

## STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO SECURITY CRISES IN SOMALIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR FOREIGN POLICY

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### ABSTRACT

The persistent security crisis in Somalia has become a focal point in contemporary academic and policy discussions. This study examines the multifaceted security challenges confronting Somalia, identifying the underlying causes and proposing strategic and foreign policy options for sustainable national stability. Beyond political fragmentation, both internal and external factors have severely undermined the country's security landscape, impeding national development. Deficiencies within Somalia's military, maritime, and intelligence strategies have further weakened its capacity to address these threats effectively. Moreover, the absence of a coherent and proactive foreign policy has limited Somalia's ability to navigate international relations and manage external security pressures. The nation has also suffered from detrimental foreign interventions under the guise of counterterrorism and anti-extremism efforts. Internally, tribal divisions and terrorism—particularly activities associated with Al-Shabaab—have critically eroded the national security framework. The resulting instability not only threatens Somalia's internal cohesion but also undermines regional peace and security. This paper explores viable strategic and foreign policy approaches to rebuild Somalia's security architecture, emphasizing context-specific, historically informed solutions to promote long-term stability and sovereignty.

**Keywords:** Somalia; Security Challenges; Foreign Policy; Maritime Strategy; Intelligence; Corruption; Al-Shabaab; National Development.

### INTRODUCTION

After the collapse of the central government in 1991, Somalia faced internal and external challenges. Over time, the country disintegrated into small regional and tribal entities. On the other hand, external intervention deteriorated the chances for peace, nation-building, and the formation of a central government. Rebuilding the Somali government became an obstacle due to multifaceted challenges. An efficacious political roadmap and strategy for making reliable security infrastructure is not yet realized. In the post-conflict era, Somali

scholarship was divided as the main reason for the failure of the Somali state. The debate focused on whether external factors or internal factors caused failure.

Despite Somalia's homogeneity, the nation is struggling with socio-political differences. Tribalism is the epicenter of challenges that damage national cohesion and social integration. Historically, tribalism played a significant role in social cohesion and survival (Ali, 2016, pp. 25-26). However, tribalism has been misused in the modern state system as an instrument for political

hegemony and public exploitation. It is alarming that tribalism issues are implemented in every sector of governance and state affairs, including the national constitution and the state security departments. This misuse has consequently hindered national security by operating for tribal purposes rather than national objectives. The nation's foreign policy remained dynamic and driven by external interests. Considering the country's rich history in external interventions, Somalis are currently struggling to establish a refined and robust foreign policy applicable to the contemporary multipolar global order. Experiences make countries strengthen specific areas of interest, allowing them to use these skills to maximize their potential and influence.

The principal challenges of Somalia's foreign policy include incompetent leadership and inefficient planning. Most Somali leaders constantly discard the policy of previous leadership, even if it is in the country's best interests, so they often make foreign policy that the foreign actors drive. Likewise, since the demise of the Barre regime, the government has not formulated a foreign policy that outlines the nation's strategic approach.

Pursuing policy options from the Somalian perspective includes domestic and foreign tenets. Both are intertwined and important in every aspect. Theoretically, the study adopts structural realism by explaining the importance of the state's power in dealing with regional and international challenges. The study will give a specific roadmap for achieving a robust strategy for security infrastructure in Somalia. In addition, the study will enlighten significant security doctrines in related areas, including foreign policy and security departments, and will help the stakeholders adopt comprehensive security policies.

The first section covers possible foreign policy options to secure the country's national interests, which have long been overshadowed by domestic ineffectiveness and massive foreign intrusion into its internal affairs to gain their myopic interests.

The second part examines security concerns and recommends possible security and military strategies, focusing on both technical capacity and professionalism.

## **The Concept of Security.**

The Concept of Security is a complex and multidimensional subject. Traditionally, it has been defined in terms of state security, focusing on military capabilities and defense, emphasizing the nation-state and its territorial integrity (Fayyaz, 2012). The overall security structure comprises all aspects, including the military and police forces, foreign and defense policies, economic protection, civil defense, and technological and information security (Beti, 2024).

Addressing the leading foreign and security theories, the study takes a realism approach as a relative assumption in Somali security. Both defensive and offensive realism have a common understanding of the state's foreign policy. According to Structural realism, foreign policy is the instrument to accomplish state interests, including balance of power and survival in international anarchy (Hill, 2015).

Foreign policy is defined as a set of rules dealing with international relations, both state and nonstate organizations (Alden, 2016). Structural Realism argues that the main threat to states comes from the anarchic international system. In such anarchic international politics, states should ensure their principle of survival, maximizing their military capability to remain strong and avoid any external aggression (Taliaferro, 2014). In addition, offensive realism argues that the principle of state security survival is to dominate its region and pursue hegemony for defensive purposes (Mearsheimer, 2014). Considering the above security interpretation, the foreign policy of the state and internal security matters are distinguishable. Therefore, the primary theory explanation for the study shall be the realism school of thought, where the study employs the principle assumption of offensive realism as an explanatory model. In this regard, the next discussions shall realistically emphasize self-help and survival

for the Somali security both internally and externally.

## 1. Foreign Policy Options

Somalia's experiences in foreign intervention give a vital understanding of the current security paradigm at the regional and international levels. The "Ogaden War" failure has witnessed that allying with any great power pole could not guarantee national security (Ogaden War: Zeleke, 2018, pp. 56-57). Likewise, massive foreign involvement in the Somali security paradigm since 9/11 has created more chaos than security. This section will present how to attain a viable and robust strategic autonomy while limiting or balancing foreign intrusion into Somali security affairs to achieve the country's national interests.

### 1.1. Strategic Autonomy and Non-alignment Policy

After grappling with a two-decade bloody civil war, attaining strategic autonomy for Somalia is wishful thinking, at least for now, as the Somali government is totally at the mercy of varied external help to survive. If history is any guide, aligning with any great powers' pole is not in the best national interests of Somalia (Ylonen, 2022). Siad Barre's regime, for instance, was a close ally of the Soviet Union, pursuing its "Scientific Socialism" to implement in the country and adopting the core tenets of Soviet Socialism in Somalia. The Soviet Union undoubtedly helped strengthen the Somali military forces.

Forming an alliance with the Soviet Union did not ensure the long-term stability of the Siad Barre regime, particularly as the Soviet Union eventually redirected its support towards the Ethiopian government. Defeat in the Ogaden war proved to be ill-fated for Somalia, and joining any pole would not be the sole guarantee for Somali national security (Mann, 1977). Likewise, the Somali state was trapped in messy great power politics after the civil war and the following period. The rise of Islamic militancy, for instance, in which the Harakat Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahideen militant group alarmed the United States and other Western partners about the looming threat of

terrorism in the critical Horn region and its southern hinterland, highly enhanced Somalia's strategic importance (Kagwanja, 2006, pp. 73-74).

Technically, the US and its allies have two main concerns in the region: the smooth flow of the maritime trade in the Horn region from the Bab-Al-Mandab to the Suez Canal encompassing the Red Sea, and containing any land-based or maritime threat from disrupting the regional order the US and its allies build over the course of the twentieth century (Burgess, 2015). Stabilizing Somalia may be an agenda item for the United States, but it is contingent on its strategic interests in the Horn region. When the first Trump administration came to power, it lowered its military engagement worldwide, including closing its Somalia mission. Stopping US support to Danab—an Elite Special Operation Forces (ESOF) of Somalia and a flagship counterterrorism training mission the US has managed in Somalia, is the recent example in this regard that frustrated the Somali government's overall credibility on the US Biden administration re-launched this project. However, the long-term credibility of Danab in Somalia remains uncertain. Likewise, relying too much on other regional actors is a zero-sum game for Somalia. Every state involved in Somalia is more concerned with protecting its national interests than Somalia's (Yusuf, 2021).

To achieve a positive result, the federal government of Somalia should expand its engagement with other rising powers that have no direct geopolitical impact on Somalia. The rising Russian role in the Sahel region has provided the Sahel region nations with an alternative to balance the Western hegemonic approach. Russo-Chinese cooperation with Somalia could also help Mogadishu balance the American and other regional powers that are actively involved in the region (Oğultürk, 2017). Somali cooperation with Russia and China should not be on the line of joining alliances; instead, it should be pursued to balance the great power's influence to diversify its national interests. In this age of Russo-China

rivalry with the US, Somalian over-reliance on the Western military alliance is not a good long-term strategy (Institute for the Study of War, 2024). During the Cold War, states had limited options for exercising their foreign policy because of the bipolar global order in which the Soviet-US dominated global politics. However, In the contemporary multipolar global order, states have options in which small and middle powers have plenty of room to maneuver to attain their interests Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the State of Israel, 2022). Achieving strategic autonomy for a weaker power is difficult, as the US is deeply embedded in the Third World and influences weaker powers' domestic and foreign affairs. Somalia needs to diversify its foreign engagement away from regional powers and the US to other rising powers with no direct geopolitical interest in the Horn.

Türkiye, Gulf Sheikdoms, and other regional neighbors are more concerned about protecting their interests and intend to build Somalian statecraft in their image (Czerep, 2018). The nation is still struggling with severe governance crises and militancy that have become existential threats (Czerep, 2018). Somalia needs to balance its foreign engagement with different rising powers. In this multipolar global politics, a blind foreign dependency could cause more danger than stability. In addition, Somalia established a foreign policy based on the country's primary interests in the long run.

## 1.2. Circumventing Global Influence on Somalian Security

External intervention in Somalia is rooted in the country's history. During the Empire's rule in Somalia, various polities were deeply intertwined with the global empires of that time, such as the Ottoman Empire and the Europeans (Fellin, 2013). With the Italian and British Somaliland and the later joining of Barre's regime to the Soviet pole, it fractured and exposed the country and its security under the massive influence of foreign powers' interests. According to Fellin (2013), the current hostile situation in

Somalia is rooted in European colonial policies that undermined the social structure and promoted social division. After the demise of the Siad Barre regime and its disastrous defeat in the Ogaden war in the 1980s, it was clear evidence that the nation's over-reliance on foreign military aid was self-inflicted (Weiss, 1980). Take Ethiopia, for example, the imminent rival of Somalia; its primary and vital interest is to weaken Somalia and make it a pro-Ethiopia state of Addis Ababa.

Since the Ogaden War, the Ethiopian government has been working on several imperatives, including eliminating the Siad regime by supporting different clans and preventing the anti-Ethiopian government from gaining power in Somalia (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021). When the religiously motivated Islamic Court Union crushed the collective alliance of clan militias and established its rule in Somalia in 2005, Addis Ababa had to invade Somalia along with the US air cover to depose the Islamic regime, which was considered an imminent threat. Since then, Ethiopia has deeply intervened in Somalia to counter and eliminate the Al-Shabaab, the hardliner successor of ICU (Napoleon, 2010).

The American role in shaping the Somalian political situation is mainly concerned with crushing Islamic militancy and maintaining the stability of critical maritime chokepoints in this geopolitically important Horn region (Allison, 2017). The United States employed an indirect approach in its counterterrorism strategy, providing support to anti-Al-Shabaab forces through operational intelligence and air support. In 2006, the US aided Ethiopia's invasion of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) with airstrikes aimed at dismantling its leadership. Moreover, the U.S. extended financial assistance to the Ethiopian government to intervene in Somalia's internal conflicts under the guise of a counterterrorism campaign (Debisa, 2021; Allison, 2017).

Nevertheless, the American involvement is not without a curse. As discussed earlier, the supposed foreign aid and donor program has fostered more chaos and violence than

stability in Somalia. The US has still not addressed this problem, and its role is shaky in dealing directly with local clan bosses, bypassing the federal government. Resultantly, the centre-periphery scramble for foreign aid has exposed the waning unity of the very foundation of the Somali government that the US and its sponsored international institutions helped to build. Such schemes in gray areas could rally public support in Al-Shabaab's favor, which is already winning in the propaganda warfare of anti-Americanism (Harrison, 2023).

In the maritime realm, the US role in the region is unmatched. It helped create maritime security initiatives—Combining Task Force 150, 151, and 152 to counter irregular maritime threats in the US Central Command Area of Operations, which includes the Horn of Africa region. Since Somali piracy is a byproduct of an onshore issue that needed a land-based robust response to address this issue, the US focused mainly on projecting power offshore, leaving the issue unresolved (Shortland & Vothknetcht, 2010). Since the fall of the Barre regime and its navy in the 1990s, Somali fishermen have had no way to do business as they had previously enjoyed. The massive intrusion of foreign fisheries into Somali littoral waters forced them to build their pirate militias for economic purposes (Makoni, 2020).

The United States has historically focused primarily on countering Al-Shabaab within Somalia, neglecting the broader domestic issues faced by the fragile Somali government. This narrow focus has contributed to further destabilization in the region. The ongoing problem of Somali piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the wider Horn of Africa further undermined the already compromised capabilities of the Somali government and created additional opportunities for militant organizations to disrupt critical choke points in the Horn. A close examination of U.S. and allied involvement in Somalia reveals a pattern of anarchy rather than stability, allowing various entities of chaos to compete for power. Meanwhile, the primary goal of eradicating

Al-Shabaab remains unfulfilled (Al-Bulushi & Ibrahim, 2024). Besides the US, several regional emerging players—Türkiye, UAE, and Qatar—are also actively involved in Somalia, envisioning building and protecting their own sphere of influence. Rather than addressing the root cause of complex Somali problems, these players pursue traditional dealing methods to prioritize their interests first (Kantack, 2017).

For instance, away from the US and Ethiopia, two regional powers—Arab Sheikdoms and Türkiye, are scrambling for Somali untapped hydrocarbon resources while exploiting its sovereignty in some cases. Persian Gulf powers and Türkiye have driven the regional cold war in the Horn region. Both want to secure their sphere of influence in Somalia for their long-term geopolitical ambitions in the Horn (Van Loon, 2022). Since 2010, Türkiye has actively engaged in Somalia, initiating support for humanitarian assistance and substantially transforming into a strategic partnership. Türkiye significantly engaged in Somalia's development, specifically taking a vital role in security and building the military and navy forces (Karatas, 2023). This initiative aggravated other external powers that involved Somalia's political security, such as Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates (Van Loon, 2022). Both want a limited or even minimal Türkiye role in the Horn. Furthermore, both consider the expanding Turkish role as a direct threat to their own designed sphere of influence in war-ridden Somalia (Van Loon, 2022). Further, making matters worse, Mogadishu maintained a clandestine mission of recruiting its personnel in Egypt, which the UAE paid for and managed. This situation could make Somalia a pawn in external power politics. (Caato, 2022).

Due to the rough path of Somali federalism and its weak control over its regional states, foreign donor countries like the UAE and other neighboring countries have maintained direct ties with both Puntland and Somaliland. Mogadishu must play a central role in external collaborations with the regional states. Foreign direct intervention would make it difficult for



Mogadishu to maintain security and stability. It is important to balance foreign agendas with the country's best interests (Soylu, 2024). In 2018, authorities in Mogadishu confiscated \$10 million in cash at the airport, linked to the UAE and intended for military training initiatives, without the federal government's permission. In response, the UAE strengthened its cooperation with Somalia's semi-autonomous regions. (International Crisis Group, 2019).

Similarly, there is a heightened concern regarding the competition to dominate critical maritime strategic locations and investigate the unexploited reserves of Somali hydrocarbons. Relying more on external donors and aid programs has fostered more instability than peace (Mohamud, 2012). While the rampant corruption has undermined Mogadishu's ability to utilize the conditioned-attached foreign aid and donations, it has fallen into the wrong hands and made this aid a liability rather than a source of stability for the nation. Thus, circumventing foreign influence is impossible, especially when the Horn has become a focal point of interest among the great powers. Balancing various actors against each other for its own Somali benefits, lessening the Al-Shabaab threat, and decreasing the Somali addiction to long reliance on foreign aid will restore the confidence and autonomy of the federal government over its regional subjects (Mahamad, 2023).

## 2. Improving Security and Military Infrastructure

### 2.1 Military Strategy

The current Somali National Army (SNA) is composed of clan militias that are more loyal to their own tribe's interests than the system (Robinson, 2019). Establishing conventional deterrence rather than wasting resources and being blackmailed by external powers into arming only its Special Operation Forces (SOF) against militancy is a logical grand strategy the Somali government should consider (Robinson & Matisek, 2021).

The current posture of the Somali army is based on a fourth-tier security paradigm. The US has been active in the region since the rise of the Islamic Court of Union (ICU). The US helped the Somali state with various military assistance, but recruiting Danab elite Special Forces was instrumental (Legros, 2024).

Türkiye and the UAE are also deeply involved in military assistance and training programs in Somalia. Although foreign assistance helped strengthen the Somali resolve against Al-Shabaab's thrust to establish a Sharia state, these missions had some challenges (Nassir, 2017). Relying on two opposing poles to train its army makes no sense for Somalia. Maintaining a clandestine training facility in Egypt, financed by the UAE while running a training center in Mogadishu, helped and funded by Türkiye at a juxtaposition, could trap the future Somali army being exploited by rival external powers. Training its forces from two opposing poles could make the future Somali army a proxy loyal more to its trainers, making it a mercenary force of foreign powers than to serve the interests of its people. Likewise, the UAE maintained close ties with Somaliland in the security and economic sectors, which could also undermine the broader Security of Mogadishu in the long run (Khan, 2018).

The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), authorized (March 2007 – March 2022), and its replacement, the African Union Transitional Mission (ATMIS), which operationalized in April 2022 to December 2024) are another force that assists the Somali state in countering a range of traditional and non-traditional security threats. Since the Somali civil war, the African Union helped empower Mogadishu to gradually rebuild its governing structures to practice its authority over its loosely aligned peripheral states (Ajú, 2022). The African Union has been actively involved both in restoring the state power from the clan infighting and countering the Al-Shabab militancy. Therefore, the African Union mission in Somalia has not yet been able to achieve the primary goal that was designed

(United Nations, 2023). Since the beginning of the Transitional Administrations in Mogadishu, the African Mission has set a withdrawal date each year to indicate that the Somali army can maintain order on its own. However, the situation is quite the opposite. The Somali army is ill-prepared to address three significant security challenges: Al-Shabaab militancy, the strengthening of control in federal member states, and the containment of piracy in the Horn of Africa and the wider western Indian Ocean region. On the other hand, the United States and the European community were instrumental in shaping the AMISOM force posture on the ground, while Addis Ababa was the primary and pivotal force in Somalia at the time (Ligawa, Onyango Standlause, & Rahoy, 2016).

Since it is considered a historic Somali rival, Ethiopia is undoubtedly critical in helping the Somali armed forces. Therefore, massive Ethiopian intrusion into Somali Security forces, along with arming and strengthening only clan militias loyal to Addis Ababa, has further frustrated the Somali population. These militias are more interested in serving their interests along with their handlers than restoring stability in the country (Mohamed, 2024). It was one of the main drawbacks of Ethiopian and American-dominated AMISOM that forced the masses to fall into supporting the anti-government forces, making Al-Shabaab a remaining option for the already deprived Somali nation (Mohamed, 2024). It should be a priority to eliminate Ethiopia's role in arming and training the Somali forces, as well as to end the AMISOM mission in the country, which is scheduled to withdraw in December 2024. Somalia, without AMISOM, could again strengthen and expand the Al-Shabaab militancy—a concern that has long persisted. Nevertheless, Somali security dependency on AMISOM undermines the unification of the national armed forces; thus, the peripheral states prefer to maintain their army forces. This is considered one of the primary failures of the AMISOM and African Transition Mission in Somalia –ATMIS (United Nations, 2023).

Somalia needs an effective strategy to construct a unified armed force. First, it must solve federal problems and implement an inclusive plan to serve all stakeholders' interests. Second, in this multipolar era, Somalia needs to play a meticulous strategy by extending its military partnership program with other rising poles, both Russia and China (Hamilton, 2023). This will help the country to balance its global rivals to its benefit. Likewise, in military training programs, either to train conventional forces or Special Operations Forces, the Somali state should rely on a single credible external actor that will be more interested in geo-economics than geopolitics (Hamilton, 2023). It will help Mogadishu build a more potent unified force against the threat of becoming a proxy of external donors and trainers. The rise of militancy, therefore, has exposed all external forces to how limited their firepower is in pinning down the Al-Shabaab and other irregular threats in the country. This situation may be a cautionary tale for the Somali government, as over-reliance on varied foreign partners only for counterterrorism would not solve its security problems in the long run (Hamilton, 2023).

The Somali National Army's (SNA) complete reliance on external partners has spoiled the capacity of security forces and diminished their coordination. Relying on more than ten external states with different agendas could permanently jeopardize the nation's primary interests (Williams, 2024).

## 2.2 Counterterrorism Strategy

When the Ethiopian government invaded Somalia to oust the Islamic Court of Union (ICU) in 2006 and later replaced it with the AMISOM in 2009, the application of massive use of force became a benchmark against all types of militants, including Al-Shabaab (Bruton & Williams, 2014). For Al-Shabaab, the ambition of unifying all ethnic Somalis currently living in other countries into a single Islamic Sharia-compliant Greater Somalia is undoubtedly too grand to achieve in today's world, which has a zero-tolerance policy towards militancy. (Brien, 2022). In an intermittent struggle between the militant

group and government forces, no one could transform the outcome of the conflict to allow one side to claim a clear victory. From the state's perspective, many impending factors prevented the Somali military and its partner countries from undermining the militant activities. For example, the center-periphery scramble for external funding, foreign powers massive intervention, hampering relations between the state and pro-state militia forces, flawed amnesty schemes for Al-Shabaab's moderate leadership, weakening of armor and more reliance on American and Turkish airpower, and the challenging geography are some of the core reasons that have exposed the ineffectiveness of counterterrorism campaigns (Williams, 2024).

With the direct American involvement to eliminate the Al-Qaeda-affiliated militant hideouts, along with other partner nations that share a near-similar terrorism concern, the Somali government has been able to quickly establish its control both in the Center and the north and effectively inflict heavy harm to the group's safe pockets in the south (Williams, 2024). In 2022, the government of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud launched a new campaign in two phases to roll out the Al-Shabaab altogether from the south. This is the first time the government has considered this over-ambitious plan when the AMISOM/ATMIS forces signal to withdraw from the country. The critical partnership of the pro-state clan militia restored the order of the Somali state in Hirshabelle and Galmudug, the central Somali regions (Muibu, 2024). Shortly after completing the first phase, the militants recaptured regions in 2023 that they had previously lost to the government in 2022. This situation disclosed the fragility of cooperation between the state forces and their pro-state clan militia, which held the liberated areas from Al-Shabaab's second attack retaliation. It also exposed an apparent vulnerability and non-credibility of militia affairs (Muibu, 2024).

The second phase, code-named Operation Black Lion, initially intended to crush Al-Shabaab's stronghold in the south. However,

its scope was eventually limited to reclaiming the lost area that the militant group recaptured (Muibu, 2024). The first Trump administration left Somalia in a challenging situation in 2019, which raised concerns about the credibility of US support in the fight against terrorism and extremism in allied countries. Thus, Danab, the US flagship training Special Operations Forces project, could be unsuccessful. Since the Biden administration came to the White House, Danab's training has been restarted. However, the country's future is still uncertain since Donald Trump was re-elected as President of the United States (Estelle, 2020).

Separating moderate militants from Al-Shabaab's hardliners for their mainstreaming is not the wrong option. Convincing ICU's moderate members from Djibouti to participate in the transitional setup has long been considered a pragmatist approach. Adopting this approach is still not out of the box (Bacon, 2024).

## 2.3 Professionalism over Tribalism

After the demise of the Siad Barre regime, a range of social and political divisions undermined the Somali security structure. Inter-tribal conflict for economic and power control exposed the tribal forces as vulnerable as they had been over the previous three decades. In reviewing the above-mentioned goals, preference must be given to military professionalism over traditional tribalism (Ouedraogo, 2024). The question of army credibility among the masses has not been restored, making it an uphill task in the long run. The Army is mainly composed of a force dominated by tribes loyal to their clan's introverted interests.

"Many local communities deeply distrust and resent the SNA, which they perceive as more of a conglomeration of militias than a competent State security service. The SNA is alleged to be unreliable in delivering basic security. Rather than responding to the military chain of command, many local SNA units display greater loyalty to their own clan and community interests; they also use the SNA to abuse and exploit rival clans. In



response, clan elders and local communities have bolstered their militias to protect against al-Shabaab and the SNA". (Felbab-Brown, 2020, para 11).

In establishing a professional foundation for military forces, some core principles should be adopted to ensure the viability of the Somali army. To contain the threat, a multi-domain operational force is required. While operating in an environment of irregular warfare, especially within the state, the rise of the range of militia forces has become a common phenomenon. Over time, these militia forces could slip into affairs that might be at odds with conventional military forces in the long run (Mirza & Mushtaq, 2021). In the post-Barre regime, the tribes that initially ousted Siad Barre through their militia forces later fought among themselves for power. Consequently, the endless tribal conflict deteriorated national reconciliation and destroyed the national institutions. In addition, the same tribal-mind is still preventing the establishment of nationwide security and military forces.

Moreover, some core suggestions can be taken to establish a viable Somali military force, lessen the tribal and militia monopoly on the military, and restore continuous military professionalism in its ranks and files. To prevent incompetence in security matters, it is necessary to examine security forces at the initial stages of recruitment thoroughly. Vetting on the line, whether the militia fighters are more loyal to their tribe or to the state, should be a core concern. Informal militia operating within the state, human rights violations have become a common concern of this age. To end this enigma, state-led forces should prioritize it (Felbab-Brown, 2020).

Finally, the corruption among senior government officials arming their clans may cause an arms race between the clans and damage the pride of the armed forces. This horrendous situation undermines the government's goal of building security infrastructure (Felbab-Brown, 2023). To establish a professional military in conventional and unconventional domains, the federal government must gradually reduce

its reliance on these vulnerable militias and political-tribalism interests in the security sector by implementing real and robust professionalism.

## 2.4 Information and Intelligence Capability

Establishing local intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets to dislodge the enemy's surprise at the tactical and operational levels will empower the Somali strategic pivot in counterterrorism capability. In this age of unreliable American counterterrorism assistance, varying its options, like employing Türkiye unmanned Bayraktar drone assets, may suit Somali Security in ISR and lethal missions (Leavy, 2023). As Türkiye has been actively training Somali forces, thus making Ankara a single reliable counterterrorism partner, in the long run, it could not be a zero-sum game for Mogadishu. It is indisputable that building a more robust and reliable national intelligence tradecraft is essential for protecting and ensuring the long-term interests of Somalia. The more donor nations involved in Somalia, the higher the chances of their intelligence assets' buildup. Such a situation could undermine the homegrown credibility and effectiveness of the counterterrorism campaign against the powerful militants of Al-Shabaab (Bergman, 2019). Giving an operational surprise to the militants in irregular warfare has become increasingly difficult in this Information Age. Thus, material superiority in all domains of force posture could not guarantee or help the state-led forces to counter and eliminate the militarily inferior forces of militants. (Wasielewski, 2023). The Somali army has yet to give an effective surprise to all its anti-state forces, including Al-Shabaab.

When it comes to the critical nature of the correct information in launching an operation, the Somali National Army has long failed to achieve its core operational ends since the rise of Islamic militancy. Pro-Al-Shabaab clandestine moles within the government ranks and files have long undermined the government's ability to maintain its secrecy and operational security effectively.

"Blind operations can be dangerous for troops. An effective information-gathering system should be developed. Information analysis should be conducted in the intelligence cells. Sufficient resources should be set aside for information gathering. Agencies and sources must be maintained. Intelligence is also not shared amongst the contingents. Ramifications have been seen of the successful attacks by the armed groups on the AMISOM bases. Military operations are supposed to be intelligence-driven and failing to do this can lead to fatal tactical blunders." (Ligawa, Onyango Standslause, & Rahoy, 2016, p. 8).

Since the country hosts many complicated agencies, both terrorism and foreign agencies, it needs to create a robust counterterrorism division to examine and closely monitor the activities of professionals and agencies. This division needs to be completely protected from external intervention. A military operation launched without robust intelligence could be a blind bet that tends to fail at any point. That is the main factor the Somali state must consider (Artiga, 2023). In sum, a lack of robust and reliable intelligence tradecraft has still lagged behind the SNA in eliminating the militancy threat. With the resistant nature of militancy in Somalia, critical intelligence, both operational and tactical intelligence, has become a core strategic imperative for the state-led forces (Artiga, 2023). A military operation launched without robust intelligence could be a blind bet that tends to fail at any point. That is the main factor the Somali state must pay attention to.

## 2.5 Maritime Strategy

From the Somali perspective, maritime strategy is based on two main principles: sea denial and sea control. Sea denial has deep roots in the country's old rivalry with Ethiopia, and now, this concept has various other factors and implications. When it comes to sea control, the concept has also been of immense value, while building viable sea control in the country's maritime realm is a concept that is still in its infancy. Both paradigms are fundamental and relevant to

the country's strategic and maritime threat calculations.

### 2.5.1 Sea Denial

Sea denial is an effort by one maritime state to contain and prevent another hostile state from accessing or using its own sea. Corbett, a famous British maritime historian, explained, "preventing partially or completely the enemy's use of the sea for military and commercial purposes" (Corbett, 911 p. 144). Besides the historical hostility between Somalia and Ethiopia, the contemporary maritime conflict reveals Ethiopia's long-term strategic objectives in Somalia. In addition to the historical enmity between Somalia and Ethiopia, the current maritime conflict reveals one of the two countries' central challenges. Being a landlocked nation, Ethiopia's access to the Red Sea is a question of lifeline, as its entire import and export is dependent on it (Takalign, 2019).

Sea denial from the Somali perspective is dominant as the country's historic rival, Ethiopia, is landlocked and has always envisioned access to the Red Sea. A thrust for the seacoast has long been a core strategic imperative of Ethiopia, which has an old history of rivalry with Somalia. Ethiopia's connotation of maritime strategy is overambitious and covers even the eastern coast of Somalia. Likewise, the Ethiopian long bet is to access the Red Sea primarily from Somaliland—a bet which has still not been waned. Access to the Red Sea is a primary goal for Ethiopia, while its relations with Somalia have long been hostile (Tekuya, n.d.).

During the Cold War, Ethiopia relied on Eritrea for access to the sea access. Therefore, Addis Ababa split from the Sea when Eritrea gained independence in 1993. Since then, Ethiopia has depended on Djibouti for sea access through one road and railroad for import and export needs (Nagy & Meservey, 2024).

In this age of maritime trade, the Ethiopian quest for maritime access has been relevant. At the same time, the continuing unstable situation of Somalia and its northwestern province of Somaliland has allowed Addis

Ababa to project influence there. While bypassing Mogadishu, Ethiopia has directly signed a deal with Somaliland, which comprises twenty miles of the Somali coast for fifty years. In return, Somaliland will gain formal diplomatic recognition from Ethiopia, as Somaliland has envisioned to gain autonomy from the Center since the outbreak of civil war (Nagy & Meservey, 2024).

Mogadishu has strongly condemned the deal and viewed it as an existential threat to its domestic affairs and a violation of its sovereignty. Similarly, other international and regional countries consider this deal an existential threat to the security and stability of the wider Horn of Africa region (Faruk, 2024). Somalia needs a powerful maritime force backed by a stronger governing authority to prevent this from happening. While containing Ethiopia to exploit the Somali internal stability, its strong governing authority could force Somaliland to revisit its over-ambitious plan, paving the way for the Center even to restore its order there (Walker, 2024).

Regarding the maritime threat calculation, Somalia has many options to deal with the rising threat of the Ethiopian quest for Red Sea access through Somali territory. Somali-Türkiye maritime cooperation is the right step, at least from the standpoint of Mogadishu, which wants to contain the rising power of Ethiopia since the country has been bogged down in internal chaos. After signing a memorandum of understanding between Ethiopia and Somaliland in January 2024, Somalia stepped up its efforts to enhance its defense cooperation with like-minded foreign nations to prevent Ethiopia's encroachment on the Somali coast (Walker, 2024). Given its geopolitical ambitions, Türkiye might have strategic interests in the Horn. This implies that defense cooperation between the Somali-Türkiye would be a bulwark to prevent forces hostile to Somali maritime interests. Türkiye is already cooperating in counterterrorism and other development and rehabilitation efforts; therefore, naval diplomacy and its ensuing outcomes would also help to provide a foundational base to

build a robust Somali navy and empower Mogadishu's governing control over its provincial states (Baser, 2024).

Having Africa's second-largest Exclusive Economic Zone, Somalia has no active naval force, making it the easiest target for external forces to exploit its maritime resources. The United Arab Emirates, for instance, is also cooperating with Somalia both in the land-based and maritime sectors, but this cooperation would not respond to the Somali existential threats. This indicates that sea denial for Somalia at this point is not easy, as its naval forces are still in their infancy. Since the demise of the Siad Barre regime, the nation has lacked a functional navy. Thus, to make a practical sea denial, the country must establish a maritime doctrine from scratch and cooperate with other like-minded maritime nations to strengthen its naval forces' posture. This long-term project will take many years, if not decades, to build a robust naval deterrent in the region. It aims to protect Somalia's maritime resources for the country's benefit (Hay, 2013).

## 2.5.2 Sea Control

Sea control has a vast definition that covers the blue-water navy, in which a mighty naval power maintains substantial control in its littoral area and may also project power in the far distance in the high seas to contain any rival naval force (Alman, 2023). The concept of sea control traces its origins to the American hegemony over the high seas, given its blue water navy (Alman, 2023). In Somalia, which does not have a functioning navy force, expectations of sea control are unrealistic because of the absence of sea denial. Therefore, sea control may be attained if Somalia builds a powerful navy force in this age of piracy in Horn Africa and its surrounding waters. Since the outbreak of civil war in the early nineties, the Somali east coast and its southeastern strip have been out of the formal control of state navies, becoming a hub of illegal fishing by non-Somali fishermen along with the rampant Somali piracy (Kellerman, 2011).

In conventional naval warfare, sea control can be visualized between the two symmetrical maritime forces. Therefore, in this age of irregular maritime threat perception, command of the sea and the very concept of sea control may lose their vanity (Alman, 2023). Since the outbreak of civil war, Somali coasts have become a target of illegal fishing, dumping of industrial waste, and piracy in the wider western Indian Ocean region. When its navy was disbanded in the wake of a bloody civil war, Somali fishermen could not thwart hostile and foreign illegal fishing activities. When the Somali fishermen got a ransom over illegal fishing, along with allowing industrial waste to be dumped, kidnapping foreign merchant ships for ransom became the third source of money the Somali East Coast people had relied on. This means that there are three-pronged strategies that the destitute Somali coastal people pursued: ransom from piracy, money from illegal fishing, and money from dumping illegal industrial waste in the Somali waters (Makoni, 2020). In the post-9/11 era, these incidents increased tremendously. Especially when the Somali piracy in the wider Horn region frustrated the Freedom of Navigation Operations (FNOs), the US and its allies have long built in the Red Sea—a world's spot of critical chokepoints and the Suez Canal where thousands of maritime vessels, merchant and military ships, crossed annually. The US had to launch Combined Task Force-150 in 2004 solely to thwart the piracy threats and disrupt their linkage with terrorism. CTF-150 was a multi-nation maritime security alliance responsible for the security and safety of marine trade and the stability of entire FNOs in the Horn and its surrounding waters (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

In the absence of the central government's provision for maritime security within the country, the northeastern Puntland state has successfully developed its own maritime forces, with assistance from the UAE, effectively neutralizing maritime threats both in the ocean and along its coastal areas (Albrecht, 2018). The Somali government is still grappling with land-based threats in

controlling an entire territory, including provincial states, which is another unresolved problem. It means that relying totally on foreign nations to build their navy is a long-term project with some liabilities, as the sponsoring nations have their own messy interests (Salama, 2018).

For better sea control, a nation would have to be stronger, have more land control, and have a robust economic base. Economic might can be transformed into military and naval power with sea control capability (Alman, 2023). In this regard, the nation should establish a proactive strategy to utilize external security and maritime cooperation to minimize threats to national interests. This requires effective security experts at both the policy and professional levels.

## Conclusion:

The ongoing security crisis in Somalia provoked fear within the international community. Contemporary global security perception gave significance to the role of non-traditional security actors, specifically extremism and terrorism. The fear of raising non-traditional security actors compelled the sovereign states to cooperate to thwart the terrorism threats, regardless of their political differences. Somalia has been identified as an epicenter of terrorism and extremist ideology in the region. The international community puts significant pressure on the government to address rising extremism. Despite the complexity of the socio-political issues, the Somali government did not take significant steps in dealing with terrorist activities.

States behave according to their principal challenges. From the Somalis' perspective, security development must be the first principle, not only organizing tribal militia with quick training but establishing a brief strategic plan that is analogous to the regional country, if not better. This can only be possible by reconsidering the current mentality of the Somali leadership in politicizing the security sector for individual and group interests.

At the political level, both the Federal Government (FG) and federal member states (FMS) need to cooperate effectively in

building national security. The federal government's core task is to initiate national policy options. This plan should be inclusive and encompass all the stakeholders. All national security efforts will be useless without the participation of the Federal Member States. Additionally, the government should make inclusive consultations in the initial stage of policymaking. For instance, in the nationwide acceptance of the federal security institutions, the government should focus on balancing tribal participation in aligning the regional administration concerns. This process is not compulsory for the state security building. However, in a country like Somalia, where federal member states and the militant Al-Shabaab are more powerful than the federal forces, it is the primary requirement for legitimizing and strengthening the federal institutions. Without national representation, the federal government's policies will remain a shadow of the Mogadishu administration, which can be seen as a security manifesto for tribal agendas, where one clan undermines another to promote its own interests over state affairs. With the growing perception of Somali foreign policy related to security matters, the government did not make a clear plan for its foreign policy strategy. This hinders the country's external strategy in dealing with direct threats from international actors, states, and regional powers. As for the diplomatic capacity, the conditions affecting Somali diplomats impede their ability to fulfill their diplomatic responsibilities. This situation can be attributed to the rooted tribalistic tendencies and corruption that the top diplomatic office perpetuates.

Using tribalism over professionalism related to security and diplomacy, the country's effort to regain its global status will remain impractical. Dealing with security and diplomatic matters requires a set of rules, skills, and effective policies that can define the challenges both internally and externally. The epicenter of the issues can be defined as the corruption level based on individualistic interest, using tribalism and incompetence as instruments. Lack of skills and knowledge can also be one of the major causes of this

horrendous situation. Finally, the government of Somalia should evaluate the relevant competent authorities overseeing security matters, including those associated with foreign diplomatic offices. These institutions should have clear manifestos and doctrines and avoid personal and group interests, tribalism, and foreign influences. In this regard, there should be comprehensive security and political arrangements. In addition to these factors, the nation's leadership and ruling elite must undergo a psychological paradigm shift to serve the country's interests adequately.

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