

Prevention and Protection Working Group

PPWG Assessment - Somalia

Prepared for the United States Atrocity Early Warning Task Force

Conflict Background:

In 1960, Somalia gained its independence from Britain and Italy and became the Republic of Somalia. In 1969, a coup toppled the government, and the country's name changed to the Democratic Republic of Somalia.

Major General Siad Barre—a socialist leader who aligned himself with the Soviet Union—became the president. In the 1970s, during the Cold War, Barre switched allegiance to the U.S. In 1991, clan-based guerrilla groups toppled Barre and took control of Somalia. Barre fled the country.

But the clans could not agree, so shortly after Barre's left, Somalia was consumed by a civil war. Since the early 1990s, Somalia has experienced war and famine, which have claimed more than 300,000 lives.

In 1993, the U.S. attempted a military intervention, after which Somalia descended into anarchy. In 2000, a group of Somali leaders met in neighboring Djibouti to elect Somalia's first government in almost a decade. In 2006, Islamist militias called the Supreme Islamic Courts Council (SICC) fought rival warlords and seized control of Somalia's capital, Mogadishu. At the same time, a breakaway nation called Somaliland (full name: The Republic of Somaliland) proclaimed its independence from Somalia. Other warlords have created their own mini-states in Jubaland and Puntland.

In late 2006, Ethiopian troops recaptured Mogadishu, and the Ethiopian government announced that its forces would remain until Somalia was stable and a functional government emerged. In 2007, in response to the Ethiopian invasion, a militia group broke away from the SICC and became Al-Shabaab. During the same year, a transitional federal government regained control of Mogadishu and other parts of Somalia.

Al-Shabaab is now aligned with Al-Qaeda and active in southern Somalia. It poses a significant threat to peace and security in Somalia, Kenya, and the rest of the region.

In 2017, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed became the president of Somalia. He was elected by 275 members of Congress and 54 senators. Somalians did not vote in that election. Mohamed's term ended on February 8th, but he postponed elections citing disagreement with Jubaland over the mode of election. He had earlier promised to go through with elections in February 2021 and had promised to sign legislation giving ordinary citizens the right to vote, bestowing equal voting rights on men and women alike.

Insurgency threats in Somalia—compounded by flooding, piracy, a locust infestation, and COVID-19—remain a challenge. At the same time, Somalia is currently feuding with its neighbor Kenya.

The prolonged violent conflict with Al-Shabaab and U.S. drone strikes^[1] have killed some and displaced many civilians. Nearly 2.6 million internally displaced people (IDPs) are living with limited or zero access to primary health care, water, and sanitation services in crowded urban and semi-urban areas. Any COVID-19 outbreak in an IDP camp will likely spread quickly amongst a crowded, immune-compromised population. Social distancing in these settings is not feasible.

To further complicate Somalia's situation, the [Famine Early Warning Systems Network](#)^[2] and the [World Food Program](#)^[3] are predicting severe food insecurity and potential for famine due to an extensive regional drought and the 2020 locust infestation.

Atrocities Risk Factors/Unfolding Atrocity Crimes

Central Government and Autonomous States/Political Opposition Groups

- Somalia remains a divided country with clan-based governments that have declared independence from the central government.
- Federal-state tensions run high: In September 2018, the leaders of the autonomous states suspended all ties with the federal government.
- In August 2020, Puntland and Jubaland's leaders did not attend the summit, where a few leaders decided the electoral process.
- Citing security concerns, Somali central government has postponed its 2020 elections until 2021. It was originally planned for February 8, 2021. However, it was postponed again citing lack of preparedness for fair elections.
- The Forum for National Parties opposition alliance, founded in October 2019, has criticized the postponement, stating that President Abdullahi is trying to unconstitutionally extend his term to maintain a grip on power.
- Somali regional governments accused the federal governments of failing to provide security in the country and adequately combat Al-Shabab and fulfill its federal responsibilities toward the federal states.

Impact of Al-Shabab and Increased Violence

- Al-Shabaab capitalizes on the constant clan and political infighting and uses the existing rivalries to expand its territory.
- Many Somalis believe that Al-Shabaab can provide better security for the individuals and territories it controls than the other actors on the ground.
- Despite having been expelled from most of Somalia, Al-Shabaab remains strong in the country and is still capable of unleashing violence at any time.
- Al-Shabaab has more financial resources than Somalia's central government, and a superior electrical grid, making it easier for them to recruit youth in search of their essential needs.
- Many Somalis remain displaced, either internally or outside the country, and lack stable homes to which they can return.
- The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somali National Army (SNA) cannot hold the territories they cleared of the militants.
- AMISOM and the SNA rely on clan militias that do not follow international standards of conduct and face no repercussions for their human-rights violations.

Humanitarian need and COVID-19 Pandemic Impact

- Somalia faces a confluence of tragedies that are fueling violence, instability, and human suffering. These include prolonged violent conflict, in which civilians suffer from attacks by Al Shabab and ongoing US drone strikesⁱ that displaces communities in Somalia.
- Natural disasters, including a swam of locusts and flooding; severe food shortages and the potential for a famine; and, the spread of COVID-19.
- The Famine Early Warning Systems Networkⁱⁱ and the World Food Programⁱⁱⁱ are predicting severe food insecurity and potential for famine due to the extensive drought experienced in the region and the locust infestation.
- The lack of health infrastructure undermines the government's ability to accurately track the coronavirus and stop its spread effectively.
- There is one hospital dedicated to COVID-19, located in Mogadishu, with just 20 ICU beds. Most of the hospitals and clinics in Somalia lack protective equipment for the country's already small pool of health workers.
- The data from the interior, where the government has no access because of federalism, clannism, and Al-Shabab's control of some areas, could be worse than known to the international community. the current count of people infected with
- The current numbers of COVID-19 infection and deaths are unknown due to lack of access to the Al Shabab controlled areas, inadequate testing, and unreported deaths.
- Most youths in Somalia are uneducated and unemployed, with little or no prospect of livelihoods. Many fall victim to recruitment by Al-Shabab.

Regional Tensions

- A recent crisis in the Gulf that pitted Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) against Qatar has exacerbated the existing federal-state tensions in Somalia.
- Jubaland has blamed Gulf states for supplying arms to the central government, creating more insecurity in Somalia and the region.
- The feud between Somalia and Kenya present security challenges that need to be addressed before they escalate.

U.S. Policy in Somalia

- U.S. policy in Somalia has failed to address the underlying causes of conflict or prevent continued recruitment by Al-Shabab. Extremist groups have gained more support and violence has increased.
- Every time there is a US air or drone attacks, Al Shabaab recruits more youth who watch their family members killed or displaced.
- The U.S. continues to attack Al-Shabab in Somalian communities, despite increased death, maiming, and displacement of innocent civilians by air-strikes and drones.
- US support to the government of Somalia must include resources to enable the government to win the hearts of the youth and people of Somalia through meeting their basic needs. Al Shabab has more money than the government.
- It is time for negotiations with Al Shabaab as the US did in Afghanistan. All warring parties in Somalia need to come to the table to negotiate and shape the future of Somalia. The US could be the catalyst.

Recommendations for U.S. Government

Continued military warfare has failed to bring peace and security to Somalia. Air-raids and drones have resulted in young Somalian youth to the ranks of Al-shabab and displaced many communities. We recommend de-escalation of conflict and encouraging conflicted parties towards dialogue.

- The U.S. should urgently work with Somalia's government and leaders towards a roadmap for fair, free, transparent, and inclusive elections.
- Encourage Somalian government and autonomous Somalian leadership to engage in talks with Al-shabab in efforts to pursue a political settlement to the conflict.
- The U.S. should support a national dialogue among Somalia's clans.
- Long as Somalian central government and state institutions remain weak, Somalians will fail to see peace. Addressing the root causes of insecurity in Somalia will require providing the central government the proper support to build institutions, infrastructure, and create livelihoods for its population.

- Prevent the escalation of arms sales in Somalia and support the government in creating viable economic alternatives
- The U.S. should stop using lethal drones and militarily intervening in Somalia while at the same time increasing investments in urgent, life-saving health, humanitarian, and peacebuilding efforts
- Somalia owes highest debt to the U.S. government, incurred during Siad Barre’s regime. Approximately \$4.5 billion debt remains in default due to lack of financial resources and has caused Somalia to lose international funding. The U.S. government should consider cancelling Somalia’s debt. As the Somali government meets the reforms required by international financial institutions, the U.S. Treasury and incoming administration need to implement the relief of \$1.1 billion in the U.S. held debt.
- The U.S. should prioritize critical humanitarian and essential COVID-19 testing to alleviate spread of the pandemic as healthcare systems remain weak
- The U.S. should support the role of Somalia’s civil society and help the country strengthen its relationship between state and citizens. This will help ensure that Somalians will shift their trust from Al-Shabab to the government and begin to rebuild their nation together.
The U.S. should engage women and youth peacebuilders to change the current mind-set in Somalia.
- It is imperative that the distribution of land and resources are managed in a fair way so that parties can come closer to a shared vision for Somalia’s future.
- The U.S. should take responsibility and pay reparations for Somalian civilians killed by its drones and air-strikes

[1] <https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/06/2002295555/-1/-1/1/SEC-1057-CIVILIAN-CASUALTIES-MAY-1-2020.PDF>

[2] <https://fews.net/east-africa/somalia>

[3] <https://www.wfp.org/countries/somalia>

[4] https://twitter.com/Free_Somaliweyn/status/1262387179352973314?s=03

ⁱ<https://media.defense.gov/2020/May/06/2002295555/-1/-1/1/SEC-1057-CIVILIAN-CASUALTIES-MAY-1-2020.PDF>

ⁱⁱ <https://fews.net/east-africa/somalia>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.wfp.org/countries/somalia>