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# SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN SOMALIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



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# 1. Introduction

After a protracted, hotly contested and sometimes violent electoral transition process, in mid-May 2022, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud assumed the presidency of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) for the second time. He arrived at a time when al-Shabaab remained a potent military force across significant parts of Somalia. Between 16 December 2020 and 6 September 2021, for example, al-Shabaab's fighters conducted 1,047 attacks on Somali and African Union (AU) targets, according to the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia.<sup>1</sup> This represents an average of about 4 attacks every day.

In response to al-Shabaab's persistent violence, the new administration moved quickly to establish a more united front with leaders of the Federal Member States (FMS) (Jubaland, South West, Hirshabelle, Galmudug, and Puntland). President Mohamud also made the controversial decision to appoint Mukhtar Robow, a former senior figure in al-Shabaab, to a cabinet position as minister of religious affairs.

At the same time, the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was also undergoing a transition, changing its name to the AU Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) on 1 May 2022. This reflected the AU's renewed focus on supporting the implementation of the latest Somali Transition Plan and ultimately withdrawing its military operation by the end of 2024. To that end, ATMIS planned to reduce its personnel in four phases (see Table 2), if certain benchmarks and peace and security targets were met. Meanwhile, in the United States, the Biden administration decided to redeploy a permanent military presence of about 450 troops to Somalia. US troops had been hastily withdrawn from Somalia by the previous Trump administration in December 2020. From July 2021, the Biden administration also restarted air strikes against al-Shabaab targets. At the same time, Turkey was also ramping up its support for Somali forces, deploying its Baykar Bayraktar TB2 drones.



*The Somali National Army (SNA) built upon the efforts of local self-defense forces who had taken territory from al-Shabaab because they were tired of being extorted*

It was in this fluid political context that President Mohamud's administration undertook a series of offensive operations against al-Shabaab, starting in late August 2022 in Hiran region, part of the president's political base. Here, the Somali National Army (SNA) built upon the efforts of local self-defense forces who had taken territory from al-Shabaab because they were tired of being extorted. Known as Macawisley after the long sarongs worn by Somali men, these local militia first emerged in 2014 in Hirshabelle and Galmudug to defend their communities against al-Shabaab. This time around, their armed resistance was driven by al-Shabaab's tactics of burning houses, destroying wells and beheading civilians, as well as making "taxation" demands during the worst drought in decades and with famine looming.<sup>2</sup>

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1. UN doc. S/2021/849 (5 October 2021), pp.51-53.

2. Abdi Sheikh, "Somali militia beheads Islamist insurgents after battle, witnesses say," Reuters, 18 September 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somali-militia-beheads-islamist-insurgents-after-battle-witnesses-say-2022-09-18/>



*On 12 September, speaking from Mogadishu but flanked by the presidents of the FMS, Mohamud urged the public to avoid al-Shabaab areas because their fighters would be bombed, attacked and raided. Unsurprisingly, this prompted an al-Shabaab response, and the war quickly escalated*

The Macawisley forces made good use of their excellent knowledge of the local terrain. One analyst suggested that the resistance had left al-Shabaab facing its own insurgency.<sup>3</sup> After years of operating without assistance from the FGS, the Macawisley were given ammunition and government troops deployed in support. Somalia's National Security Advisor said that the local fighters added legitimacy to the SNA's operations against al-Shabaab and provided useful intelligence.<sup>4</sup>

Over the next few months, the FGS announced that its forces had liberated dozens of settlements from al-Shabaab and killed hundreds of its fighters. On 12 September, speaking from Mogadishu but flanked by the presidents of the FMS, Mohamud urged the public to avoid al-Shabaab areas because their fighters would be bombed, attacked and raided.<sup>5</sup> Unsurprisingly, this prompted an al-Shabaab response, and the war quickly escalated.

In addition to putting serious military pressure on al-Shabaab for the first time in several years, these operations were important for several political and institutional reasons.

- First and foremost, they generated serious and largescale fighting, with both the Somali authorities and al-Shabaab committing thousands of fighters to the campaign, and al-Shabaab often fighting to defend and retake settlements rather than adopting their usual tactic of retreating when outnumbered. This demonstrated the extent to which both sides understood the seriousness of the current campaign: al-Shabaab knows it must stop local resistance in Hiran or face similar troubles elsewhere; the FGS understands that now is the time to support local resistance and seize the initiative from al-Shabaab.
- Second, although they built on the local resistance to al-Shabaab, the initial planning for the Hiran operations was led by the SNA rather than external partners.<sup>6</sup> This was a major step forward from 2018 when external partners led the planning for Operation Badbaado, which sought to eject al-Shabaab forces from several so-called Shabelle River “bridge towns” in the Lower Shabelle region south-west of Mogadishu.
- Third, the operations were undertaken not just by the Somali special forces Danab units, which had previously been the SNA's only real offensive capability but involved a wider range of SNA troops, including the Turkish-trained Gorgor battalions and some local units. This is good news, but it has put a premium on the SNA's command and control structures and situational awareness. While Danab troops played important combat roles, they also helped facilitate coordination between other SNA units and local forces.

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3. Cited in Mary Harper, “Somalia's men in sarongs taking on al-Shabab militants,” BBC News, 3 November 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63486013>

4. Cited in Harper, “Somalia's men in sarongs taking on al-Shabab militants.”

5. <https://twitter.com/HarunMaruf/status/1569362714560024576?s=20&t=AqRDeMo-CpvPIpWpkfndXQ>

6. Interview with Western official, 16 September 2022; Harun Maruf, “Somalia Military Rebuilding Shows Signs of Improvement,” VOA, 30 November 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-military-rebuilding-shows-signs-of-improvement/6856894.html>



*The operations involved reasonably well coordinated cooperation with the SNA's main external partners. The United States provided air support, including surveillance and deadly strikes. So too did Turkish drones. ATMIS provided indirect fire, aviation support, and casualty evacuation and care*

- Fourth, the SNA forces worked in conjunction with the Macawisley and other local forces, at least on the missions to clear al-Shabaab from particular settlements.
- Finally, the operations involved reasonably well coordinated cooperation with the SNA's main external partners. The United States provided air support, including surveillance and deadly strikes. So too did Turkish drones. ATMIS provided indirect fire, aviation support, and casualty evacuation and care.<sup>7</sup> The UN Support Office for Somalia (UNSOS) provided non-lethal support to SNA troops that had been vetted under the UN's Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP), including logistical support and casualty evacuation. However, UN support was complicated by the involvement of local self-defense militias, which had not been through such UN vetting procedures.

It is in this fluid political context that our report provides an overview of the current state of security sector reform (SSR) in Somalia and assesses the different forms of security assistance provided by Somalia's main external partners, notably the United States, Turkey, the European Union, and the United Kingdom. After providing a brief overview of Somali security forces, we focus mainly on official efforts to support the SNA by examining the major external security force assistance programs. The report then identifies ten ongoing challenges facing SSR in Somalia and concludes with recommendations for the next steps.

## 2. Methodology

Our report uses a qualitative approach based on confidential, semi-structured interviews held between September and November 2022. Our interviewees included current and former senior Somali government officials with expertise in the Somali security sector, as well as officials from the main external providers of security force assistance (SFA) to Somalia. We also reviewed internal documents from several organizations, ranging from security plans to joint assessments prepared by the FGS and its external partners. Finally, we conducted an extensive literature review as a critical part of drafting of this report.

## 3. Overview of the Somali Security Services

Somalia's Federal Provisional Constitution (FPC) establishes "armed forces, intelligence services, police force and prison forces."<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the FPC empowers the Federal Members States to establish their own police forces.<sup>9</sup>

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7. The US Africa Command described this phase of the campaign as "the largest combined Somali and ATMIS offensive operation in five years." AFRICOM press release, 21 September 2022, <https://www.africom.mil/pressrelease/34736/federal-government-of-somalia-engages-terrorists-with-support-from-us-forces>

8. See Federal Provisional Constitution of Somalia, Article 126, [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/94693/111147/F1279445166/Somalia\\_Provisional-Constitution\\_2012\\_ENGLISH.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/ELECTRONIC/94693/111147/F1279445166/Somalia_Provisional-Constitution_2012_ENGLISH.pdf)

9. Federal Provisional Constitution of Somalia, Article 126(5)



The stated goal of the Somali federal authorities is to build “able, affordable, accountable, and acceptable Somali security forces and institutions, that support enhanced community led peacebuilding efforts

Therefore, as summarized in the latest Somali Transition Plan, the stated goal of the Somali federal authorities is to build “able, affordable, accountable, and acceptable Somali security forces and institutions, that support enhanced community led peacebuilding efforts.”<sup>10</sup> Currently, Somalia’s official security services are comprised of four main elements: the Somali National Army (SNA), the Somali Police Force (SPF), and the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), and Prison Forces. However, there are also various unofficial armed forces that operate in Somalia’s “security arena.”<sup>11</sup>



The FGS recognizes that “success in ‘clear-hold-build’ operations requires military, policing, stabilization, governance, and development activities to be closely aligned and planned in an integrated manner

The immediate goal of Somalia’s official security forces, as set out in the latest Somali Transition Plan, is “to progressively assume full responsibility for security across the whole of Somalia by the end of 2024 in a conditions-based and clear manner.”<sup>12</sup> To that end, the FGS is working on improving the ability of its security services to conduct operations, build institutional capacities, as well as establish the necessary supporting activities. The official political vision is for the security services to conduct operations to ensure the “enduring and sustainable recovery of key population centers and strategic locations from Al-Shabaab, enabling local development and state-building (‘clear-hold-build’).”<sup>13</sup> The FGS recognizes that “success in ‘clear-hold-build’ operations requires military, policing, stabilization, governance, and development activities to be closely aligned and planned in an integrated manner.”<sup>14</sup>

As part of the national security architecture agreed during the London Conference on Somalia in May 2017, the FGS and the member states agreed to build an SNA with at least 18,000 personnel, excluding special forces (Danab), the Air Force, and the Navy.<sup>15</sup> The Danab special forces were envisaged to number 3,000, based on 500-strong battalions in each of the SNA’s six sectors (which were to be aligned with Somalia’s FMS).

The SNA was officially reconstituted in 2008 after being effectively disbanded in 1991. On paper, today’s SNA comprises around 32,000 personnel. However, this figure includes roughly 40% of SNA personnel who are inactive, including soldiers over retirement age, those unfit for service, in training, or dependents of soldiers that were killed or wounded in service.<sup>16</sup> This leaves a deployable force of closer to 19,000. In 2022, the SNA budget was US\$93.7 million but it increased to US\$113.3 million in 2023.<sup>17</sup>

Somalia’s Air Force is not functional. It comprises less than 150 aging personnel, including from the Siad Barre era, living in Afsione, Mogadishu.<sup>18</sup> Although some recruits have been sent for training in Turkey, the Air Force has no aircraft or maintenance crews. Somali security forces have therefore had to rely on external air power, especially from the United States as well as UNSOS and ATMIS.

10. The Somali Transition Plan (FGS, March 2022 version), p.4.

11. Alice Hills, “Security Sector or Security Arena? The Evidence from Somalia,” *International Peacekeeping*, 21:2 (2014): 165-180.

12. The Somali Transition Plan (FGS, March 2022 version), p.1.

13. The Somali Transition Plan (FGS, March 2022 version), p.4.

14. The Somali Transition Plan (FGS, March 2022 version), p.8.

15. See “London Conference on Somalia: Security Pact,” May 2017, p.5, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/613720/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/613720/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact.pdf)

16. Interview with Somali security official, 19 November 2022.

17. See FGS, Appropriation Act for the 2023 Budget, available at <https://mof.gov.so/sites/default/files/Publications/Approved%20Budget%20Appropriation.pdf>

18. We owe this point to Colin Robinson.



*The country needs a better navy and coastguard to respond to maritime threats including piracy, armed robbery, illegal and unregulated fishing, the dumping of toxic waste, the smuggling of weapons, drugs, IED components, explosive precursors, and human trafficking*

Officially re-established in 2009, the Navy is slightly more advanced than the Air Force. The Navy has received some funding from the UAE, while Turkey, the European Union (EU), and Ukraine have donated about 20 patrol boats to the maritime police and the Navy. The country needs a better navy and coastguard to respond to maritime threats including piracy, armed robbery, illegal and unregulated fishing, the dumping of toxic waste, the smuggling of weapons, drugs, IED components, explosive precursors, and human trafficking.

Many factors have delayed and impeded the building of the national security architecture envisaged in 2017. But the principal reason it has not been implemented is the lack of political reconciliation and cooperation between the FGS and FMS.<sup>19</sup> However, two notable positive developments occurred in 2018 and 2019: in 2018, the president signed a decree to enable the distribution of arms and ammunition to all security forces across the FMS; and in March 2019, biometric registration of all SNA troops was completed, which has helped reduce corruption related to military salary payments.<sup>20</sup> By 2020, the headcount in the biometric registration system was just over 24,000 SNA personnel, although as noted above, not all of them are fit for active service.

The FGS has highlighted several priority areas for SNA capacity-building, notably force generation and retention, counter-IED capabilities, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, mobile capabilities, logistics and administrative support management, and sustainment.<sup>21</sup> The latest Somali Transition Plan includes a rather confusing set of numbers of forces to be generated by the SNA: 3,850 by December 2022; 8,525 by September 2023; 10,450 by June 2024; for a grand total of 22,825.<sup>22</sup> We are unclear how these numbers were derived or their relationship to personnel already in the SNA prior to April 2022 which, according to the latest Somali Transition Plan, comprised 47 battalions of troops.<sup>23</sup>

In the 2017 Security Pact, the Somali police were envisaged to comprise of 32,000 personnel, divided between the federal and state level. The plan was to generate about 9,200 federal police and five state police forces of about 4,500 personnel (in Jubaland, South West, Galmudug, Hirshabelle, and Puntland). Reportedly, the federal-level personnel mostly hail from the Hawiye clan and they have been concentrated in and around Mogadishu. It is unclear how many of the state-level police should be Darwiish, a reserve force that could be activated when necessary. It's also important to note that Darwiish forces are not suitable for carrying out classic community policing tasks and investigating crimes but are rather part of a broader militarized capacity. In the latest Transition Plan, the Somali authorities committed to “generate and deploy Darwiish forces to provide a policing presence in newly recovered areas.”<sup>24</sup>

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19. For an overview, see Paul D. Williams, “Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of Failure, 2008–2018,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 43:3 (2020): 366–391.

20. FGS, AU, UN, Somalia Joint Threat Assessment (January 2020), pp.18, 14.

21. The Somali Transition Plan (FGS, March 2022 version), pp.10, 20.

22. The Somali Transition Plan (FGS, March 2022 version), p.16.

23. The Somali Transition Plan (FGS, March 2022 version), p.24.

24. The Somali Transition Plan (FGS, March 2022 version), p.8.



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Created in 2007, NISA reportedly has some 4,500 personnel. It is mandated to conduct intelligence gathering, domestic policing and counterterrorism activities. In 2022, its budget was US\$17.5 million, rising to US\$23.5 million for 2023. NISA has become controversial because it has been used as a personal tool of the presidency

Created in 2007, NISA reportedly has some 4,500 personnel. It is mandated to conduct intelligence gathering, domestic policing<sup>25</sup> and counterterrorism activities.<sup>26</sup> In 2022, its budget was US\$17.5 million, rising to US\$23.5 million for 2023.<sup>27</sup> NISA has become controversial because it has been used as a personal tool of the presidency, with NISA personnel being deployed against the president’s political opponents. One particularly egregious example being a December 2017 raid carried out on the Mogadishu house of opposition leader Abdirahman Abdishakur, which killed five of his security guards. Abdishakur was injured in the raid and arrested for alleged ‘treason.’<sup>28</sup> A former NISA director said, “Somali presidents view NISA as an extension of Villa Somalia and a blunt instrument to cudgel opponents into order.”<sup>29</sup> NISA has also been criticized for being heavily dependent on resources from external patrons, which has inhibited its operations against al-Shabaab.<sup>30</sup> On 5 January 2023, Somalia’s Council of Ministers enacted a new NISA establishment act which lawmakers will debate.

Finally, there are four sets of unofficial security forces which remain relevant to questions of Somali security sector reform.

- First, the FMS have assembled their own regional security forces.<sup>31</sup> These are numerous and operate outside the formal SNA chain of command. For example, an operational readiness assessment of regional security forces in Jubaland, Galmudug, South West State and Puntland conducted in 2019 estimated there were some 19,700 registered individuals in these respective forces.<sup>32</sup>
- Second, in 2020, former President Mohamed Farmajo sent approximately 5,000 Somali fighters to Eritrea where they received military training and equipment. This appears to have been an attempt by his administration to create a regime-protection force that could be deployed against political opponents rather than bolster official SNA units. Some Somalis said their sons were recruited with false promises including jobs in Qatar, while others claimed they were press-ganged.<sup>33</sup> It also appears that many of these recruits were children (under 18 years), adding another layer of complexity to the issue. In July 2022, President Mohamud told parents of these recruits that they were given money to buy SIM cards so they could call home, implying many of them had been incommunicado until then.<sup>34</sup>

25. Historically, NISA personnel have been integrated into the Somali police force, as in 2018 when more than 1,700 were integrated. Alice Hills, “Somalia’s Security Challenges Complicate Transfer of Responsibility to Government,” IPI Global Observatory, 11 March 2019, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/03/somalia-security-challenges-complicate-transfer-government/>

26. NISA’s role in Puntland is somewhat unclear since Puntland has its own intelligence agency, established in 2001.

27. See FGS, Appropriation Act for the 2023 Budget.

28. “Former PM apologizes over NISA attack in opposition leader’s house,” Garowe Online, 21 December 2020, <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/former-pm-apologizes-over-nisa-attack-in-opposition-leaders-house>

29. Cited in HIPS, Structural Impediments to Reviving Somalia’s Security Forces (HIPS, April 2021), p.8, <https://heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Structural-Impediments-to-Security-English-version-April-17-Final-.pdf>

30. Mohamed Haji Ingiriis, “Insurgency and international extraversion in Somalia: the National Intelligence and Security Agency (MISA) and Al-Shabaab’s Amniyat,” *African Security Review*, 29:2 (2020): 125-151.

31. See, for example, Colin D. Robinson and Jahara Matisek, “Assistance to Locally Appropriate Military Forces in Southern Somalia: Bypassing Mogadishu for Local Legitimacy,” *RUSI Journal*, 165:4 (2020): 68-78.

32. FGS, AU, UN, Somalia Joint Threat Assessment (January 2020), p.15.

33. Abdi Sheikh, “Anger in Somalia as sons secretly sent to serve in Eritrea military force,” Reuters, 28 January 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-eritrea-security/anger-in-somalia-as-sons-secretly-sent-to-serve-in-eritrea-military-force-idUSKBN29X1F5>

34. Mohamed Dhaysane, “Somalia’s President Speaks to Parents of Troops in Eritrea,” VOA, 14 July 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-s-president-speaks-to-parents-of-troops-in-eritrea-says-to-return-soon/6658535.html>

Then, in September, after President Mohamud visited the Somali recruits in Eritrea, President Isais Afwerki refused to send them back, apparently due to the political differences inside Somalia, adding that he had “good intentions” in training and equipping them.<sup>35</sup> Most recently, in mid-November, President Mohamud once again visited the recruits in Eritrea, and in late December they began returning to Somalia, a process that will reportedly be completed in early 2023.

- A third set of approximately 3,000 recruits from across the country are reported to have received military training in Uganda and other countries since late October 2022, financed by the UAE as part of a larger potential arrangement with the FGS.<sup>36</sup>
- Finally, Somalia also has informal community militias with various levels of military training and equipment and who have fought against al-Shabaab. In recent years, the most significant have been Ahlu Sunna Waljama’a (ASWJ) and the Macawisley.<sup>37</sup>

## 4. External Security Assistance to Somalia

The main external partners providing security force assistance to Somalia since 2008 have been the United States, Turkey, the European Union, and the United Kingdom.

### The United States

Since 2007, the United States has implemented a variety of security force assistance programs in Somalia. Initially, most of these focused on supporting AMISOM, but since 2012 more emphasis has been placed on developing the SNA.<sup>38</sup> In Somalia, Washington’s main military objective has been to reduce the ability of al-Shabaab (and later the Islamic State in Somalia) from conducting attacks within Somalia and using the country as a safe haven to attack US interests in east Africa and beyond.<sup>39</sup> US assistance to the SNA has been implemented in parallel with US support to the AU force (AMISOM then ATMIS), as well as its own kinetic operations, usually conducted in partnership with Somali forces.

After several frustrating years and citing concerns about corruption, in December 2017 the US government paused its security force assistance to all the non-mentored SNA units (i.e., excluding the Danab and Presidential Guard units).

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In Somalia, Washington’s main military objective has been to reduce the ability of al-Shabaab (and later the Islamic State in Somalia) from conducting attacks within Somalia and using the country as a safe haven to attack US interests in east Africa and beyond

35. [https://twitter.com/HarunMaruf/status/1570775916019875847?s=20&t=hCiOUTHwqQlBT\\_yTuxzJiw](https://twitter.com/HarunMaruf/status/1570775916019875847?s=20&t=hCiOUTHwqQlBT_yTuxzJiw)

36. Bashir Mohamed Caato, “UAE and Egypt recruiting and training secret Somali forces,” Middle East Eye, 2 November 2022, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/somalia-uae-egypt-recruit-train-secret-forces>

37. For an overview and analysis, see Mohammed Ibrahim Shire, “Protection or predation? Understanding the behavior of community-created self-defense militias during civil wars,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 33:3 (2022): 467-498.

38. For details, see Paul D. Williams, *Understanding US Policy in Somalia* (Chatham House, July 2020), <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/07/understanding-us-policy-somalia>

39. Successive US administrations have considered al-Shabaab to be an “associated force” of Al-Qaeda, for the purposes of the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force and have provided considerable security force assistance to both Somalia and to countries contributing to ATMIS.

In July 2019, after some of these concerns had been allayed, Washington resumed some non-lethal assistance to SNA units engaged in Operation Badbaado—involving AMISOM, international, and Somali forces to recover from al-Shabaab the so-called Shabelle River “bridge towns” in the Lower Shabelle region south-west of Mogadishu.<sup>40</sup> The US also provided information and surveillance support for these operations and in October 2019 opened its new embassy in Mogadishu. In February 2020, the US resumed lethal, direct security assistance to SNA units engaged in the Lower Shabelle operations. By this stage, about 650-800 US troops were operating in Somalia to deliver security force assistance and conduct other related operations.<sup>41</sup> In December 2020, having approved an increased tempo of American military operations in Somalia for the previous four years, President Donald Trump ordered US troops to leave Somalia.<sup>42</sup> Most were subsequently redeployed around the east African region and in May 2022 the Biden administration reversed Trump’s decision and agreed to provide a “persistent presence” in Somalia of around 450 US soldiers.<sup>43</sup>

Today, the US runs multiple security assistance programs in Somalia, delivered primarily by the Departments of State and Defense, including by Africa Command and the Special Operations Command Africa. Some programs are authorized under Title 22 authorities, which provide defense articles, military education and training, and other defense-related services. Education takes place both in Somalia and abroad, including Combating Terrorism and Irregular Warfare fellowships and International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs. Additional US “train and equip” support comes via Section 333 authority, which is intended to build sustainable Somali security capacity, including in counterterrorism operations. These programs are delivered to the FGS. So far, except for Puntland, the US has refrained from providing the FMS security forces with direct military assistance.<sup>44</sup>

The United States currently pursues four main lines of effort to implement its security cooperation programs in Somalia:

- Building partner capacity to counter terrorism;
- Conducting defense institution-building;
- Building partner capacity for maritime security; and
- Providing support to ATMIS.

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40. For an overview of these operations, see Paul D. Williams, “Stabilisation 2.0? Insights from the Somali and African Union operations in Lower Shabelle,” Wavell Room, 3 December 2019, <https://wavellroom.com/2019/12/03/stabilization-2-0-insights-somali-african-union-operations-lower-shabelle/>

41. Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, East Africa Counterterrorism Operation (November 2020), p.8, <https://www.dodig.mil/Reports/Lead-Inspector-General-Reports/Article/2427451/lead-inspector-general-for-east-africa-and-north-and-west-africa-counterterrori/>

42. Helene Cooper, “Trump Orders All American Troops Out of Somalia,” New York Times, 4 December 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/world/africa/trump-somalia-troop-withdrawal.html>

43. Charlie Savage and Eric Schmitt, “Biden Approves Plan to Redeploy Several Hundred Ground Forces Into Somalia,” New York Times, 16 May 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/16/us/politics/biden-military-somalia.html>

44. Robinson and Matisek, “Assistance to Locally Appropriate Military Forces in Southern Somalia,” p.69.

Since 2014, the principal operational focus of US efforts to build Somali counterterrorism capacity has been the Danab advanced infantry units. The Danab units conduct a wide range of operations including clearing, attacks, and civil-military activities. Recent years have seen the Pentagon devote about US\$10 million of lethal aid and equipment directly to these Somali troops, while in 2020, the State Department gave US\$25.9 million to support Danab development.<sup>45</sup> In January 2023, the US announced another US\$9 million support package of weapons, vehicles, and equipment.<sup>46</sup> For Danab, the US has provided training,<sup>47</sup> mentoring and support for operations, equipment (including vehicles, weapons and ammunition,<sup>48</sup> radios, C-IED equipment and medical supplies), infrastructure and services (such as food, fuel and stipends of US\$300-US\$500 per month).<sup>49</sup>



*Since 2017, the US goal has been to build the 3,000-strong Danab Brigade that was envisioned in the Somalia Security Pact*

Since 2017, the US goal has been to build the 3,000-strong Danab Brigade that was envisioned in the Somalia Security Pact.<sup>50</sup> It has been a slow and difficult process involving recruitment drives, training, as well as seeking replacement for recruits as the force inevitably suffered casualties and some personnel were placed in leadership roles in other SNA units, including the 14th October Brigade. Initially, the Danab struggled to recruit sufficient troops from across Somalia's regions, and suffered setbacks when the FGS ordered its units to perform tasks for which they were not prepared. Currently, the Danab is nearly 1,500-strong and operates out of bases in Mogadishu, Baledogle, Kismayo, Galkayo, and Jowhar.<sup>51</sup> The US hopes to conduct three more recruitment cycles over the next year to bring the Danab units up to the envisaged brigade strength.



*Academic analysts have attributed the Danab's success to "its cohesion, esprit de corps, training, and aggressive mobile tactical style." Practitioners engaged in these programs suggested that an additional factor was crucial: field mentoring and advising provided by US contractors and military personnel*

Overall, the Danab units have been effective. In mid-2020, for instance, they were conducting approximately 80% of SNA offensive operations and nearly all counterterrorism operations.<sup>52</sup> One estimate suggested that during 2019 and 2020, Danab forces successfully cleared 29 towns/villages, with only seven falling back into al-Shabaab's hands.<sup>53</sup> Academic analysts have attributed the Danab's success to "its cohesion, esprit de corps, training, and aggressive mobile tactical style."<sup>54</sup> Practitioners engaged in these programs suggested that an additional factor was crucial: field mentoring and advising provided by US contractors and military personnel.

45. Confidential interview and Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, East Africa Counterterrorism Operation (November 2020), p.21.

46. US Embassy in Somalia, press release, 8 January 2023, <https://so.usembassy.gov/united-states-donates-9-million-in-weapons-and-equipment-to-support-the-somali-national-army/>

47. Initial training for Danab recruits is led by the contractor firm Bancroft Global Development. This is followed by Department of Defense-led collective training. Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, East Africa Counterterrorism Operation (November 2020), p.20.

48. From 2017-2021, the US distributed 82 vehicles, 112 weapons, and 1,500 individual fighting kits to Danab forces (at a cost of about US\$9 million). By late 2022, another 319 vehicles, 104 weapons and 374 fighting kits were on the way.

49. US stipends constitute about one-half of the salaries for Danab soldiers. The FGS pays the remainder, US\$200-US\$400 via a separate system than for the rest of the SNA. Ido Levy and Abdi Yusuf, "The "Lightning" Brigade: Security Force Assistance and the Fight Against al-Shabaab," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, p.12, published online 13 March 2022. Between 2010 and May 2017, the US gave approximately US\$66 million for SNA stipend-related activities. Cited in Williams, "Building the Somali National Army."

50. The Somalia Security Pact released by the FGS and its international partners in 2017 envisaged the development of a brigade-sized Danab force as part of Somalia's new national security architecture. The Danab brigade would comprise of 500 troops in each of the SNA's sectors (that were to be realigned with the FMS boundaries).

51. This is an increase from about 945 Danab troops in September 2020. Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, East Africa Counterterrorism Operation (November 2020), p.21.

52. Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, East Africa Counterterrorism Operation, p.20.

53. Levy and Yusuf, "The "Lightning" Brigade," p.16.

54. Levy and Yusuf, "The "Lightning" Brigade," p.2.

The US has also played a smaller role in building Somali capacity for maritime security. Here, the focus has been on helping the Somali Navy and police to secure the coastline and ports, mainly by participating in exercises and supporting staff training, boat repairs, and safety equipment.

In relation to defense institution-building, the US focus has been on the Somali Ministry of Defense (MoD) and to mentor the SNA, including its general staff. The goal has been to support MoD/SNA staff to plan and coordinate operations including with ATMIS. The US is also helping the AU transfer security responsibilities to the FGS in time for its planned withdrawal at the end of 2024. Since 2006, the US has spent nearly US\$2 billion on bilateral and multilateral forms of security assistance for troop-contributing countries to the AU missions in Somalia.<sup>55</sup> This has been in the form of training, equipment and advising programs—often implemented by contractor firms—as well as the US contributions to the UNSOS, which since 2009 has provided AMISOM and then ATMIS with logistical support.

In addition to implementing assistance packages, US forces have also conducted offensive ground and air operations targeting important al-Shabaab figures and facilities, often in partnership with Somali special forces and Danab units. The US has conducted air strikes in Somalia against various targets since January 2007 and drone strikes since June 2011. In recent years, about one-quarter of these strikes have been in collective self-defense of Somali or AU partner forces. Two US soldiers have been killed in Somalia (in May 2017 and June 2018) and several others injured.

## Turkey

Having been deeply engaged in Somalia diplomatically and through humanitarian relief and development aid, Turkey signed a military training agreement with the Somali authorities in 2012. Turkey increased its security force assistance to Somalia after 2016 when it opened a new military base in Mogadishu called Camp Turksom, which houses some 200 Turkish troops and has facilities to train up to 1,000 Somalis. This prompted al-Shabaab to launch a campaign against Turkey, which its leader Ahmed Diriye called an “enemy of the nation” in a July 2016 audio message.<sup>56</sup> Camp Turksom was attacked by al-Shabaab in May 2018, by suicide attacks in June 2020 and June 2021 and a rocket attack in July 2022. Other Turkish operations have suffered multiple IED and other attacks.

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55. See Congressional Research Service (2015), ‘Statement of Lauren Ploch Blanchard, Specialist in African Affairs, Congressional Research Service, Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health’, 4 June 2015, p.2, [https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/060415\\_Blanchard\\_Testimony.pdf](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/060415_Blanchard_Testimony.pdf); and authors’ calculations. The AU troop-contributing countries have been Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia.

56. “New Shabaab leader labels Turkey Somalia’s ‘enemy’” AFP, 12 July 2016,

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*Turkey also trained about 1,000 Haramcad police, including the first unit of around 50 female officers in August 2021. By 2022, Turkey completed the training of different types of security forces including the special forces*

Overall, Ankara planned to train about 5,000 SNA troops<sup>57</sup>—known as Gorgor (Eagle) units—as well as about 1,000 special police officers—known as Haramcad (Cheetah) units. In addition, Turkey agreed to train 110 special forces, 100 SNA officers every two years and 100 NCOs each year. Between 2019 and 2022, Turkey trained 5,000 Gorgor soldiers divided into three brigades (or nine battalions plus one support battalion), around 300 officers and nearly 400 NCOs.<sup>58</sup> Turkey also trained about 1,000 Haramcad police, including the first unit of around 50 female officers in August 2021. By 2022, Turkey completed the training of different types of security forces including the special forces.

The Turkish model for training most SNA soldiers has been to take recruits to Turkey for an intensive one-year program with a mix of Turkish and Somali trainers. This allows continuous collective training without the difficult distractions of training in an active war zone and includes stipends of up to US\$400 per month.<sup>59</sup>

Turkey also provides considerable equipment to its trainees including weapons (MPT-76 and H&K G3 rifles, M2 Browning machine guns) and ammunition, as well as armored vehicles (Kirpi APCs), utility trucks, uniforms and boots.<sup>60</sup> During 2020 and 2021, Turkey donated over 40 military vehicles to Gorgor units (20 Kirpi APCs and more than 26 utility trucks).<sup>61</sup> Turkey also provided specialized officer and NCO trainings. By July 2022, four cohorts of officers and five cohorts of NCOs had graduated from the Military Academy and Turksom military training center respectively.<sup>62</sup> The main limitation of the Turkish training model is the lack of follow-on mentorship and field advising by Turkish troops on Gorgor operations. This is in stark contrast to the US field support provided to the Danab Brigade.

Although they have developed a reputation as competent fighting forces, one recent analysis concluded that “any combat effectiveness they may have offered is severely hamstrung by political misuse.”<sup>63</sup> Examples of Turkish-trained forces being used against domestic political opponents of the Farmajo administration include February 2021 when Gorgor troops fired on civilians protesting the extension of Farmajo’s term as president and April 2021 when Haramcad police illegally arrested Somali journalists and attacked former Somali presidents.<sup>64</sup> More generally, Haramcad police were regularly deployed “to ensure FGS-favored political outcomes in South West State (SWS), Galmudug, Baidoa and Dhusamareb.”<sup>65</sup>

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57. Kerry Herschelman, “Turkey to train a third of Somali army,” Janes, 6 August 2020, <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/turkey-to-train-a-third-of-somali-army>

58. Maruf, “Somalia Military Rebuilding Shows Signs of Improvement.”

59. Levy and Yusuf, “The “Lightning” Brigade,” p.15.

60. HIPS, Structural Impediments to Reviving Somalia’s Security Forces.

61. See <https://www.military.africa/2020/08/turkey-donates-kirpi-armored-vehicle-and-utility-trucks-to-somalia/> and <https://voi.id/en/news/76672/turkey-donates-22-military-vehicles-to-somali-special-forces-to-fight-al-qaeda-network>

62. [https://twitter.com/tc\\_mogadishu/status/1553864635153104896?s=11&t=02GzcWMAwI8byDpCIYHFcw](https://twitter.com/tc_mogadishu/status/1553864635153104896?s=11&t=02GzcWMAwI8byDpCIYHFcw)

63. Levy and Yusuf, “The “Lightning” Brigade,” p.15.

64. For example, “Somali ex-leader says soldiers attacks his home, blames president,” Reuters, 25 April 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/supporters-somali-president-clash-with-opponents-residents-say-2021-04-25/>; Colin Robinson, “Rising Politicization Risks Splitting Somali National Army,” IPI Global Observatory, 17 March 2021, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/03/rising-politicization-risks-splitting-somali-national-army/>

65. Robinson and Matisek, “Assistance to Locally Appropriate Military Forces in Southern Somalia,” pp.71-72.

In December 2021, Turkey provided the FGS with Baykar Bayraktar TB2 drones. Operating out of Mogadishu, they were piloted by Turkish personnel and used for reconnaissance in support of Gorgor troops until late 2022 when some were armed and began conducting strikes against al-Shabaab targets.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that although the Somali Air Force has no aircraft or maintenance crews, it has sent some pilots for training in Turkey.

## The European Union

The EU has provided security assistance to Somali security forces since 2010 via its Training Mission (EUTM-Somalia). The EU's objectives for its security assistance are to increase “the proficiency, effectiveness, credibility and accountability of the Somali defense sector to enable Somali authorities to take over security responsibilities progressively.”<sup>67</sup>

Initially based in Uganda, the EUTM-Somalia was one aspect of the EU's integrated approach to working towards a peaceful Somalia which includes EU support for the AU mission, maritime security, as well as Somalia's maritime civilian law enforcement capabilities. EUTM-Somalia began by delivering tactical training support to help the newly reconstituted SNA generate forces. Strategic advising was added to the mission's mandate in 2013. While based in Uganda between 2010 and 2014, EUTM-Somalia comprised 150-200 personnel, primarily drawn from seven to 15 EU member states. EUTM-Somalia also includes a roughly 60-strong protection unit provided by Italy. Overall, the mission's “common costs” covered by the EU's Athena mechanism have totaled approximately €105 million since 2010, with the current budget for 2021 and 2022 being €14.5 million. So far, EUTM-Somalia has not suffered any fatalities, but al-Shabaab has attacked the mission's convoys with car bombs on two occasions: in October 2018 and September 2019.<sup>68</sup>

By the time it moved to Mogadishu in 2014, EUTM-Somalia operated training and advising teams. The mission has also provided small amounts of non-lethal equipment and engaged in some infrastructure construction and civil-military cooperation activities. EUTM-Somalia's advising teams mainly supported the Ministry of Defense and SNA general staff, including promoting civilian oversight of the military. EUTM-Somalia has trained individual soldiers, Somali trainers, infantry and specialist units, leaders (mainly platoon and company commanders) and headquarters staff. Starting in 2016, EUTM-Somalia began unit (rather than individual) training to generate and regenerate existing SNA light infantry units.

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66. Confidential interview, 24 October 2022; Maruf, “Somalia Military Rebuilding Shows Signs of Improvement.”

67. See the mission's website, <https://www.eutm-somalia.eu>

68. Paul D. Williams and Hussein Yusuf Ali, *The European Union Training Mission in Somalia: An Assessment* (SIPRI, December 2020), p.4, [https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/bp\\_2011\\_eutm\\_somalia\\_3.pdf](https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/bp_2011_eutm_somalia_3.pdf)

The COVID-19 pandemic made this difficult by requiring the mission to temporarily adopt remote forms of support. Nevertheless, it trained several so-called “Flame” companies (which have now been disbanded) and the SNA’s 143rd Light Infantry Battalion. By August 2020, the EU had trained nearly 7,000 troops. Roughly half were from infantry units, while the others were a mix of specialist units (such as combat engineer platoons), NCOs, officers and Somali trainers and instructors.<sup>69</sup>



*EUTM-Somalia’s current goal is to train about 500 troops or four companies per year. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, by October 2022, the EU had offered another 48 courses, trained 1,634 personnel, as well as 107 trainers.*

EUTM-Somalia’s current goal is to train about 500 troops or four companies per year. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, by October 2022, the EU had offered another 48 courses,<sup>70</sup> trained 1,634 personnel, as well as 107 trainers.<sup>71</sup> This brought the total number of trainees to approximately 8,700. The EU has not provided direct military assistance to the FMS forces.<sup>72</sup>

In July 2021, the EU’s new European Peace Facility (EPF) allocated €20 million to support SNA troops cooperating with AU forces. This was particularly important because, for the first time, it allowed the EU to deliver lethal military support to its recipient states. So far, however, EPF support to the SNA has been spent on rehabilitation works at its training facility, payment of the training center’s running costs, basic personnel equipment for SNA trainees and non-lethal equipment. The most recent EU package also included vehicles for trained SNA units, specifically troop transport trucks, water tankers, pick-up trucks, ambulances, as well as individual equipment and radios.

Although the EUTM’s contributions have been positive overall, it suffered from two principal operational deficits. First, as one study concluded, “The tangible operational impacts of EUTM Somalia activities were minimal for its first seven years because there was no clear connection between its training activities and SNA operations in the field.”<sup>73</sup> The first direct link from EUTM-Somalia trainees participating in operations came in 2019 with Operation Badbaado. Here, the EU-trained SNA troops acted primarily as holding forces after Danab and Gorgor SNA had cleared the various settlements of al-Shabaab fighters. The EU-trained SNA units continue to operate primarily in the Lower Shabelle region.



*A second limitation is that, like Turkey, the EU has adopted a “train and release” approach. It has not deployed military mentors and advisors to accompany trained SNA units in field operations*

A second limitation is that, like Turkey, the EU has adopted a “train and release” approach. It has not deployed military mentors and advisors to accompany trained SNA units in field operations. EUTM personnel are aware of how the lack of field advising negatively impacts their ability to monitor and evaluate the effects of its training programs. As one EUTM-Somalia official noted, “There are also very limited ways and methods to evaluate training done and subsequently the quality of the training, due to the security environment and the fact that EUTM Somalia doesn’t deploy to the areas of operations.”<sup>74</sup> The EUTM must therefore rely on information provided by their Somali counterparts.

69. See Williams and Ali, *The European Union Training Mission in Somalia*, p.3.

70. These courses were Mobile Training Teams, Platoon Leader and Company Commander, Military Police, Train the Trainers Advanced Urban Combat, Brigade Staff, Law of Armed Conflict, Protection of Civilians, Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, Security and Computer Training, and Gender Workshops.

71. Communication with EU officials, 9 November 2022.

72. Robinson and Matissek, “Assistance to Locally Appropriate Military Forces in Southern Somalia,” p.69.

73. Williams and Ali, *The European Union Training Mission in Somalia*, p.9.

74. Cited in Williams and Ali, *The European Union Training Mission in Somalia*, p.11.



## The United Kingdom

Having been one of the earliest providers of bilateral security assistance to the AMISOM from 2007, the UK started to provide more security assistance to the SNA and Somali federal police in 2014. On the diplomatic front, this saw the UK finance two major security conferences about Somalia in London in 2014 and 2017. The UK also supported the EU Training Mission in Somalia (until Britain withdrew from the European Union in January 2020). Since 2014, the UK has also contributed over £13 million to the UN Trust Fund to funnel counter-IED initiatives and non-lethal logistical support to the 13,900 SNA who participate in joint operations with the AU mission (AMISOM then ATMIS). This involved food and water, fuel, transport, tents, in-theater medical evacuation, communications, and field defense stores. Since September 2021, the UK has also financed the Mogadishu Joint Operations Coordination Center used by the SNA and AMISOM/ATMIS.

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*From 2015-2020, UK bilateral assistance to the SNA involved training, equipment provision, infrastructure support and stipends. Specifically, the UK trained and paid monthly stipends of US\$100 to approximately 3,000 SNA soldiers in Sector 60*

In terms of bilateral security assistance to the SNA, the UK has delivered 22 courses to different members of the Somali security sector.<sup>75</sup> From 2015-2020, UK bilateral assistance to the SNA involved training, equipment provision, infrastructure support and stipends. Specifically, the UK trained and paid monthly stipends of US\$100 to approximately 3,000 SNA soldiers in Sector 60 (which roughly corresponds to AMISOM/ATMIS Sector 3). The UK has also supported training programs delivered by AMISOM for approximately 2,700 Somali federal police recruits as well as some uniforms, vehicles, and radios. It has also supported infrastructural projects such as police stations and headquarters buildings, training facilities, vehicle check points and a mechanical workshop. The UK has also provided infrastructure support to the SNA, particularly around Baidoa, including a training center, barracks, logistics hub and headquarters, as well as refurbishing several operations rooms. The UK provided equipment to SNA troops who participated in collective company training, including personal equipment (uniform, boots, first aid), communications gear, tents, and vehicles to each completed battalion.

## 5. Ten Key Challenges

Although significant progress has been made over the last few years, major challenges still inhibit the building and deployment of effective Somali security services and their requisite institutions and infrastructure. Here, we briefly discuss ten of the challenges, primarily those facing the SNA.

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75. Communications with UK officials, 1 and 2 September 2022.

“Some analysts think that the SNA is less “an institution, [and] more of a strategically deployed brand”—a brand used to acquire resources, like training and equipment from external actors. We think this goes too far but it is true that whatever set of security services are built, they will not be sustainable unless the Somali authorities are able to afford them

## A Financially Sustainable Force

Some analysts think that the SNA is less “an institution, [and] more of a strategically deployed brand”—a brand used to acquire resources, like training and equipment from external actors.<sup>76</sup> We think this goes too far but it is true that whatever set of security services are built, they will not be sustainable unless the Somali authorities are able to afford them. That includes paying for salaries, equipment, education and training, infrastructure, and pensions. To date, the Somali authorities alone cannot afford the army they want.

Although Somalia’s domestic revenue has increased by over 30% since 2017, the FGS must think carefully about the type and size of security services it can afford. This is partly because over two-thirds of the FGS budget comes from external donors. For 2023, for example, the federal budget totals US\$950.7 million, of which, US\$665 million is revenue from external donors, principally the World Bank, which provided US\$457.6 million.<sup>77</sup> In recent years, just under 20% of the Somali budget has been spent on defense and security (see Table 1). While the budget for the armed forces increased significantly in 2023 (by some 17%), NISA has seen a small but steady increase, whereas the police budget reduced slightly from 2022 to 2023. Of the US\$113 million allocated for the Armed Forces in 2023, most is spent on salaries (US\$93.4 million, or 83%), while only US\$20 million (or 17%) goes on goods and services, which includes utilities, fuel, materials, supplies, as well as maintenance and repairs.<sup>78</sup> It is unclear from the 2023 budget where the US\$113 million for the Armed Forces comes from, or the balance between domestic and donor revenue generation.

Table 1: Defense and Security Budget (US\$ million)<sup>79</sup>

	2021	2022	2023
<b>Total Defense and Security Budget</b>	163.8	162.8	197.1
Total disbursed by Ministry of Defense	95.7	99.25	120.4
Armed Forces	93	96.4	113.2
Total disbursed by Ministry of National Security	68.1	71.15	76.8
Police	44.1	46	45.8
National Security Force (NISA)	17.5	18.5	23.1

76. Nisar Majid et al., *Somalia’s Politics: The Usual Business?* (London, UK: London School of Economics, A Synthesis Paper of the Conflict Research Programme, June 2021), p.30, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/110878/>

77. See FGS, *Appropriation Act for the 2023 Budget*, pp.9-10.

78. FGS, *Appropriation Act for the 2023 Budget*, p.14.

79. *Reviewing the Federal Government of Somalia’s 2022 near billion-dollar budget* (Somali Public Agenda, Governance Brief 18, July 2022); FGS, *Appropriation Act for the 2023 Budget*, p.12.

## A Politically Accountable Force

The Somali security services should be accountable to the federal authorities, and ultimately to the people of Somalia. If the security services are riddled with corruption; if they engage in violations of the laws of war or abuse local civilians; and if they become tools in Somalia's struggles over political patronage, their effectiveness and legitimacy will erode. Corrupt senior security personnel and civilian officials are notorious for undermining both the promotion and procurement processes of security institutions, both of which reduce operational effectiveness in the field.

On too many occasions, security personnel have been used by the authorities to pressure political opponents rather than al-Shabaab. Although no units are completely immune from political pressures, it is the Turkish-trained Gorgor and Haramcad units that have proved more vulnerable to political misuse. Turkey's pressure in this regard has not been as strong as that of the United States and it came very late.

Finally, if security personnel abuse civilians or break the laws of war, they too will reduce their organization's legitimacy in the eyes of the population and encourage al-Shabaab to do the same. It is therefore worrying that senior leaders of the government, at times, encourage, extrajudicial killing. For instance, military commander, Gen. Odowaa Yusuf recently announced that "anyone who engages in bandits through illegal checkpoints (Isbaaro) should be killed on sight. There is no need for court." Additionally, the governor of the Hiran region, Ali Jeyte, recently offered cash rewards of several thousand US dollars to fighters (SNA and others) for killing al-Shabaab militants and their wives and children.<sup>80</sup> Without strong accountability mechanisms in place, such rewards incentivize abuses and raise the risk of people being killed who fall into neither category.



*Building a politically accountable set of Somali security services is down to Somali political and military leaders; external actors have comparatively little leverage.*

Building a politically accountable set of Somali security services is down to Somali political and military leaders; external actors have comparatively little leverage. As Josep Borrell, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, put it, "externally driven interventions cannot provide the core necessary ingredient: a viable, legitimate political settlement and government. Only local forces can do this. ... Outsiders can provide temporary security, or do 'capacity building', but only locals can do the politics and make the institutions work."<sup>81</sup>

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80. See [https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2022/Oct/wararka\\_maanta18-182642.htm](https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2022/Oct/wararka_maanta18-182642.htm)

81. Josep Borrell, "Foreign interventions and the future of European defence," EEAS blog, 27 August 2022, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-interventions-and-future-european-defence\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-interventions-and-future-european-defence_en)

## A Tight Timeline

There are growing economic and political pressures facing some of Somalia’s external security partners. The most immediate issue is the withdrawal of ATMIS, which has a UN Security Council-endorsed timetable for withdrawal in four phases ending in December 2024 (see Table 2).

Table 2: ATMIS Transition Phases, 2022-2024

	<b>Phase 1 Apr-Dec 2022</b>	<b>Phase 2 Jan-Sept 2023</b>	<b>Phase 3 Oct 2023–Jun 2024</b>	<b>Phase 4 July-Dec 2024</b>
AU force reduction	2,000 troops withdrawn	3,000 troops withdrawn	4,000 troops withdrawn	9,586 uniformed personnel withdrawn
Somali forces generated	3,850	8,525	10,450	Total 22,825
Key transition activities	FOB handover/-closure; joint logistics bases established	FOB handover / closure & enhancements	Joint operations; FOB handover/closure	All ATMIS personnel withdrawn; sector hubs handover.

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The 2017 Somalia Security Pact developed what at the time was considered a realistic ten-year timeline to build a fully-functioning, effective set of Somali military forces and Ministry of Defense

This timetable is ambitious because the Somali security services are unlikely to be fully autonomous by then, nor is it likely that al-Shabaab will have been militarily defeated. The 2017 Somalia Security Pact developed what at the time was considered a realistic ten-year timeline to build a fully-functioning, effective set of Somali military forces and Ministry of Defense. The switch of ATMIS’ transition from a withdrawal based on political benchmarks to a withdrawal based on an explicit timetable was more about sending a political signal to the FGS about donor fatigue than about the on-the-ground realities of institution-building and the war against al-Shabaab. For ATMIS, and UNSOS, which provides non-lethal logistical support to SNA working in coordination with ATMIS, this timetable raises a difficult question—perhaps even a strategic contradiction—between supporting offensive operations, in Hiran and elsewhere, and simultaneously preparing to draw down large numbers of troops in four phases. In November 2022, the African Union accepted an FGS request to delay the first drawdown of 2,000 ATMIS soldiers by six months, from December 2022 to 30 June 2023.<sup>82</sup> On 21 December 2022, the UN Security Council agreed to this delay of the first phase of the ATMIS withdrawal.<sup>83</sup>

82. AU doc. PSC/PR/COMM.1121.1(2022), 11 November 2022, <https://peaceau.org/en/article/communique-of-the-1121st-meeting-of-the-psc-held-on-11-november-2022-on-the-consideration-of-the-request-of-the-federal-government-of-somalia-to-extend-phase-1-of-atmis-operational-timelines>

83. UN press release, SC15160, 21 December 2022, <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15160.doc.htm>

Finally, there is also an important “known unknown” about the future of UNSOS and the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM): although the UN Security Council has not yet announced a timeline for the withdrawal of its two missions, UNSOS will likely downsize and integrate into UNSOM. However, it remains an open question whether UNSOM could or should remain in Somalia without ATMIS or some other form of security arrangements.

## Force Re-Generation

Despite all the external efforts described above, a significant portion of SNA personnel deployed in the field have never received training and/or equipment from external partner programs or as part of the FMS formation process. While these troops have already been officially “generated” which means they are counted as part of the SNA force, they need to be “re-generated”—temporarily brought back from the sectors where they are currently deployed and entered into a process to be trained and re-equipped. This would undoubtedly generate significant pushback from some powerful regional personalities and may well reveal the limits of the official SNA chain of command. But without such re-generation, these forces are very unlikely to develop into a good “hold” force or be adequately trained or resourced for other operations.

To add to the problem, the FGS has relied on external partners to pay for such training and equipment, which is not sustainable over the long-term. In practical terms, this issue raises questions about which SNA forces deployed in the sectors beyond Mogadishu should be brought back into the training pipeline first and who will cover for them during that period. It remains unclear how this process relates to the numbers of generated SNA troops listed in the latest Somali Transition Plan (Table 2).

## Plugging Capability Gaps

Even after more than a decade of external security force assistance programs, the Somali security services still have a long list of significant capability gaps. The SNA’s official Order of Battle which exists on paper is not always available in the field. It remains unclear precisely how far the SNA has progressed since the detailed Operational Readiness Assessment of its forces was conducted in late 2017. That assessment showed a dire lack of equipment, including vehicles and ammunition, and that about 30% of SNA troops were unarmed.<sup>84</sup> The SNA still has poor weapons and ammunition storage, management and tracking systems.<sup>85</sup>

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84. Harun Maruf, “Somalia: Up to 30 percent of soldiers unarmed,” VOA, 19 December 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-government-says-up-thirty-percent-its-soldiers-unarmed/4170388.html>

85. Although the FGS recently developed a new weapons and ammunition management (WAM) national strategy, “...the absence of central weapons armories and ammunition storage facilities in all the FMS and the lack of a weapon’s marking and registration system are now seen as serious deficiencies in the accountability for WAM.” To fill this gap, the FGS and implementing partners have developed a prototype weapons database. ATMIS Strategic CONOPS (Draft February 2022), paras. 79, 81.

There is also the difficult issue of monitoring and evaluating the different types of training that SNA personnel have received and the extent to which it has actually improved their performance. This is especially difficult to measure for external providers that do not accompany their trainees into the field on operations.

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At the operational level, the ongoing campaign in Hirshabelle and elsewhere has highlighted two major capability gaps for the SNA: counter-IED equipment and appropriate vehicles. The SNA has suffered many casualties from IEDs over the last few years. They are al-Shabaab’s weapon of choice and are usually placed on main supply routes and around Somali and AU forward operating bases. They are often deadly because Somali personnel travel mainly in soft-skin vehicles due to a lack of armored personnel carriers and often without explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) teams.

More generally, it is apparent that capabilities are spread very unevenly across the SNA force. For instance, while the Danab and Gorgor units are now reasonably well equipped—albeit with different types of equipment—other SNA units are not. The regular SNA units in Hiran are only marginally better equipped than the Macawisley. This inequality is so pronounced that officials now talk about the SNA being effectively two armies—one that is mobile, and one that is largely stationary. The so-called “freedom units/maneuver units” are those that possess the necessary vehicles to move from point A to point B in order to conduct operations including long-range patrolling and special operation raids. They include the Danab, Gorgor, and Presidential Guard units, which total about 7,000 troops. The other SNA units are only able to operate in very localized areas and are poorly equipped to carry out stabilization tasks.

## Building Stabilization/Hold Forces

The ongoing offensive operations against al-Shabaab in Hiran, Galgaduud and Middle Shabelle have succeeded in recovering roughly twenty settlements. However, there is an important difference between pushing al-Shabaab forces out of areas and holding them long enough to deliver a real peace dividend to the local inhabitants. One area where the Somali security services have always struggled is in generating and deploying the type of “hold” forces that can deliver such stabilization to the newly recovered areas.<sup>86</sup>

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86. See, for example, Levy and Yusuf, “The “Lightning” Brigade,” p.8. Of course, Somali forces are not the only ones that have struggled with this issue. See Walter Lotze and Paul D. Williams, *The Surge to Stabilize: Lessons for the UN from the AU’s Experience in Somalia* (International Peace Institute, May 2016), <https://www.ipinst.org/2016/05/un-au-stabilize-somalia>

Al-Shabaab made their jobs much harder by destroying schools, medical facilities, wells, and other important infrastructure. Nevertheless, the question remains as to which type of force can deliver a degree of stability that will enable alternative forms of governance to function. The Danab and Gorgor are primarily strike units, while local SNA units are poorly equipped and trained for the difficult tasks of stabilization. Ideally, police forces should take on these tasks, but they are not deployable in sufficient numbers and not well-suited to withstanding attacks from al-Shabaab if they attempt to return. In the interim, recovered settlements have effectively experienced military governance, which is difficult to get right at the best of times and especially hard for under-trained and under-equipped army or police units.

There has been some improvement as planning for Operation Hiran III included the need to deploy stabilization forces. However, the FGS has been using the Macawisley as a holding force in these ongoing operations. This is partly because SNA commanders feel they are short of about 1,000 personnel, and the Macawisley have at least some leadership and economic structures that may help get beyond purely military governance. The FGS also hopes to integrate some of the Macawisley into the Darwiish in Hirshabelle and Galmudug.<sup>87</sup>

However, while understandable in terms of expediency, this plan will face some serious challenges. First, many if not most of the Macawisley fighters will disband and return to their normal professions once they believe the immediate threat has diminished. Second, there is also a concern about the discipline and accountability of Macawisley fighters, especially if they receive significant external aid.<sup>88</sup> Third, there are no guarantees that different self-defense forces won't fight one another in clan-related disputes over land or resources once the immediate threat from al-Shabaab recedes.

## Recruitment

Recruiting suitable personnel for the Somali security services remains challenging. First, Somalia has a youth unemployment rate of about 70%, leaving a potentially large pool of recruits for insurgents and criminals, while illiteracy rates remain high and education levels are generally low.<sup>89</sup> This is an especially serious problem when trying to build specialized military units.

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87. Interview with Somali security official, 10 November 2022.

88. See the argument made by Shire, "Protection or predation?"

89. See Youth Unemployment and Security in Somalia (Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, April 2022), <https://heritageinstitute.org/youth-unemployment-and-security-in-somalia-prioritizing-jobs-for-achieving-stability/publications/reports/>

Second, the war continues to generate high levels of casualties. Along with older soldiers leaving, this means the SNA has a high personnel turnover, requiring regular intakes of new recruits.

Third, the clan composition of recruits is important, especially to enable the SNA to build multi-clan units which can legitimately operate across multiple regions of the country (instead of being tied to particular territory because of their clan composition).<sup>90</sup> The Danab, for example, has always adopted the principle of recruiting across clans and therefore requires recruitment drives across Somalia.<sup>91</sup> However, Danab recruits also need to meet various standards, including physical fitness, medical tests confirming good health, literacy, levels of education, age restrictions (18-25 years of age), not being addicted to drugs and passing the Leahy Law and biometric vetting procedures.<sup>92</sup> In the past, this led to a significant failure rate. Today's success rate is much higher, thanks in part to a refined pre-selection process and Danab recruits receiving courses in literacy and writing. There is also the issue of turning some recruits into NCOs and officers. Danab only recruits its own soldiers for officer positions after they have undergone training, but some Danab officers have subsequently taken up positions in other SNA units. By July 2022, Turkey had graduated its fourth batch of officers from the Military Academy and a fifth batch of NCOs from the NCO training school at the Turksom military training center.<sup>93</sup>

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Finally, it is worth noting that there have been reports of some forcible recruitment. For example, in the case of the 5,000 Somali recruits sent to Eritrea, some relatives have claimed NISA officials effectively press-ganged their sons into joining a military training enterprise

## Unofficial Militarization

The security services, especially the SNA, must grapple with what to do about unofficial militarization—which occurs when Somalis outside the official SNA receive military training (and equipment) from external actors. In general, this should be discouraged since the Somali authorities will not be able to sustain a larger force than the SNA's current order of battle, and because it raises big questions about the official Somali military chain of command.

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90. For a discussion, see Robinson and Matisek, “Assistance to Locally Appropriate Military Forces in Southern Somalia,” pp.68–78.

91. The latest deal on the next tranches of Danab recruitment was signed between the Somali Minister of Defense, Abdulkadir Mohammed Nur, and US Ambassador Larry Andre on 7 September 2022. See [https://twitter.com/US2SOMALIA/status/1567513060109172744?s=20&t=hCiOUTHwqQIBT\\_yTuxzJiw](https://twitter.com/US2SOMALIA/status/1567513060109172744?s=20&t=hCiOUTHwqQIBT_yTuxzJiw)

92. The US Leahy Law prohibits “the US government from using funds for assistance to units of foreign security forces when there is credible information implicating that unit in the commission of gross violations of human rights.” “About the Leahy Law,” US Department of State Fact Sheet, 20 January 2021, <https://www.state.gov/key-topics-bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/human-rights/leahy-law-fact-sheet/> Biometric registration has required Somali soldiers to render 10 fingerprints, a digital photo and undergo a deduplication process before being issued with a unique identification card.

93. See [https://twitter.com/tc\\_mogadishu/status/1553864635153104896?s=11&t=02GzcWMAwI8byDpCIYHFcw](https://twitter.com/tc_mogadishu/status/1553864635153104896?s=11&t=02GzcWMAwI8byDpCIYHFcw)



The cases of the 5,000 Somali fighters trained in Eritrea and the 3,000 being trained in Uganda and other countries financed by the UAE, raise difficult questions about what should be done with them. If the SNA is short of deployable personnel, there is a case for integrating these new recruits into the force re-generation process. There might also be a role for them as reservists. Either way, they would still need additional training, which could perhaps be provided by Turkey or the EU. It is also unclear whether they have been formed into clan-appropriate units, or whether they remain a collection of individuals with some basic military training. This is also relevant for whether and how they might be integrated into the SNA-proper. But if such recruits are not integrated into the Somali security forces, then questions remain about who they would report to, where they would be based, and what activities they might pursue.

## Coordination with External Partners

Because the SNA is still heavily reliant on outside help, effective coordination with and between external partners is required. The United States and Turkey are clearly the most important bilateral players in reforming Somalia's military forces. It is therefore of paramount importance that they coordinate their activities effectively. Since the 2017 Somalia Security Pact, this issue has been discussed via the Comprehensive Approach to Security (CAS) framework.<sup>94</sup> It is unrealistic to expect the United States and Turkey to provide SNA forces with the same type of training and equipment, and it can benefit individual Somali officers to receive training in different skills from different countries. But for these programs to add up to more than the sum of their parts to create a coherent SNA, the respective training and equipment packages must be interoperable. This is especially important in relation to communications, when SNA forces need to operate not only with each other, but also local self-defense forces and AU troops. Coordination between Danab and Gorgor units has recently improved in the field, including working together in Operation Badbaado in Lower Shabelle and in the ongoing Hiran operations. Ideally, the FGS should create a single Somali boot-camp where all new recruits undergo their first, official basic military training, which would then be followed by external training programs.

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The SNA must also coordinate closely with ATMIS as it gradually transitions out of Somalia. A key issue is the handover of Forward Operating Bases (FOBs), but this continues to be a major struggle. First, there remains a lack of trust between ATMIS and parts of the SNA, in part because of concerns about al-Shabaab's ability to infiltrate the Somali army. Second, in some areas, the local Somali population does not have a good opinion of ATMIS, which makes close cooperation more difficult. Third, the locations of the African Union's FOBs do not always reflect the SNA's preferences and priorities.

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94. The five CAS strands were: 1) enabling effective AMISOM operations; 2) accelerating the development of Somali national security institutions and forces; 3) community recovery and extension of state authority/accountability; countering/preventing violent extremism; and enhancing the coherence of international partner's support. "London Conference on Somalia: Security Pact," p.10.

For example, ATMIS FOB locations are often outside population centers, but the SNA would want them moved near water holes or on key transit routes. This would require some ATMIS FOBs to be bulldozed and new ones constructed, all of which takes time and resources. Overall, the SNA should decide which FOBs are transitioned, how and when, but with the general proviso that the most remote FOBs should be collapsed first, leaving the ones nearest to Mogadishu until last. At that stage, the international diplomatic community in Mogadishu will need to prepare for a time when their security is provided by the Somali security services.

## Present versus Future Needs

A tenth challenge is balancing short-term and long-term demands in Somalia's national security architecture. The national security architecture Somalia is trying to build today is too military-heavy compared to the security challenges and threats it will face over the longer-term. Today, the principal focus is rightly on the military dimensions of the war against al-Shabaab, and to a much lesser extent the Islamic State in Somalia. However, over time, a weakened al-Shabaab is likely to become more of a transnational and criminalized network, which will place much greater emphasis on the role of Somalia's law enforcement services rather than the Army. More generally, the SNA will also become less important as the principal instrument for dealing with Somalia's other security challenges such as instability related to clan disputes, pastoral forms of conflict, environmental disruptions, organized crime, and a range of maritime threats. This suggests Somalia's future security needs will require more emphasis on policing and law enforcement agencies rather than the army.

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## 6. Recommendations

Based on our analysis, we submit the following ideas for improving security sector reform in Somalia:

1. As the ongoing operations in Hiran have demonstrated, coordinating the movements and operations of thousands of troops from a variety of official and unofficial forces places a premium on effective command and control structures and situational awareness. The FGS should make it a key priority to improve the relevant structures in its security sector reform programs.
2. The FGS should create a single Somali boot-camp within Somalia where all new recruits undergo their first, official basic military training. After graduating from this boot-camp, they could then embark on external or other training programs.

3. FGS and FMS leaders should make an explicit declaration that they will not politicize the Somali security forces by using them as tools to repress legitimate domestic political opponents and civilian demonstrations. Strong disciplinary action should be taken against any security personnel that commit crimes against civilians.
4. More attention and resources must be devoted to building the institutions and infrastructure required to support the SNA and other Somali security services, beyond simply training and equipping the forces. Priorities should include an adequately resourced and staffed Ministry of Defense as well as resources for basic education, medical care, and pensions for security personnel.
5. One urgent operational priority is the development of suitable stabilization or “hold” forces to help deliver a genuine peace dividend to the local populations in settlements recovered from al-Shabaab. The Macawisley are ill-suited to play this role over the longer-term. The FGS and FMS must prepare “hold” forces and provide intensive training.
6. A second operational priority should be for the FGS to recommend and support the use of field advisors and mentors for all its external security force assistance programs. Currently, it is only the United States that provides such field support for troops trained in its programs. All other external partners run what can be described as “train and release” programs, which are not as effective.
7. Another key operational priority in the handover from ATMIS to the Somali security forces must be the development of new FOB locations that align with SNA priorities and needs. This process will require good coordination between the Somali forces, ATMIS, and UNSOS.
8. As Somalia’s two most important external security partners, it is particularly important for the United States and Turkey to closely coordinate their security force assistance programs for Somalia. This may require a new mechanism beyond the existing CAS framework.
9. The FGS and FMS must start planning for increasing the roles of non-military elements in Somalia’s national security architecture, especially law enforcement and maritime capabilities.
10. The authorities should clarify what size and type of army they can afford without major reliance on external financiers. Any other approach is unsustainable. This is linked to the question of how Somalia should balance the military and non-military elements of its national security services, bearing in mind that once the war against al-Shabaab is over, Somalia’s security challenges will require primarily non-military law-enforcement capabilities.

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