then selected the 275 members of the Lower House (officially known as the House of the People).<sup>12</sup>

The parliamentary seats for the Lower House were apportioned according to the “4.5 formula,” by which the four dominant clans—Darod, Dir, Hawiye,

5. “Profile: Omar Hammami,” Anti-Defamation League, February 9, 2010, <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/.../profile-omar-hammami-2013.pdf> (accessed August 24, 2017).
6. Menkhaus, “Violent Islamic Extremism: Al-Shabaab Recruitment in America.”
7. Harper, *Getting Somalia Wrong*, p. 83.
8. “Uganda’s Museveni Vows Revenge on Al-Shabab over Blasts,” BBC, July 15, 2010, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-10645370> (accessed August 18, 2017).
9. Harun Maruf, “Al-Shabab Captures Somali Military Base,” Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/al-shabab-captures-somali-military-base-kenya/3695116.html> (accessed August 24, 2017).
10. “Somali Lawmakers Elect Mohamud as Next President,” Reuters, September 10, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/somalia-politics-idUSL5E8KAIUR20120910> (accessed August 18, 2017).
11. “U.S. Set to Recognize Somali Government,” Voice of America, January 17, 2013, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-set-to-recognize-somali-government/1585876.html> (accessed August 18, 2017).
12. Joshua Meservey, “Somalia’s Milestone Electoral Process Requires U.S. Scrutiny,” Heritage Foundation Issue Brief No. 4602, August 19, 2016, <http://www.heritage.org/africa/report/somalias-milestone-electoral-process-requires-us-scrutiny>.

and Rahanweyn—received an equal number of seats, while all other clans combined received half as many as one of the major clans. This worked out to the four dominant clans each electing 61 members for the Lower House, while the rest of the clans elected 31 seats among them.<sup>13</sup>

The electoral process included the creation of an Upper House of parliament as well, as provided for in the provisional constitution. Somalia has a federal system, with six established states: Galmudug, Hirshabelle, Jubaland, Puntland, Somaliland, and South West State. The state executives selected at least two nominees for each Upper House seat that was allotted to their state, and the state legislatures then voted on which one would win the seat.<sup>14</sup> The provisional constitution requires that states have an equal number of Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Upper House, and that the total number of Upper House MPs not exceed 54.<sup>15</sup>

After they were elected, MPs from both houses of parliament voted on the president. In a surprise result, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, a former prime minister and dual U.S.–Somali citizen more frequently known as “Farmajo,” won the election in the second round of voting. Farmajo was inaugurated in February 2017.

## **U.S. Interests in Somalia**

U.S. interests in Somalia have been sufficiently robust to spur U.S. engagement with the country for decades, sometimes at significant cost. The interests driving the U.S.’s long engagement with the country are as follows:

**Fighting al-Shabaab**, a group that harms the U.S. by:

- Destabilizing Somalia, a country the U.S. has tried to help towards stability.
- Affiliating with a terrorist organization, al-Qaeda, which has attacked the U.S. and its interests for decades. Al-Shabaab’s first concern is winning the local jihad, but it occasionally calls for lone wolf attacks in the U.S. and would happily attack U.S. interests in the region if the opportunity arose.<sup>16</sup> Al-Shabaab also once had dozens of American citizens and residents fighting with it, including at least four who became suicide bombers.<sup>17</sup> It likely only has a few Americans now, and is no longer an attractive destination for most aspiring terrorists from the West. As long as the group, or one like it, is active in Somalia, however, there is the danger it will again attract Americans. That would bring to the U.S. all the problems associated with having some of its citizens fighting for a deadly, committed terrorist organization.

- Frequently attacking neighboring countries allied to the U.S., especially Kenya.

**Fighting ISIS.** In October 2015, a small breakaway faction of al-Shabaab declared allegiance to ISIS.<sup>18</sup> Making significant inroads in Somalia will be difficult for it,<sup>19</sup> but given the virulence of ISIS, and the likelihood it is seeking new bases as it gets pushed from Iraq and Syria, it is in U.S. interests to prevent the faction from making gains in Somalia.

**Preventing Humanitarian Crises.** Poor or non-existent governance, drought, and violence cause recurrent famine in Somalia. U.S. efforts to avert disasters strengthen the U.S.’s moral authority.

13. Ibid.
14. News release, “Fact Sheet on Somalia’s 2016 Electoral Process,” United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, October 23, 2016, <https://unsm.unmissions.org/fact-sheet-somalia%20%99s-2016-electoral-process> (accessed August 18, 2017).
15. The Federal Republic of Somalia, “Provisional Constitution,” adopted August 1, 2012, [https://unpos.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/old\\_dnn/Adopted\\_Constitution\\_ENG\\_Final%20for%20Printing\\_21SEPT12.pdf](https://unpos.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/old_dnn/Adopted_Constitution_ENG_Final%20for%20Printing_21SEPT12.pdf) (accessed August 17, 2017).
16. Joshua Meservey, “Assessing al-Shabaab’s Mall Threat,” AfricaSource, February 26, 2015, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/africasource/al-shabaab-is-trying-to-claw-back-relevance-with-its-western-malls-threat> (accessed August 18, 2017).
17. They are: Shirwa Ahmed, Omar Mohamud, Farah Mohamed Beledi, and Ibrahim Abdirahman Mohamed. There are conflicting reports whether Abdisalan Hussein Ali was also a suicide bomber. Author research.
18. Abdi Sheikh, “Small Group of Somali al-Shabaab Swear Allegiance to Islamic State,” Reuters, October 23, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-somalia-idUSKCNOSH1BF20151023> (accessed September 6, 2017).
19. Joshua Meservey, “As ISIS Struggles for Influence in Somalia, al-Shabaab Remains the Main Threat,” *World Politics Review*, January 11, 2017, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/20887/as-isis-struggles-for-influence-in-somalia-al-shabab-remains-the-main-threat> (accessed September 6, 2017).

Disaster relief after a crisis that spins out of control is also expensive, and sometimes embroils the U.S. in difficult situations for which it is not fully prepared. Helping Somalia achieve stability would save the lives of people from Somalia, neighboring countries, and perhaps the U.S., and would free up money that the U.S. would otherwise spend on disaster relief in the country.

**Stopping Piracy.** Somali-based pirates attacked hundreds of ships during the peak of their activity between 2010 and 2012. Pirates extorted more than \$200 million in ransoms annually for the ships they captured, causing maritime security costs to rise to \$7 billion a year.<sup>20</sup> The rate of attacks plummeted beginning in 2012, though there was a small flare-up in early 2017.<sup>21</sup> Pirates only ever hijacked a tiny percentage of the ships that passed through the Gulf of Aden, but given U.S. commitment to ensuring free and safe international shipping, it is in U.S. interests to ensure that piracy does not re-emerge in Somali waters.

**Helping Allies.** The instability in Somalia is straining a number of U.S. allies in East Africa. Several of them have lost hundreds of troops in Somalia. Refugees have fled Somalia for nearby countries for more than 20 years, and criminal gangs use Somalia as a transit point for smuggled goods into the region. The U.S. benefits from strong allies, and the situation in Somalia is weakening several of them.

**Ensuring That Its Previous Investment in the Country Is Not Wasted.** Over the past 10 fiscal years, the U.S. spent nearly \$2.5 billion in foreign aid on Somalia.<sup>22</sup> It also lost service members during operations in the country, most recently in May

2017.<sup>23</sup> That investment of blood and treasure gives the United States a stake in Somalia's future, and a responsibility to do all it reasonably can to ensure that this investment is not squandered.

**Maintaining Ties with the Government of a Strategically Located Country.** Somalia has the second-longest Indian Ocean coastline in Africa, is proximate to the Bab el Mandeb chokepoint and to the Middle East, and borders Djibouti, where the U.S. has its only permanent African military base. A number of regional powers are seeking influence in Somalia,<sup>24</sup> and the U.S. must ensure that it protects its own interests there during the growing competition.

## What Al-Shabaab Wants

Al-Shabaab declared allegiance to al-Qaeda in 2012, and reaffirmed its vow two years later. It wishes, as al-Qaeda does, to create a global caliphate ruled by its harsh interpretation of Islamic law.<sup>25</sup> At one time, some of al-Shabaab's leadership wanted to focus more on a nationalist struggle, but emir Ahmed Abdi Godane purged them in 2013. Godane's successor, Ahmed Diiriye, appears to have the same global perspective as Godane did.

In practice, al-Shabaab focuses on first conquering Somalia. It also seeks to win territory in neighboring regions inhabited primarily by ethnic Somalis, or in other primarily Muslim areas.<sup>26</sup> It has a quasi-state structure consisting of nine offices, each of which is led by a senior official who reports to Diiriye. Its military wing, Jaysh al-Usra (Army of Hardship), is split up among the six governorates into which al-Shabaab divided its Somalia operations. It also has a unit

20. John Campbell, "An Uptick in Somali Piracy Caused by a Wave of Poor Maritime Decision-Making," Council on Foreign Relations, June 13, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/blog-post/uptick-somali-piracy-caused-wave-poor-maritime-decision-making> (accessed August 18, 2017), and Roger Middleton, "Trends in Piracy: A Global Problem with Somalia at the Core," Oceans Beyond Piracy, <http://oceansbeyondpiracy.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Middleton%20Trends%20in%20Piracy%20A%20Global%20Problem%20with%20Somalia%20at%20the%20Core.pdf> (accessed August 18, 2017).
21. Campbell, "An Uptick in Somali Piracy Caused by a Wave of Poor Maritime Decision-Making."
22. USAID, "U.S. Foreign Aid by Country: Somalia," [https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/SOM?fiscal\\_year=2015&measure=Disbursements](https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/SOM?fiscal_year=2015&measure=Disbursements) (accessed August 18, 2017).
23. Lucas Tomlinson, "US Navy SEAL Killed in Somalia Identified as 15-year Veteran," FoxNews, May 6, 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/05/06/us-navy-seal-killed-in-somalia-identified-as-15-year-veteran.html> (accessed August 24, 2017).
24. A non-exhaustive list includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Kenya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates.
25. Al-Shabaab spokesman Sheikh Ali Mahmoud Rage recently articulated this philosophy in a propaganda video: "New Video Message from Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahidin's Shaykh Ali Mahmud Rage: 'An Analysis of Events, Part 1: Emigrant's Graduation Ceremony Address,'" Jihadology, May 22, 2017, minute 9:40-11:26, <http://jihadology.net/2017/05/22/new-video-message-from-%E1%B8%A5arakat-al-shabab-al-mujahidins-shaykh-ali-ma-%E1%B8%A5mud-rage-an-analysis-of-events-part-1-emigrants-graduation-ceremony-address/> (accessed August 18, 2017).
26. Joshua Meservey, "Sermonizing with Al Shabab," *Foreign Affairs*, July 26, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/kenya/2015-07-26/sermonizing-al-shabab> (accessed August 18, 2017).

## Foreign Fighters in Somalia—Some from Western Countries

Non-Somalis, including many from the West, have been fighting in Somalia for decades. In 1996, Ethiopian forces killed a European citizen fighting for the Islamist terrorist group al-Itihad al-Islamiya (AIAI),<sup>\*</sup> while a Swedish asylee named Gouled Hassan Dourad began fighting with AIAI in 1997.<sup>†</sup> American, British, Canadian, Danish, and Swedish citizens—including the man who became al-Shabaab's most famous recruit from the U.S., Omar Hammami—fought with the Islamic Courts Union (ICU).<sup>‡</sup>

Al-Shabaab has coveted foreign fighters from its earliest days. When it was still a wing of the ICU, it even took over control of the Mogadishu airport from other elements of the ICU to ensure that arriving foreign fighters were welcomed.<sup>§</sup> Leading members of the group made specific calls to foreign fighters, and in March 2008 the group released a martyrdom video in which a narrator spoke in fluent English for the first time.<sup>||</sup> In 2010, most of the group's important videos were in English or had English subtitles.<sup>#</sup>

Al-Shabaab's appeals likely drew in thousands of foreign fighters,<sup>\*\*</sup> including at least 33 American citizens or residents, most of whom were of Somali descent.<sup>††</sup> Those with battle experience from other jihads were particularly valuable for their fighting and leadership, and likely helped al-Shabaab gain the level of tactical and technological sophistication that it has.<sup>‡‡</sup>

Inexperienced foreign fighters, such as most of those from the West, were generally of little value as front-line fighters. They had other uses, however, including frequently being among the most fanatical

\* Evan F. Kohlmann, "Shabaab Al-Mujahideen: Migration and Jihad in the Horn of Africa," The NEFA Foundation, May 2009, <https://web-beta.archive.org/web/20100601062036/http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/FeaturedDocs/nefashabaabreport0509.pdf> (accessed August 16, 2017).

† News release, "Biographies of High Value Terrorist Detainees Transferred to the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, September 6, 2006, <https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Press%20Releases/2006%20Press%20Releases/DetaineeBiographies.pdf> (accessed August 21, 2017).

‡ Stewart Bell, "Somali-Canadians Joined Fight in Horn of Africa: Report," *National Post*, July 25, 2007, <http://circ.jmellon.com/docs/view.asp?id=1142> (accessed September 6, 2017); Michael Taarnby and Lars Hallundbaek, "Al-Shabaab: The Internationalization of Militant Islamism in Somalia and the Implications for Radicalisation Processes in Europe," Danish Ministry of Justice, February 26, 2010, <http://www.justitsministeriet.dk/sites/default/files/media/Arbejdsomraader/Forskning/Forskningspuljen/2011/2010/alshabaab.pdf> (accessed September 6, 2017); "Swedes Reported Dead in Somalia," *The Local*, January 30, 2007, <https://www.thelocal.se/20070130/6245> (accessed September 6, 2017); and James Brandon, "Islamist Movements Recruiting in the West for the Somali Jihad," *Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (January 9, 2009), <https://jamestown.org/program/islamist-movements-recruiting-in-the-west-for-the-somali-jihad/> (accessed May 31, 2017).

§ Kohlmann, "Shabaab Al-Mujahideen: Migration and Jihad in the Horn of Africa."

|| Ibid.

# Chris Harnisch and Katherine Zimmerman, "Al Shabaab Effectively Recruits Americans," American Enterprise Institute, August 10, 2010, <http://www.aei.org/publication/al-shabaab-effectively-recruits-americans/> (accessed August 21, 2017).

\*\* One analyst estimates that as many as 1,000 members of the Somali diaspora alone joined al-Shabaab. Christopher Anzalone, "Al-Shabaab Recruits in Somalia's Diaspora," *The Daily Star*, September 6, 2011, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2011-Sep-06/147995-al-shabaab-recruits-insomalias-diaspora.ashx> (accessed August 16, 2017).

†† This number includes only those U.S. citizens or residents who physically traveled to Somalia to join the group. Dozens of others either tried and were stopped by law enforcement, or provided some other form of support for the group. There are almost certainly significantly more U.S. citizens or residents who joined al-Shabaab in Somalia or supported it in some other way, but whose stories never appeared in open-source reporting. Author research.

‡‡ A Yemeni likely made one of al-Shabaab's most infamous bombs. It was hidden in a laptop and then detonated on an airplane shortly after it took flight in February 2016. Mark Mazzetti, Jeffrey Gettleman, and Eric Schmitt, "In Somalia, U.S. Escalates a Shadow War," *The New York Times*, October 16, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/world/africa/obama-somalia-secret-war.html> (accessed August 21, 2017).

fighters. At least 12 citizens or residents of Western countries became suicide bombers, while others participated in some of the most brutal attacks in al-Shabaab's history.<sup>§§</sup>

Foreign fighters were also of significant propaganda value. Some appeared in propaganda videos. Omar Hammami, who first joined the ICU, became one of al-Shabaab's most famous propagandists, while others, such as Swedish citizen Fu'ad Muhammed Qalaf (more commonly known as "Shongole"), became important recruiters and fundraisers.

Despite al-Shabaab's yen for foreign fighters, its leadership was suspicious of them. Word began to leak out of the group's poor treatment of foreigners and its brutality against fellow Somalis, and its appeal as a destination for aspiring jihadists faded.<sup>¶¶</sup> There are now only occasional reports of Westerners supporting al-Shabaab, though the group almost certainly still has some in its ranks.<sup>##</sup>

§§ Citizens or residents of the U.K., Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and the U.S. became suicide bombers in Somalia. Citizens or residents of Western countries participated in the Shamo Hotel suicide bombing and the Westgate Mall attack. Author research.

¶¶ Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan, a Somali-American who joined al-Shabaab in 2008, is a good example of the disillusionment some foreign fighters came to feel: Abby Simons and Libor Jany, "Ex-Minneapolis Student 'Mujahid Miski' Denies Ties to Islamic State," *Star Tribune*, December 8, 2015, <http://www.startribune.com/mujahid-miski-denies-ties-to-islamic-state/36115341/> (accessed August 21, 2017).

## In May 2017, for instance, Dutch police arrested a Dutch-Somali national in the south of Holland on suspicion of helping al-Shabaab. White foreigners also sometimes appear in al-Shabaab propaganda videos, and some are occasionally killed and their bodies recovered by anti-al-Shabaab forces. "Dutch Arrest Suspected Shabab Extremist," *Arab News*, May 3, 2017, <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1093596/world> (accessed August 21, 2017); Joshua Meservey, "The Softer Side of Jihad," *Foreign Affairs*, December 17, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/kenya/2015-12-17/softer-side-jihad> (accessed August 21, 2017); and David Williams, "Final Moments of the 'White Beast': Heavily-Bearded British Muslim Convert Is Seen Hugging and Praying with Al-Shabaab Fighters Before Going into Battle Where He Was Shot Dead by Kenyan Troops," *Daily Mail*, June 24, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3137879/British-Muslim-convert-embraces-fellow-terrorists-hours-shot-dead-Video-emerges-Thomas-Evans-alongside-Al-Shabaab-fighters-day-dies-fierce-battle-Kenya.html> (accessed August 21, 2017).

composed largely of East Africans that is responsible for most of the attacks in Kenya.<sup>27</sup>

The rigid Wahhabist worldview of Al-Shabaab's leadership<sup>28</sup> is the animating spirit of the group, but

is also a vulnerability. The support or acquiescence of Somalis is critical to its hopes of ruling Somalia.<sup>29</sup> Yet its violent interpretation of Islam is off-putting to most Somalis,<sup>30</sup> and its frequent killing of fellow

27. Intergovernmental Authority on Development, "Al-Shabaab as a Transnational Security Threat," March 2016, <http://www.igadssp.org/index.php/documentation/reports/igad-report-al-shabaab-as-a-transnational-security-threat> (accessed August 18, 2017).
28. While al-Shabaab's leadership are generally committed ideologues, not all of its recruits are. Some joined for money or because of clan politics, some were kidnapped into the group, and some were motivated by al-Shabaab's mixture of nationalist and Islamist appeals. Graham Turbiville, Josh Meservey, and James Forest, "Countering the al-Shabaab Insurgency in Somalia: Lessons for U.S. Special Operations Forces," Joint Special Operations University Report No. 14-1, February 2014, pp. 18-21.
29. Al-Shabaab appears to understand this as it occasionally hosts "soft power" activities, such as delivering aid to drought-stricken areas, and even claims to have a Head of Humanitarian Affairs. Jamal Osman, "Al-Shabaab Militants Try Food to Win Hearts and Minds in Drought," Channel 4, May 2, 2017, <https://www.channel4.com/news/al-shabaab-militants-try-food-to-win-hearts-and-minds-in-drought> (accessed August 18, 2017).
30. Al-Shabaab cuts thieves' hands off, whips people for dancing, and stones people it claims committed adultery. Its use of suicide bombing, something previously unheard of in the country, also horrifies many Somalis. Ken Menkhaus, "Violent Islamic Extremism: Al-Shabaab Recruitment in America," and "Somalia's Al-Shabab Cuts Off Hands of 2 Men Convicted by Sharia Court," *Goobjoog News*, May 19, 2017, <http://goobjoog.com/english/somalias-al-shabab-cuts-off-hands-of-2-men-convicted-by-sharia-court/> (accessed August 16, 2017); "Somali Islamists Whip 32 Women for Dancing," *Al Arabiya News*, November 15, 2008, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2008/11/15/60174.html> (accessed August 16, 2017); and "Somalia's al-Shabab Stones Man to Death for Adultery," BBC, May 29, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40083361> (accessed August 16, 2017).

Muslims<sup>31</sup> drained some of the popular support it once enjoyed.<sup>32</sup>

Al-Shabaab's need for the support or acquiescence of the Somali people to achieve its goals appears to drive much of its strategy. The government of Somalia is the most prominent competing system of rule, so al-Shabaab is intent on discrediting it. Violence accomplishes that goal in two ways: killing government officials degrades the government's capacity to govern, and violence of any kind warns the Somali people that the government is incapable of protecting them and that they should submit to al-Shabaab for their own safety.

For this reason, al-Shabaab frequently attacks hotels in Mogadishu, the gathering places of elites.<sup>33</sup> In an attempt to undermine the credibility of any new government, al-Shabaab also increased its attacks in the run-up to the Somali electoral process, and has maintained a high operational tempo ever since.<sup>34</sup>

Anyone who participated in the electoral process appears to be a particular al-Shabaab target. The group is likely behind the killings of at least six

delegates from the recent electoral process.<sup>35</sup> Some elders from al-Shabaab-controlled territories who were involved in selecting delegates for the electoral process later denounced their involvement and paid a fine to al-Shabaab, almost certainly to avoid the group's retribution.<sup>36</sup>

Al-Shabaab also assassinates prominent Somalis, particularly outspoken opponents. It will even sometimes foment clan violence in areas liberated by AMISOM<sup>37</sup> to send the message to Somalis that only al-Shabaab can guarantee stability and peace.

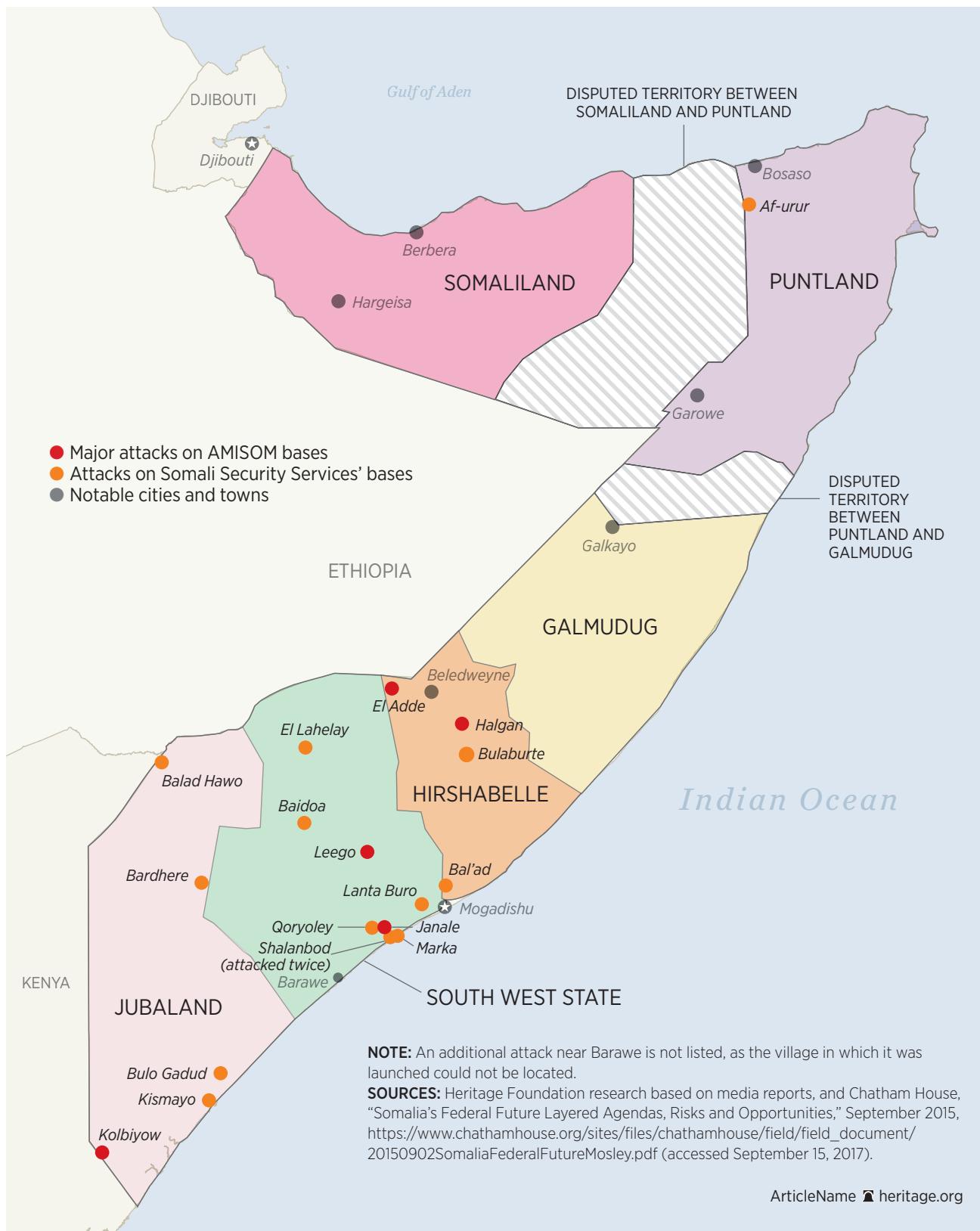
Al-Shabaab attacks AMISOM because it is the government's bulwark against collapse, to punish the troop-contributing countries, and to capture materiel. It is also probably trying to recapture some of the nationalist support that propelled it to its greatest strength when it led the anti-Ethiopian insurgency beginning in 2006.<sup>38</sup>

In 2015, al-Shabaab added massed infantry attacks against AMISOM bases to its strategy, overrunning three in 2015 and 2016, and possibly several others in June 2016 and January 2017 (AMISOM

31. The group uses the radical *takfir* doctrine to justify its killing of fellow Muslims. The doctrine holds that a Muslim who disobeys a fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law is in reality an apostate. That allows a "true" Muslim to ignore the Quranic injunction against killing innocent people and Muslims in particular. Lawrence Wright, *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), pp. 141-144.
32. Its suicide bomb attack on a graduation ceremony of mostly medical students in December 2009 is one example of an attack that sparked broad outrage, to the point that al-Shabaab denied responsibility. The bomber was likely a Danish citizen of Somali origin, making him Denmark's first suicide bomber. Raffaello Pantucci, "Youth Movement—Somalia's Foreign Fighters," blog post, February 16, 2011, <https://raffaellopantucci.com/2011/02/16/youth-movement-somalias-foreign-fighters/> (accessed August 18, 2017), and Ibrahim Mohamed, "Somali Speaker Says Suicide Bomber Was Danish," Reuters, December 11, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/ozatp-somalia-conflict-idAFJOE5BA09V20091211> (accessed August 18, 2017).
33. Between 2012 and September 2016, 18 MPs were killed, most of them probably by al-Shabaab. In June 2016 alone, the group killed two MPs and the government's environment minister in separate attacks on hotels. "Exclusive: High MP Absenteeism Rattles Somalia's 9th Parliament (2012-2016)," *Hiiraan Online*, September 7, 2016, [https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2016/Sept/117497/exclusive\\_high\\_mp\\_absenteeism\\_rattles\\_somalia\\_s\\_9th\\_parliament\\_2012\\_2016.aspx](https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2016/Sept/117497/exclusive_high_mp_absenteeism_rattles_somalia_s_9th_parliament_2012_2016.aspx) (accessed August 18, 2017); "Somalia Attacks: MPs Among Dead in Hotel Blast and Gun Raid," BBC, June 1, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36430306> (accessed August 18, 2017); and "Somalia: Tributes to Minister Killed in Al-Shabaab Hotel Attack," BBC, June 26, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36634848> (accessed August 18, 2017).
34. Bomb attacks killed at least 723 people in Somalia in 2016, up from 193 in 2015. Al-Shabaab or "unidentified persons" killed 134 civilians in the first four months of 2017, up 47 percent from the same period in 2016. Katharine Houreld and Abdi Sheikh, "As Somali Bombings Spike, an Unlikely Saviour Steps Forward," *Gulf Times*, April 6, 2017, <http://www.gulf-times.com/story/543411/As-Somali-bombings-spike-an-unlikely-saviour-steps> (accessed August 18, 2017), and Kevin J. Kelley, "Al-Shabaab Remains a Threat as Attacks Increase," *The East African*, May 27, 2017, <http://www.theeastfrican.co.ke/news/Shabaab-tactical-evolution-United-Nations/2558-3944824-item-0-eshdtoz/index.html> (accessed August 18, 2017).
35. Author research from various news reports.
36. Jon Lunn, "Somalia: February 2017 Update," House of Commons Library Briefing Paper No. 7298, February 16, 2017, <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7298/CBP-7298.pdf> (accessed August 21, 2017).
37. Author conversation with nongovernmental organization official, Nairobi, Kenya, June 16, 2016.
38. Al-Shabaab frequently portrays AMISOM as an infidel, marauding invasion force. In his first public address as emir, Ahmed Diiriye said Somalia was "under occupation," and that foreign troops engage in "widespread rape." Harun Maruf, Twitter post, July 12, 2016, 7:25 a.m., <https://twitter.com/HarunMaruf/status/752871507521593344> (accessed September 13, 2017).

MAP 1

## Spike in al-Shabaab Attacks on Military Bases in Somalia Since 2015



and al-Shabaab frequently give conflicting accounts of the attacks, making it difficult to determine if al-Shabaab actually overran the bases).<sup>39</sup> It has started routinely striking SNA bases as well, launching at least 18 such attacks since August 2015.<sup>40</sup>

Al-Shabaab has also increased its attacks in Puntland, the northernmost federal member state, where it traditionally had only a minimal presence. It has kept up a steady pace of assassinations and car bombings since the beginning of 2016, including briefly capturing the town of Garad and launching the deadliest terror attack ever in Puntland in August 2016.<sup>41</sup> Reports of Puntland security forces battling al-Shabaab militants or breaking up its terror cells are now commonplace.

Despite al-Shabaab's displays of strength, a drought gripping Somalia is sapping the terror group of some of its power. As it did during a 2010–2012 famine, al-Shabaab is blocking food aid from reaching hungry people under its control.<sup>42</sup> People are fleeing toward government-controlled areas where aid organizations operate, thereby depriving al-Shabaab of tax revenue it extorts from people in its territory.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the drought has depressed economic activity and killed livestock, both sources of tax revenue for al-Shabaab.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, al-Shabaab still has reason for hope over the long term. The group needs only to maintain the capacity to meaningfully challenge the government's authority. Doing so will frustrate the government's attempt to build enough credibility with

its people to govern effectively, and leave Somalis few options other than to submit to al-Shabaab.

Al-Shabaab as currently comprised can hold on for the foreseeable future. The fundamentally Somali nature of the group, and the cunning of its leadership, gives it a resilience that allows it to survive and maintain high-level operations even while facing a militarily superior AMISOM. The forces fighting al-Shabaab are also not powerful enough to make further significant gains.<sup>45</sup>

The window of opportunity to break the stalemate is closing. AMISOM is by far the most effective anti-al-Shabaab military force, yet it is due to start drawing down in 2018 and to be out of the country entirely by the end of 2020. Given the scant progress the SNA has made since 2012, there is a strong possibility it will not be capable enough to take over all AMISOM responsibilities by the withdrawal deadline. Yet the European Union, which funds much of the AMISOM troop allowances, may be unwilling to continue its funding beyond 2020, as it has already paid far more than it originally expected.<sup>46</sup>

The U.S. should already be working with international partners to create a contingency plan that would bridge any security gap between AMISOM withdrawal and the time the SNA can take full responsibility. One option is to fund a smaller, post-2020 AMISOM. The SNA should be able to accept increased responsibility by then, which means that fewer AMISOM troops would be required and the

39. The attacks were in June 2015 against the Burundian base at Leego; September 2015 against the Ugandan base in Janaale; January 2016 against the Kenyan base in El Adde; June 2016 against the Ethiopian base in Halgan; and January 2017 against the Kenyan base in Kolbiyow. A suicide car bomb usually initiates the attack by breaching the base's fortifications to allow the infantry to flow in. There have been other, less severe attacks against AMISOM bases as well.
40. Media reports collected by author.
41. Joshua Meservey, "Al Shabab's Resurgence," *Foreign Affairs*, January 3, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2017-01-03/al-shabab-s-resurgence> (accessed August 21, 2017).
42. Max Bearak, "In Somalia, Islamist Rebels are Blocking Starving People from Getting Food," *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/in-somalia-islamist-rebels-are-blocking-starving-people-from-getting-food/2017/05/26/5b5284c8-39bf-11e7-a59b-26e0451a96fd\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/in-somalia-islamist-rebels-are-blocking-starving-people-from-getting-food/2017/05/26/5b5284c8-39bf-11e7-a59b-26e0451a96fd_story.html) (accessed August 21, 2017).
43. It also extorts money from people who live outside areas they control but where they have influence, such as in Mogadishu. Harun Maruf, Twitter post, July 12, 2017, 9:15 a.m., <https://twitter.com/HarunMaruf/status/885170867868774400> (accessed September 13, 2017), and "Somalia: Business Community in Fear After Al-Shabab Imposed New 'Zakat,'" *Somali Update*, July 13, 2017, <http://somaliupdate.com/articles/10444/Somalia-Business-Community-in-Fear-After-Al-Shabab-Imposed-New-Zakat> (accessed August 21, 2017).
44. Osman, "Al-Shabaab Militants Try Food to Win Hearts and Minds in Drought."
45. Joshua Meservey, "Al-Shabaab's Somali Safe Havens: A Springboard for Terror," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 7, No. 6 (2013), <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/313/623> (accessed August 21, 2017).
46. For a good analysis of EU funding of AMISOM and the looming challenges, see Paul D. Williams, "Paying for AMISOM: Are Politics and Bureaucracy Undermining the AU's Largest Peace Operation?" *IPI Global Observatory*, January 11, 2017, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/01/amisom-african-union-peacekeeping-financing/> (accessed August 25, 2017).

## Al-Shabaab Friends and Enemies

There are three likely explanations for al-Shabaab's escalation in the north. First, it may be looking for a backup plan in case its enemies further squeeze its southern stronghold.

Second, it may be trying to strengthen its links with Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which operates in Yemen just across the Gulf of Aden.<sup>\*</sup> For years, weapons, supplies, and men flowed between the groups.<sup>†</sup> In 2011, the U.S. captured Ahmed Warsame, a senior al-Shabaab operative with links to AQAP ideologue Anwar al-Awlaki, in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>‡</sup> One of al-Shabaab's most notorious leaders, Abdulkadir Mohamed Abdulkadir (better known by his nickname "Ikrima"), is a key liaison to AQAP, and likely spent time in Yemen with the group.<sup>§</sup> He may have written an article on bomb-making in AQAP's online magazine *Inspire*.<sup>||</sup>

Third, al-Shabaab is likely trying to wipe out Abdiqadir Mumin's forces. Mumin broke away from al-Shabaab with a small band of fighters in October 2015 to declare allegiance to ISIS, and operates in the north. ISIS has for years tried to convince al-Shabaab to switch its allegiance from al-Qaeda, but al-Shabaab violently resists. Al-Shabaab will need more of a presence in the north to have a chance of finishing off Mumin.<sup>#</sup>

- \* Joshua Meservey, "Al Shabab's Resurgence," *Foreign Affairs*, January 3, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/2017-01-03/al-shabab-s-resurgence> (accessed August 21, 2017).
- † Brian Bennett, "Al Qaeda's Yemen Branch Has Aided Somalia Militants, U.S. Says," *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 2011, <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/jul/18/world/la-fg-bin-laden-somalia-20110718> (accessed August 17, 2017).
- ‡ News release, "Guilty Plea Unsealed in New York Involving Ahmed Warsame, a Senior Terrorist Leader and Liaison Between al Shabaab and al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, for Providing Material Support to Both Terrorist Organizations," Federal Bureau of Investigation, March 25, 2013, <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/newyork/press-releases/2013/guilty-plea-unsealed-in-new-york-involving-ahmed-warsame-a-senior-terrorist-leader-and-liaison-between-al-shabaab-and-al-qaeda-in-the-arabian-peninsula-for-providing-material-support-to-both-terrorist-organizations> (accessed August 21, 2017).
- § Michele Neubert and Keir Simmons, "The Terrorist Who Got Away: Why SEAL Team 6 Was Sent to Snatch Ikrima from Somalia," NBC News, November 17, 2013, <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/other/terrorist-who-got-away-why-seal-team-6-was-sent-f2D11609353> (accessed August 21, 2017).
- || Christopher Dickey, "Nairobi Mall Attack: Al Shabaab's Scandinavian Connection," *The Daily Beast*, October 19, 2013, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/nairobi-mall-attack-al-shabaabs-scandinavian-connection> (accessed August 21, 2017).
- # Joshua Meservey, "As ISIS Struggles for Influence in Somalia, al-Shabaab Remains the Main Threat," *World Politics Review*, January 11, 2017, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/20887/as-isis-struggles-for-influence-in-somalia-al-shabab-remains-the-main-threat> (accessed August 21, 2017).

mission would be less expensive. The mission could also draw down some of its civilian components<sup>47</sup> that perform functions either the Somali government or one of the countries engaged in Somalia could do.

The U.S. would have to try to persuade the EU to continue funding the cheaper mission after 2020, which would likely require providing a clear, realistic, and short timeline for the force's full withdrawal.

The African Union (AU) also plans by 2020 to collect \$800 million per year from member states to fund its peace and security operations.<sup>48</sup> The international community could pressure the AU to help bankroll a bridging AMISOM force. Finally, the U.S. could lead a diplomatic push to pressure countries—such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Turkey, and Saudi Arabia—that benefit from AMISOM's Soma-

47. "AMISOM Civilian Component," African Union Mission in Somalia, <http://amisom-au.org/mission-profile/amisom-civilian-component/> (accessed August 28, 2017).

48. News release, "The African Union Adopts the AU Peace Fund," The African Union, July 18, 2016, <http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/the-african-union-adopts-the-au-peace-fund> (accessed August 28, 2017).

lia presence to provide funds as well. If a bridging AMISOM force proves unworkable, one alternative would be for the U.S. and its partners to help Kenya and Ethiopia, which have strong national interests in Somalia, field a bridging force.

## The window of opportunity to break the AMISOM–al-Shabaab stalemate is closing.

Any such plan is contingent on the government remaining viable and on a positive trajectory. If that is not the case by 2020, the U.S. should not try to build support for a bridging force, as its mission would be hopeless. Depending on the situation in Somalia at the time, the U.S. might wish to seek continued funding of AMISOM, but strictly as a counter-terrorism force. Al-Shabaab directly threatens Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, so they would likely be willing to consider the idea.

Even if any future security gaps can be bridged, the Somali government has little time in which to deliver competent governance. Somalis will not tolerate foreign troops indefinitely, as no people enjoys the presence of foreign armies in their land. Somalia also has a rancorous history with Ethiopia, one of AMISOM's major troop contributors and one of the countries that would likely be involved in any bridging force.

### Assessing the State of State-Building

Whichever system of authority provides an acceptable level of security and services, as well as a frame-

work for sorting out contentious issues, such as clan politics and violent competition for land and other resources, will be victorious in Somalia. It is in the U.S. interest that a viable, friendly government be the victor.

The challenge for U.S. policymakers is to determine whether the current Somali government—and the governance model established in the provisional constitution—are moving the country forward, or if they are irredeemably flawed and therefore part of the problem. Making such a determination is particularly difficult as Somalia's decades-long dysfunction means state-building will be a lengthy, demanding, and inconstant process. Yet an accurate assessment is critical, since supporting an unviable government and governance model is counterproductive.

Al-Shabaab's territorial losses and the election of Hassan Sheikh as president in 2012 gave some American policymakers hope that the government and the model on which it was based were of the type that would finally move Somalia in a positive direction. The U.S.'s decision to restore formal ties with the country was a reflection of that hope.

The U.S. now has four years and the first president's term under the new model to assess whether it is working. In this regard, Hassan Sheikh's tenure was disappointing. He failed to restrain rampant government corruption, and embroiled himself in power struggles that distracted the government from the country's many pressing needs.<sup>49</sup> His government also failed to achieve many of the essential requirements of the framework—called Vision 2016—it created to translate core constitutional provisions into political reality.<sup>50</sup> One of the primary perceived failures was the inability to hold national direct elections in 2016.<sup>51</sup>

49. Joshua Meservey, "Somalia's Governance Problem," *Foreign Affairs*, May 15, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/somalia/2016-05-15/somalias-governance-problem> (accessed August 21, 2017).
50. Abdirashi Hashi, "Somalia's Vision 2016: Reality Check and the Road Ahead," The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, May 2015, <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/somalias-vision-2016-reality-check-and-the-road-ahead/> (accessed August 21, 2017), and Matt Bryden and Tres Thomas, "Somalia's Troubled Transition: Vision 2016 Revisited," Sahan Research, <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:wRAvulzColkJ:um.dk/en/danida-en/partners/research/other/-/media/UM/English-site/Documents/Danida/Partners/Research-Org/Research-studies/Somalias%2520troubled%2520transition%2520-%2520Vision%25202016%2520revisited.pdf+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us> (accessed August 21, 2017).
51. Hassan Sheikh denies that his government promised to hold national direct elections in 2016. The issue is confused as some of the core documents articulating the government's plans for elections strongly imply a commitment to national one-person, one-vote elections in 2016, but not explicitly so. However, the very widely held perception was that the government had committed to such elections. For Hassan Sheikh's denial, see Harun Maruf, "Somalia: No Popular Elections in 2016," Voice of America, July 29, 2015, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-says-no-popular-elections-in-2016/2883749.html> (accessed August 21, 2017). For documents strongly implying a commitment to national direct elections in 2016, see "The Vision 2016 Conference...was convened by the President of the Federal Republic of Somalia," Horseed Media, September 6, 2013, <https://horseedmedia.net/2013/09/06/the-vision-2016-conference-hereinafter-referred-to-as-the-conference-was-convened-by-the-president-of-the-federal-republic-of-somalia/> (accessed August 21, 2017), and The Federal Republic of Somalia, The Somali Compact, [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/20130916\\_the\\_somali\\_compact.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/20130916_the_somali_compact.pdf) (accessed August 21, 2017).

The Ninth Parliament that sat during Hassan Sheikh's tenure did little better. Absenteeism was rampant, making it difficult to obtain a quorum to move parliamentary business.<sup>52</sup> The Ninth Parliament failed to complete promptly some of the tasks critical to implementing the electoral process,<sup>53</sup> and its dallying is one of the reasons the electoral process was delayed. It also failed to complete a review of the provisional constitution by August 2016 as required by that constitution. It instead punted the task to the Tenth Parliament.<sup>54</sup>

Additionally, the government failed to build a competent military. The SNA is unrepresentative of all clans and regions,<sup>55</sup> meaning that it is mistrusted in many parts of the country. Violent clashes occasionally break out within the Somali security services,<sup>56</sup> and the federal member states' forces are generally loyal to the states, not to Mogadishu. During Hassan Sheikh's tenure, soldiers received their pay only intermittently, due in part to the widespread theft of funds earmarked for their salary.<sup>57</sup>

The international community, meanwhile, has trained an estimated 60,000 to 80,000 Somali troops, of which only a few thousand can be account-

ed for.<sup>58</sup> There are currently about 27,000 names on the SNA payroll, only a minority of which may prove to be capable soldiers once the government completes the recently launched assessment of SNA operations. The rest may be an assortment of patronage beneficiaries, retirees, widows, and ghost soldiers.<sup>59</sup> A number of countries have trained various parts of the SNA as well, resulting in diverse equipment, tactics, and standing operating procedures throughout the army.

The previous government's tenure was not all negative. It created a National Development Plan, the country's first in 30 years.<sup>60</sup> The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects that Somalia's gross domestic product grew by 3.7 percent in 2016,<sup>61</sup> diaspora are returning to the country and bringing money and investments, and the country is taking halting steps to rebuild its shattered financial system.<sup>62</sup>

President Farmajo has also overseen some positive developments in his short tenure. He has thus far kept his vow to ensure that security services and civil servants are paid regularly, something the previous government failed to do. His government is

52. "Exclusive: High MP Absenteeism Rattles Somalia's 9th Parliament (2012–2016)," *Hiiraan Online*, September 7, 2016, [https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2016/Sept/117497/exclusive\\_high\\_mp\\_absenteeism\\_rattles\\_somalia\\_s\\_9th\\_parliament\\_2012\\_2016.aspx](https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2016/Sept/117497/exclusive_high_mp_absenteeism_rattles_somalia_s_9th_parliament_2012_2016.aspx) (accessed August 18, 2017), and Ahmed Mohamed Adan, "Absenteeism in Parliament Could Ruin Parliament's Work," *Goobjoog News*, December 14, 2015, <http://goobjoog.com/english/absenteeism-in-parliament-could-ruin-parliaments-work/> (accessed August 21, 2017).
53. Examples include parliament taking nearly three years to establish the Boundaries and Federations Commission to give guidance on the number and borders of the federal member states and failing to clarify the status of Mogadishu and the extent and nature of its parliamentary representation. Because of its failure, Somalia's most populous city has no representation in the Upper House. Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, "Somalia's Parliament Should Produce a Constitution by and for the People," February 2017, pp. 7 and 14, <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Somalias-parliament-should-produce-a-constitution-by-and-for-the-people.pdf> (accessed August 17, 2017).
54. Jan Amilcar Schmidt, "The Somali Constitutional Review Process. Taking Stock," *ConstitutionNet*, March 8, 2017, <http://www.constitutionnet.org/news/somali-constitutional-review-process-taking-stock> (accessed August 21, 2017).
55. There are reports that clan diversity is slowly improving within the SNA. "The London Conference and Prospects for Peace and Stability in Somalia," International Crisis Group, May 10, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/london-conference-and-prospects-peace-and-stability-somalia> (accessed August 21, 2017).
56. "At Least 5 Somali Security Officers Killed During Infighting," Xinhua, July 27, 2017, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off\\_the\\_Wire/2017-07/27/content\\_41292494.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2017-07/27/content_41292494.htm) (accessed August 21, 2017).
57. "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2244 (2015): Somalia," United Nations Security Council S/2016/919, p. 77/247, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/919](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/919) (accessed August 21, 2017).
58. Remarks by a senior U.S. diplomat, Washington, DC, January 17, 2017.
59. Author conversation with a senior official of an international nongovernmental organization, April 19, 2017.
60. Federal Government of Somalia, National Development Plan 2017–2019, <http://mopic.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/SOMALIA-NATIONAL-DEVELOPMENT-PLAN-2017-2019FINAL14DEC.pdf> (accessed August 21, 2017).
61. News release, "Statement by the IMF Mission on Somalia," International Monetary Fund, November 21, 2016, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2016/11/21/PR16519-Somalia-Statement-by-the-IMF-Mission> (accessed August 21, 2017).
62. "Six Things to Know About Somalia's Economy," International Monetary Fund, April 11, 2017, <http://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2017/04/11/NA041117-Six-Things-to-Know-About-Somalia-Economy> (accessed August 21, 2017).

scrutinizing the civil service rolls for workers who draw a salary but do not show up for work.<sup>63</sup> In June, his cabinet approved two significant bills—an anti-corruption bill and a telecommunications bill—to send to parliament for approval.<sup>64</sup>

## Assessing the Electoral Process

The electoral process that brought Farmajo to power is an especially useful gauge of what kind of progress Somalia is making. The country has experienced decades of war, has little experience with democratic governance, and is fractured by clanism, meaning that the electoral process could not begin to meet the standards of established democracies. However, the four years of intense international engagement prior to the process should have borne some fruit.

There were some positive developments, including the following:

- **The country completed the electoral process,** even in the midst of an intense terror campaign by al-Shabaab.
- **Over a hundred times more Somalis cast votes in 2016 than in 2012,**<sup>65</sup> making the 2016 process slightly more representative.
- **Hassan Sheikh stepped down from power peacefully after he lost, and there was no violence associated with his defeat.**
- **The federal member states formed in time to select Upper House MPs.** The process was con-

tentious, delayed, and haphazard in some cases, and difficult issues remain unresolved.<sup>66</sup> Forming the states with their legislatures was nonetheless an achievement, and some are already passing laws.

- **The Tenth Parliament is in some important areas more representative of Somali society than the previous parliament.** Women hold nearly a quarter of the seats, almost 60 percent of Lower House MPs are under 50 years of age, and 55 percent have never held parliamentary seats before.<sup>67</sup>
- **The MPs appeared to cast private ballots when electing the president.** During the 2012 electoral process, some MPs snapped photos of their ballots to prove their votes to those from whom they took bribes. When MPs cast votes for the president in 2017, security forced them to surrender their phones before entering the voting booths.<sup>68</sup>

There were disappointing developments as well, including the following:

- **There were serious violations of the provisional constitution throughout the electoral process.** The NLF arrogated extraordinary authority for shaping the process, despite Article 47 granting the Lower House of parliament the responsibility to regulate federal elections. Article 72(b) stipulates that each state have an equal number of MPs in the Upper House, yet the NLF awarded Somalil-

63. Abdirahman A., "Somalia Govt Threatens to Fire 'Ghost Employees,'" Horseid Media, July 3, 2017, <https://horseidmedia.net/2017/07/03/somalia-govt-threatens-to-fire-ghost-employees/> (accessed August 21, 2017).
64. The Lower House approved the latter but sent the former back to the Justice Ministry for further work. In Somalia's system, the executive branch via the ministries frequently submits bills to the cabinet. If the cabinet approves a bill, it then sends it to the parliament that is responsible for passing it into law. "Somalia: Federal Parliament Sends Back Incomplete Anti-Corruption Bill," RBC Radio, July 24, 2017, <http://www.raxanreeb.com/2017/07/somalia-federal-parliament-sends-back-incomplete-anti-corruption-bill/> (accessed August 18, 2017).
65. News release, "Fact Sheet on Somalia's 2016 Electoral Process."
66. Including Somaliland's non-participation in the process, the precise delineation of borders between some of the states, and the demarcation of authority between the states and the federal government.
67. Abdi Latif Dahir, "The Fate of Fragile Somalia Is Now in the Hands of a Remarkably Young, Diverse Parliament," Quartz, March 2, 2017, <https://qz.com/922449/the-fate-of-fragile-somalia-is-now-in-the-hands-of-a-remarkably-young-diverse-parliament/> (accessed August 21, 2017), and Mohammed Yusuf and Mohamed Olad, "New Somali Parliament Takes Office Amid High Hopes, Charges of Graft," Voice Of America, December 27, 2016, <http://www.voanews.com/a/new-somali-parliament-takes-office-amid-high-hopes-charges-of-graft/3652648.html> (accessed August 21, 2017).
68. Ahmed Soliman, "Is Democracy Emerging in Somalia?" Chatham House, February 16, 2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/democracy-emerging-somalia> (accessed August 17, 2017).

and and Puntland three extra seats each.<sup>69</sup> Article 91 required Hassan Sheikh's term to end in September 2016, yet after delays to the electoral process, the NLF unilaterally extended his term.<sup>70</sup>

- **Not only did the NLF make a number of extra-constitutional decisions, some of its members contested the very seats for which the NLF established the rules of competition.** Such a body was probably necessary to ensure the electoral process came off at all, but opaque and non-accountable negotiations were typical of the way previous reviled governments operated.
- **Massive corruption tainted the process.**<sup>71</sup> Somalia's auditor general claims that some MPs bought delegate votes for anywhere between \$5,000 and \$30,000, with two of them allegedly spending \$1.3 million each on their seats.<sup>72</sup> In total, candidates may have given at least \$20 million in bribes.<sup>73</sup> In one instance, the entourages of two MP candidates exchanged gunfire at the polling station. The Federal Indirect Electoral Imple-

mentation Team disqualified both candidates from running again, yet one of them ultimately won a seat anyway.<sup>74</sup>

- **There was no universal suffrage.** Given the depth of Somalia's dysfunction, national elections in 2016 was always an unrealistic goal. Falling so far short of people's expectations, however, can only have deepened Somalis' lack of faith in the country's governing institutions.
- **The Indirect Electoral Dispute Resolution Mechanism (IEDRM) was nominally effective at best.** The IEDRM called for a review of the results of 24 parliamentary races because of evidence of irregularities, yet the NLF unilaterally decided that only 11 races would be re-run. Eventually, only five races were held again, in which four of the previously disqualified candidates prevailed.<sup>75</sup>
- **Three federal member states nominated a warlord for parliament.**<sup>76</sup>

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69. "Quick Facts About Puntland Senators and MPs," Wakiil, <https://wakiil.org/home/map/2> (accessed August 21, 2017).
  70. "Communiqué—National Leadership Forum Communiqué," *Puntland Post*, August 10, 2016, <http://puntlandpost.net/2016/08/10/national-leadership-forum-nlf-2016-elections/> (accessed August 21, 2017).
  71. Joint press statement, "International Community Expresses Grave Concerns Over Corruption and Intimidation in Somalia's Electoral Process and Delays in Voting for Lower House Seats," United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, October 30, 2016, <https://unsm.unmissions.org/international-community-expresses-grave-concerns-over-corruption-and-intimidation-somalia%E2%80%99s> (accessed August 17, 2017).
  72. Harun Maruf, "Somalia Elections Not Credible, Country's Auditor General Says," Voice of America, November 19, 2016, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-elections-lack-credibility-auditor-general-says/3603878.html> (accessed August 17, 2017).
  73. Jeffrey Gettleman, "Fueled by Bribes, Somalia's Election Seen as Milestone of Corruption," *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/07/world/africa/somalia-election-corruption.html> (accessed August 17, 2017).
  74. News release, "Thirteen Elected to the House of the People in the Final Stages of Voting as Hirshabelle Concludes the Process," United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, December 10, 2016, <https://unsm.unmissions.org/thirteen-elected-house-people-final-stages-voting-hirshabelle-concludes-process> (accessed August 17, 2017).
  75. The disqualification issue has sparked a row between parliament and the courts as well. The High Court nullified a number of MP victories, and parliament subsequently voted to ignore the High Court ruling, touching off debate over the extent of parliament's and the courts' power. "Somalia: Lawmakers Reject Supreme Court Ruling on Nullified Seats," *Garowe Online*, July 22, 2017, <http://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-lawmakers-reject-supreme-court-ruling-on-nullified-seats> (accessed August 18, 2017). For other discussions of the controversy around nullified races, see Abdihakim Ainte, "Can the Credibility of Somalia's Indirect Elections Be Salvaged?" *African Arguments*, January 5, 2017, <http://africanarguments.org/2017/01/05/can-the-credibility-of-somalias-indirect-elections-be-salvaged/> (accessed August 17, 2017); Soliman, "Is Democracy Emerging in Somalia?"; and Joint press statement, "International Community Gravely Concerned Over Decisions of National Leadership Forum on Electoral Process," United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, December 27, 2016, <https://unsm.unmissions.org/international-community-gravely-concerned-over-decisions-national-leadership-forum-electoral-process> (accessed August 17, 2017).
  76. After an international protest, Jubaland dropped its warlord candidate. Another was defeated in his bid to win one of Puntland's seats, while a third won his race in Galmudug. Joint press statement, "International Community Expresses Concern Over Parliamentary Candidates with a History of Violence and Criminality," United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, October 16, 2016, <https://unsm.unmissions.org/international-community-expresses-concern-over-parliamentary-candidates-history-violence-and> (accessed August 17, 2017), and "Three Women Voted in, Former Warlord Locked out in Puntland Senate Polls," *Goobjoog News*, October 20, 2016, <http://goobjoog.com/english/three-women-voted-former-warlord-locked-puntland-senate-polls/> (accessed August 17, 2017).

- **The government of Somaliland refused to participate in the process entirely—despite being one of the federal member states.<sup>77</sup>**
- **Diaspora dominate the new government.** More than 80 percent of the presidential candidates were dual citizens,<sup>78</sup> and the newly elected president, prime minister, and speaker of the parliament all have Western passports.<sup>79</sup> Parliament also has a large diaspora contingent.<sup>80</sup> Diaspora Somalis can be important contributors to the rebuilding process, and their ubiquity is in part a reflection of the size of the diaspora after two decades of war in Somalia. However, their increasing prominence in the country stirs resentment among Somalis who remained.<sup>81</sup>

The 2016 electoral process was riddled with deficiencies. Its successes, however, taken together with the security gains against al-Shabaab largely holding, the few positive developments from the previous administration, and the early progress of Farmajo's government, suggest that the stabilization project is still viable. Somalia is also undeniably, significantly better off today than it was during the 1990s and 2000s.

However, the gains made in the country could easily evaporate if Farmajo's government does not make significant strides. While Farmajo is reputedly well liked in Somalia and his government has made some positive steps, the system that governs Somali politics is comprehensively corrupt. Overcoming it will be an extraordinary challenge for the new president, a challenge to which his predecessor who came to office amid similar acclaim and hopes was unequal.

Moving forward, the U.S. must develop, and then hold the government accountable to meeting, a clear set of benchmarks. That will allow the U.S. to gauge how effective its policy is, and avoid encouraging the Somali government to behave irresponsibly under the belief that the U.S. offers open-ended and non-contingent support.

If the government fails to achieve a sufficient number of these milestones over the coming years, and there is not a compelling reason to believe it will significantly and rapidly improve, the U.S. should pivot away from supporting state-building. It would then be wise to focus on counterterrorism measures and helping any friendly systems of authority in the country that have a reasonable chance of stabilizing either the entire country or parts of it. One option in this scenario would be to engage bilaterally with responsible federal member states.

## Future Benchmarks

Benchmarks to determine if there is any progress in Somalia should include:

- **The legislation that the government enacts.** The U.S. should track whether the government is quickly laying the legislative groundwork for meeting the commitments it has made to its people and to the international community.
- **Implementation of the Security Pact and the partnership framework agreed at the London Conference in May 2017.<sup>82</sup>** The government

77. Somaliland declared independence in 1991, refused to participate in the electoral process, and rejects its status as a federal member state. Somalia, however, does not recognize Somaliland's independence claims. To maintain its position that Somaliland is part of Somalia, the latter accorded Somaliland seats in the Lower and Upper Houses of parliament as if it were an official state. People from Somaliland clans filled those seats, but Somaliland does not recognize them as its representatives. In fact, Somaliland will not allow them to enter its territory as long as they hold federal office. Once they have left office, their clans can file for a pardon from the Somaliland president that, if granted, would allow them to return to Somaliland. Author e-mail exchange with senior Somaliland politician.

78. "More than 80% of Presidential Candidates Hold Foreign Passports," *Goobjoog News*, January 31, 2017, <http://goobjoog.com/english/80-presidential-candidates-hold-foreign-passports/> (accessed August 17, 2017).

79. Harun Maruf, Twitter post, February 23, 2017, 7:28 a.m., <https://twitter.com/HarunMaruf/status/834787069457264641> (accessed September 14, 2017).

80. Abdi Latif Dahir, "Two-thirds of Somalia's Presidential Candidates Hold Foreign Passports," *Quartz*, February 7, 2017, <https://qz.com/903697/majority-of-somalias-presidential-candidates-and-one-third-of-lawmakers-hold-foreign-passports/> (accessed August 17, 2017).

81. Maimuna Mohamud, "Diaspora Return to Somalia: Perceptions and Implications," Heritage Institute for Policy Studies *Issue Brief* No. 7, June 2014, [http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/HIPS\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_007-2014\\_ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/HIPS_Policy_Brief_007-2014_ENGLISH.pdf) (accessed August 17, 2017).

82. Security Pact, London Conference Somalia, May 11, 2017, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/613720/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/613720/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact.pdf) (accessed August 17, 2017), and "A New Partnership for Somalia for Peace, Stability and Prosperity," London Conference Somalia, May 2017, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/613719/new-partnership-for-somalia-may-2017.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/613719/new-partnership-for-somalia-may-2017.pdf) (accessed August 17, 2017).

committed to implementing both agreements that are full of milestones, many with timelines.

- **Implementation of the National Development Plan.**<sup>83</sup> Developed during Hassan Sheikh's tenure, the plan is an ambitious blueprint for reviving the Somali economy with a number of measurable goals a competent government can achieve.
- **Meeting its obligations under the IMF Staff-Monitored Program.** Farmajo's government committed to meeting the extensive reform targets included in the IMF plan first agreed during Hassan Sheikh's tenure.<sup>84</sup>
- **Crafting a new constitution that resolves key stumbling blocks.** The current constitution is provisional and ambiguous on a number of important issues that contribute to the political gridlock in Somalia.<sup>85</sup>
- **Delivering on promises.** Farmajo has publicly committed to stabilizing the government; fighting corruption, poverty, and al-Shabaab; and protecting the rule of law.<sup>86</sup> Indicators of success would include his government not cycling quick-

ly through prime ministers; passing and enforcing a robust anti-corruption bill; removing ghost soldiers and ghost civil servants from the rolls; ensuring that security forces and civil servants are paid consistently; dismantling illegal checkpoints;<sup>87</sup> and directing the reforms necessary to restore Somalia's standing with international financial institutions.<sup>88</sup> While Farmajo's pledge to defeat al-Shabaab in two years is unrealistic, the SNA's development will be a useful gauge of how the fight against al-Shabaab will progress in the future.

- **The SNA successfully taking over security responsibility from AMISOM for more and more areas of the country.**
- **Protecting civil liberties.** Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre publicly committed to protecting press freedom in May 2017,<sup>89</sup> following the previous government's sometimes repressive treatment of journalists. Farmajo's cabinet approved an amended version of the country's existing, restrictive media law in July, but the amended law still has strictures inconsistent with a truly free press.<sup>90</sup>

83. Federal Government of Somalia, National Development Plan 2017–2019.
84. News release, "IMF Management Completes the Second Review under the Staff-Monitored Program for Somalia and IMF Managing Director Approves a New Staff-Monitored Program," International Monetary Fund, July 11, 2017, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2017/07/11/pr17275-somalia-imf-completes-second-review> (accessed August 18, 2017), and "Somalia Staff-Monitored Program—Press Release; and Staff Report," IMF Country Report No. 16/136, May 2016.
85. The new constitution must clearly demarcate the division of power between the president and the prime minister, and between the federal states and the central government; clarify the status of Mogadishu; and determine a framework that ensures a truly representative parliament. The provisional constitution's ambiguity on these matters is one reason why Hassan Sheikh's government had three prime ministers in four years, and one reason for the controversy that arose after Somaliland and Puntland signed bilateral deals with the UAE. Abdi Latif Dahir, "There's a New Player in the Horn of Africa," *Defense One*, April 12, 2017, <http://www.defenseone.com/news/2017/04/theres-new-player-horn-africa/136962/> (accessed August 17, 2017), and Mohamed Olad Hassan, "Somali Official Says Somaliland Deal with UAE Corrupt, Illegal," *Voice of America*, February 14, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-official-says-somaliland-deal-with-uae-corrupt-illegal/3724682.html> (accessed August 17, 2017). For a good rundown of the inadequacies of the provisional constitution, see Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, "Somalia's Parliament Should Produce a Constitution by and for the People."
86. Abdihakim Ainte, "Somalia: Another Paradigm Shift?" *Aljazeera*, May 11, 2017, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2017/05/somalia-paradigm-shift-170511053303806.html> (accessed August 16, 2017).
87. "Instruments of Pain (III): Conflict and Famine in Somalia," International Crisis Group Briefing No. 125, May 9, 2017, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b125-instruments-pain-iii-conflict-and-famine-somalia> (accessed August 21, 2017).
88. Farmajo publicly vowed to "personally follow" this process. Ilya Gridneff, "Can Somalia Find the Debt Relief Necessary for Development?" IPI Global Observatory, July 6, 2017, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/07/somalia-development-debt-london-conference/> (accessed August 16, 2017).
89. Adan Awale, "Somali PM Ensures Freedom of Expression to Media Practitioners," *Qaranimo Online*, May 24, 2017, <http://www.qaranimo.com/news/2017/05/24/somali-prm-ensures-freedom-of-expression-to-media-practitioners/> (accessed August 21, 2017).
90. Laetitia Bader, "Review of Somalia's Media Law Falls Short," Human Rights Watch, July 18, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/18/review-somalias-media-law-falls-short> (accessed August 21, 2017).

It is reasonable to expect significantly more improvements (over what the U.S. tolerated during Hassan Sheikh's tenure) on good governance measures over the next four years. The baseline for Farmajo's term is higher, and he should be held to a higher standard than his predecessor.

## **Recommendations for the U.S.**

To best protect its national interests in Somalia, the U.S. needs to focus on pushing the Somali government to establish itself as a compelling alternative to al-Shabaab before the window of opportunity closes. To accomplish this, the U.S. should:

- **Hold the government accountable to a series of measurable benchmarks.** Doing so would encourage responsible governance and avoid fueling corruption and enabling counterproductive governance. The Somali government must understand that retaining, and perhaps increasing, U.S. aid and diplomatic support requires that it make measurable progress in key areas.
  - **Mobilize major players to hold the Somali government accountable.** U.S. diplomats should work to persuade allies engaged with Somalia to hold the government accountable to the targets it committed to reaching. To amplify the effect, the U.S. and its allies should coordinate delivering support in exchange for the Somali government reaching milestones, and withholding support for missed targets.
  - **Prosecute any U.S. citizens involved in corruption, and encourage other countries to do the same with their citizens.** During the electoral process, the American, British, and Swedish embassies to Somalia issued public reminders that their laws enabled prosecution of any of
- their citizens engaged in corruption overseas.<sup>91</sup> The subsequent failure to do so likely lessened the deterrent effect, but following through in the future could provide a check on corruption.
- **Ensure effective monitoring of U.S. aid to Somalia.** Somalia remains dangerous, which makes it difficult to monitor accurately where U.S. aid is going. It is crucial to do so, however, as there is a long history in Somalia of aid money inadvertently accelerating conflict. The U.S. must ensure that its investment in Somalia is not part of the problem, and should also require any U.S.-funded organizations to take all reasonable precautions to ensure that they are doing the same.<sup>92</sup>
  - **Help Somalia develop its security institutions in tandem with training its military.** The U.S. trains elite Somali commandos, known as Danab, who are likely the most effective fighting force in the SNA. The U.S. should continue this training, but should also ensure that it is helping reform and develop the institutions that are critical to sustaining and controlling those forces. There is an obvious danger in having highly trained and well-armed soldiers who are not managed by strong, civilian-directed institutions.
  - **Help Somalia build the capacity of its bureaucrats.** The years of violence in Somalia has left the country with too few people with the skills or education to run a government. The government requires highly skilled bureaucrats to implement competently the recently passed telecommunications bill, for instance, or to manage its own airspace.<sup>93</sup> The government's failure to do so will damage the stabilization effort, so the U.S. should

91. Mikael Lindvall, Twitter post, December 29, 2016, 9:44 a.m., <https://twitter.com/mikaellindvall/status/814527612781494273?refsrc=email&s=11>, and Harriet Mathews, Twitter post, December 28, 2016, 9:11 a.m., <https://twitter.com/HarrietLMathews/status/81415693168627302>.

92. The U.N. documented ongoing pilfering of the majority of U.S.-supplied rations that are supposed to feed SNA soldiers here: "Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2244 (2015): Somalia," United Nations Security Council S/2016/919, p. 80/247, [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/919](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/919) (accessed August 21, 2017). As an example of how unscrupulous actors abuse humanitarian aid in Somalia, see Abdalle Ahmed Mumin, "Somali Camps: Places of Desperation," *Financial Mail*, January 12, 2017, <http://www.businesslive.co.za/fm/features/africa/2017-01-05-somali-camps-places-of-desperation/> (accessed August 21, 2017).

93. For the first time in 25 years, Somalia will control its own airspace by October 2017. "Somalia to Have Full Control of Airspace by End of October," *Goobjoog News*, August 28, 2017, <http://goobjoog.com/english/somalia-to-have-full-control-of-airspace-by-end-of-october/> (accessed August 28, 2017).

be working to quickly increase the Somali's government bureaucratic capacity.

- **Lead the effort to harmonize security training for Somali security services.** The Somali security services receive different training from different countries, which is deepening their fragmentation<sup>94</sup> and making them less effective in the fight against al-Shabaab. The U.S. and other countries providing security assistance to Somalia began discussing better coordination of their activities in 2016.<sup>95</sup> The U.S. should continue to strongly support that effort.
- **Mediate regional powers' competition for influence in Somalia.** A number of countries are seeking influence in Somalia, and there is danger it could become host to proxy conflicts. The row between Saudi Arabia and Qatar especially has the potential to damage Somalia. Turkey, which opened its largest embassy in the world and its largest overseas military base in Mogadishu, is siding with Qatar,<sup>96</sup> which has itself long been involved in Somalia. The UAE, meanwhile, is siding with Saudi Arabia, the first country that

Farmajo officially visited after his election.<sup>97</sup> The UAE is extensively engaging in Somalia and the broader Horn of Africa region.<sup>98</sup> The U.S. is the only country with sufficient diplomatic capacity to lessen the possibility of the rivalry spilling further into Somalia.

- **Pressure Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other Gulf States to stop funding—and crack down on their citizens' funding—the proselytizing of fundamentalist interpretations of Islam in Somalia and beyond.**<sup>99</sup> Beginning in the 1980s, Saudi Arabia in particular began funding the spread of a fundamentalist, confrontational version of Islam known as Wahhabism,<sup>100</sup> the creed to which most current Islamist terrorist groups—including al-Shabaab—subscribe.<sup>101</sup> Wahhabism eventually supplanted Sufism—the syncretic and generally tolerant traditional practice of Islam in most of Africa, including Somalia—as the dominant practice of Islam in East Africa.<sup>102</sup> Saudi, Qatari, and other Gulf State proselytizing has increased the number of Muslims who share significant parts of the ideology to which terrorist groups subscribe. Much of the Gulf funding

94. Dawit Yohannes Wondmagegnehu and Daniel Gebreegziabher Kebede, "AMISOM: Charting a New Course for African Union Peace Missions," *African Security Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (April 18, 2017), <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10246029.2017.1297583?needAccess=true> (accessed August 21, 2017).
95. Ilya Gridneff and Brian O'Sullivan, "A New Path Emerges for Troubled Somali Security," IPI Global Observatory, November 8, 2016, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2016/11/somalia-al-shabaab-amisom-ethiopia/> (accessed August 21, 2017).
96. Christian Krug, "Turkey Backs Qatar in Middle East Spat," *Politico*, August 6, 2017, <http://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-backs-qatar-in-middle-east-spat/> (accessed August 16, 2017).
97. "Somali President Meets Saudi King in His First Foreign Visit," *Garowe Online*, February 23, 2017, <http://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somali-president-meets-saudi-king-in-his-first-foreign-visit> (accessed August 16, 2017).
98. A Dubai-based company recently won contracts to develop and manage ports in Berbera, Somaliland, and Bosaso, Puntland. In 2017, the UAE signed an agreement with Somaliland to build a military base in Berbera port, which would supplement a base that the UAE recently built in neighboring Eritrea. Matina Stevis and Asa Fitch, "Dubai's DP World Agrees to Manage Port in Somaliland for 30 Years," *The Wall Street Journal*, May 30, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/dubais-dp-world-agrees-to-manage-port-in-somaliland-for-30-years-1464549937> (accessed August 16, 2017), and Abdi Latif Dahir, "The UAE Is Expanding Its Influence in the Horn of Africa by Funding Ports and Military Bases," *Quartz*, April 11, 2017, <https://qz.com/955585/in-somalia-and-eritrea-the-united-arab-emirates-is-expanding-its-influence-by-building-ports-and-funding-military-bases/> (accessed August 16, 2017).
99. For analysis of how Saudi Arabia in particular might be responsive to U.S. pressure on this issue, see William McCants, "Trump Should Push the Saudis to Scale Back Proselytizing—They May Be more Responsive than You Think," The Brookings Institution, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2017/05/10/trump-should-push-the-saudis-to-scale-back-proselytizing-they-may-be-more-responsive-than-you-think/> (accessed August 24, 2017).
100. Andrew L. Peek, "The Roots of Lone Wolf Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs*, January 12, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2016-01-12/roots-lone-wolf-terrorism> (accessed August 16, 2017).
101. For an explanation of the (minor) differences between Wahhabism and Salafism, another term analysts frequently use to describe the ideology of most current Islamist terrorist groups, see Peter Mandaville, *Global Political Islam* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 247.
102. Abdisaid M. Ali, "Islamist Extremism in East Africa," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, August 9, 2016, <http://africacenter.org/publication/islamist-extremism-east-africa/> (accessed August 16, 2017).

for terrorism now likely flows from wealthy citizens rather than governments.<sup>103</sup> The U.S. should push those governments to cease any of their own remaining funding of Wahhabi proselytizing, and to stop their citizens' funding as well.

- **Engage directly with federal member states when appropriate.** The U.S. should not limit its engagement to the central government alone. It should also assist federal member states with their challenges, though the U.S. should do so in a way that does not exacerbate the federalism dispute. Only a highly devolved governance system has a chance of working in Somalia, and engaging directly with federal member states will help Somalis achieve that system. The federal government also appears keen to maintain as much control as possible over the states, so a U.S. willingness to engage with the states could be a point of leverage with the federal government.
- **Allow U.S. diplomats greater freedom to travel outside the Mogadishu airport compound.** The U.S. has a constant diplomatic presence in Mogadishu as Kenya-based diplomats rotate in and out of the city. When the diplomats are there, however, they are restricted to the secure airport compound. They should travel, with proper security precautions, into the rest of Mogadishu and beyond, which would enhance their effectiveness and increase their ability to monitor U.S. aid and other engagement in the country. Non-American diplomats frequently make such trips, demonstrating that the risk level is acceptable.
- **Lead an international effort to deliver emergency aid in response to the drought gripping Somalia, but only in a way that ensures al-Shabaab or other malign actors do not benefit.** A years-long drought, coupled with the exacerbating effects of violent instability, has created food shortages for millions of Somalis. The U.N. anticipates the situation will worsen throughout

the rest of 2017.<sup>104</sup> The U.S. should continue to rally support for the crisis response, but should also seek to ensure that aid does not reach violent actors, as it frequently has in the past.

- **Urge the Somali government to craft a new constitution in as inclusive and consultative a way as possible.** A small group of foreigners and elite Somalis drafted previous constitutions. A widely consultative process was impossible at those times given Somalia's disarray, but the security situation has improved sufficiently that the current constitutional review process can and should include as broad as possible consultations within Somalia.
- **Craft a contingency plan to bridge any security gap that opens after AMISOM's 2020 withdrawal.** An AMISOM withdrawal before the SNA can provide effective security would end the stabilization project in Somalia. The U.S. should already be working with its partners to ensure that does not happen (if the Somali government remains viable and on a positive trajectory in 2020).

## Continue the Effort

The Somali government and the governance model upon which it is based may not be the solution to Somalia's problems. They may prove to be ineffective, or even counterproductive. Progress has thus far been painfully slow, and is quickly reversible.

Yet the current stabilization effort is not hopeless. Somalia is objectively better off today than when it was the world's most failed state. Al-Shabaab is far from defeat, but it so far has been unable to reconquer the swathes of territory it lost. For all its deficiencies, the government has made some progress, though it must do much better, and soon. Since the best way to achieve the U.S. goal of a stable Somalia is through competent governance, the U.S. should continue to support the Somali government, though under strict conditions and with rigorous, committed oversight.

103. Andrew L. Peek, "The Roots of Lone Wolf Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs*, January 12, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/2016-01-12/roots-lone-wolf-terrorism> (accessed August 16, 2017).

104. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Humanitarian Bulletin Somalia July 2017," July 31, 2017, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FINAL%20July%202017%20Humanitarian%20Bulletin-v2.pdf> (accessed August 21, 2017).

If it does become clear that the government is not part of the solution, the U.S. should withdraw support for it, focus on counterterrorism, and support any viable and friendly systems of authority that emerge.

The next four years are likely to be critical in determining whether the current stabilization effort can work. The government has the opportunity and the broad international support it needs to build a legitimate political system. The onus is on the government and people of Somalia to prove they can do it.

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