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Paving a Path to Lasting Peace and Security in Somalia



Ugandan AMISOM soldiers play football with Somali boys in Buur-Hakba after its liberation from al-Shabaab by SNA and AMISOM forces. Taken without a fight, the town—a key link between Mogadishu and central Somalia—had banned football under Shabaab rule. Photo by Stuart Price/UN.

Paving a Path to Lasting Peace and Security in Somalia

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Two boys practice their shooting on a basketball court in Mogadishu, Somalia. Banned under the extremist group al-Shabaab, basketball is once again resurging in Mogadishu. Photo by Tobin Jones/Au Un Ist.



INTRODUCTION

Paving a Path to Lasting Peace and Security in Somalia

For nearly two decades, Somalia has remained entangled in conflict and crisis. Since the [U.S.-backed Ethiopian invasion in 2006](#), conditions in the country have steadily deteriorated, driven by a combination of persistent insecurity, weak governance, and the expanding influence of non-state groups like al-Shabaab. These dynamics have contributed to what many consider to be the [worst humanitarian crisis](#) in Africa's modern history.

Despite ongoing U.S. engagement, primarily through military and counterterrorism operations, there have been few sustained or transformative gains. Since 2007, U.S. policy in Somalia has centered on a military-first approach, with limited focus on long-term political stability or state-building. This trend has only intensified in recent years: since 2020, the U.S. has conducted more than [more than 250](#) strikes in Somalia, more than 80% of which have occurred during the second Trump administration.

The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) is a national nonpartisan Quaker organization that lobbies Congress for peace, justice, and environmental stewardship. We seek a world free of war and the threat of war, conducting research, analysis, education, and advocacy to address the root causes of violence and injustice. In this spirit, FCNL has developed a series of recommendations and accompanying issue briefs informed by expert interviews with individuals from the Somali diaspora, former government officials, and broader civil society advocates.

If the United States is going to continue engaging in Somalia—as it should, given the U.S. role in the country's instability—we recommend three core steps for members of Congress to take in order to fundamentally reimagine U.S. policy and steer the country toward a path of sustainable peace and security.



Issue Brief #1: Oppose Continued Militarized Counterterrorism and Conduct Robust Oversight

Prolonged military-first approaches have failed to deliver sustainable peace or reduce long-term instability in Somalia. **CONGRESS MUST** oppose the continued reliance on U.S. military operations and instead exercise meaningful oversight of the unintended harms these operations may cause to Somali civilians and civil society.



Issue Brief #2: Support Strengthening Governance

Lasting peace in Somalia requires a shift toward policies that invest in governance and state-building. To reduce Somalia's reliance on foreign military support, **CONGRESS SHOULD** urge the administration to prioritize diplomatic engagement and assistance that strengthens Somali institutions and promotes inclusive political processes.



Issue Brief #3: Support Long-term, Locally Led Development and Humanitarian Solutions

Moving away from militarized engagement must not mean disengagement. The U.S. should increase support for economic, humanitarian, and peacebuilding assistance in Somalia while ensuring that programs are locally driven and centered on Somali leadership and priorities.



A Ugandan soldier serving with the African Union (A.U.) Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) looks over an open tract of land from the roof of Mogadishu University. Photo by Stuart Price/UN.

ISSUE BRIEF #1

Oppose Continued Militarized Counterterrorism and Conduct Robust Oversight

Since 2007, the U.S. has conducted a sustained counterterrorism campaign in Somalia that has heavily relied on the use of lethal force. Since the first known U.S. airstrikes in Somalia was conducted as part of the so-called “War on Terror” during the George W. Bush administration, there have been more than [350 counterterrorism strikes](#) in Somalia, mostly targeting al-Shabaab and more recently, ISIS-Somalia. These operations cost the U.S. [\\$2.5 billion](#) between 2007 and 2020 alone.

On top of that, this military campaign has been unsuccessful in decreasing the presence of non-state violent groups in Somalia. In fact, the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point [reports](#) that al-Shabaab has only continued to grow in the years since U.S. intervention.

Militarized counterterrorism strategies have proven to be ineffective and, in many cases, counterproductive in Somalia. Continued reliance on drone strikes, special operations raids and other lethal force tactics will not achieve lasting security.

Congress must assess the situation

The RAND Corporation [reports](#) that military force has led to the end of violent non-state groups in only 7% of cases. In contrast, 43% of conflicts with non-state actors have ended through “peaceful political accommodation with their government.” Despite this, U.S. policy to address the conflict in Somalia continues to prioritize the use of force.

The first Trump administration dramatically escalated military activity in Somalia, conducting [219 airstrikes](#) — more than triple the combined number conducted under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. During this time, the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies found that attacks from al-Shabaab [increased by 20% annually](#).

Then, following President Trump’s abrupt [withdrawal](#) of U.S. forces from Somalia in early 2021, al-Shabaab’s activity [surged](#). President Biden redeployed several hundred U.S. troops to the country in 2022 and since the beginning of 2025, airstrikes have once again [dramatically increased](#) under the second Trump administration.

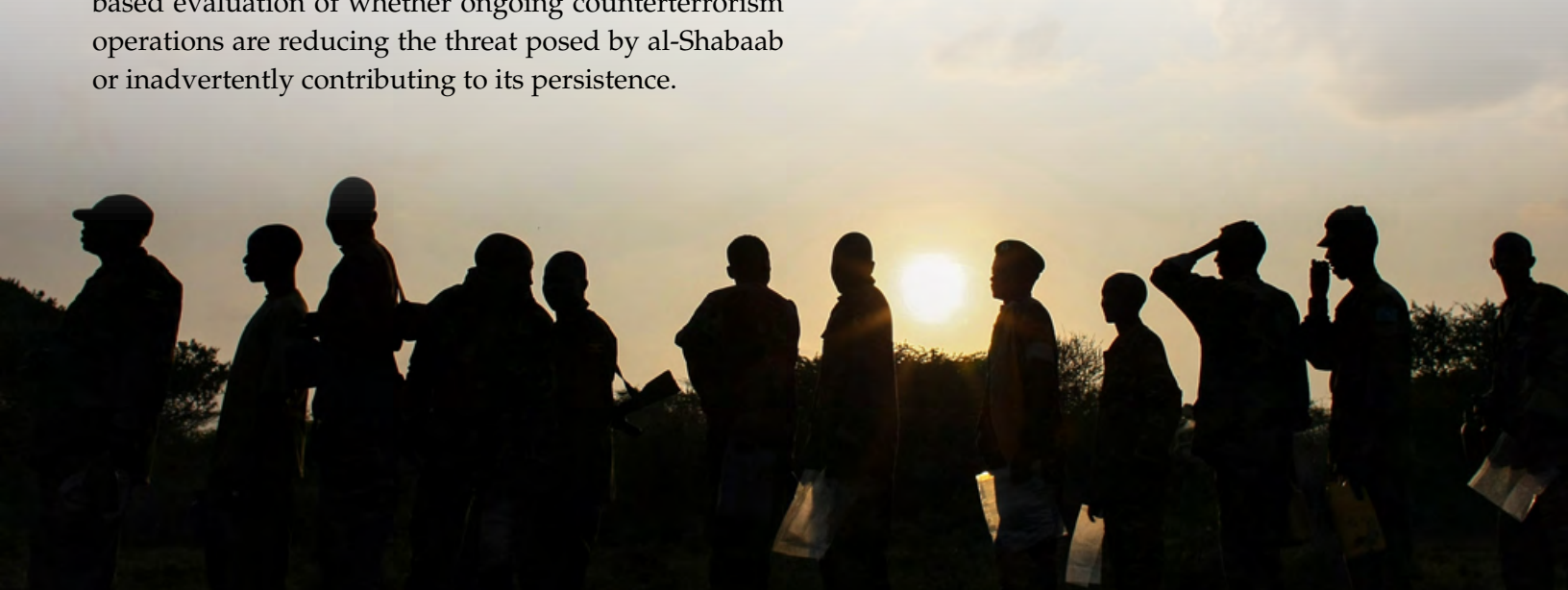
CONGRESS MUST conduct rigorous oversight to evaluate the strategic effectiveness and unintended consequences of the use of force in Somalia. Holding hearings on the impact of U.S. strikes on civil society and political stability in Somalia would enable evidence-based evaluation of whether ongoing counterterrorism operations are reducing the threat posed by al-Shabaab or inadvertently contributing to its persistence.

Evaluate the threat level of al-Shabaab

For more than a decade, the consensus across [official U.S. reports](#) and [independent studies](#) agree that al-Shabaab remains a serious East African threat but has *not* demonstrated the intent or capability to attack the U.S. homeland. As RAND analyst Seth Jones [testified](#) before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 2014, there is “little evidence...any intent to attack the U.S. homeland.”

More recent [U.S. congressional reports](#) similarly emphasize the group’s regional focus and reach. The Defense Intelligence Agency noted in its [2024 Annual Threat Assessment](#) that while al-Shabaab poses a threat to the U.S. forces deployed in Africa, it did not provide an assessment that the organization posed a threat to the U.S. homeland.

CONGRESS MUST scrutinize al-Shabaab’s current threat to the U.S. It should call on the administration to provide a comprehensive assessment to help determine how the U.S. should engage with Somalia to effectively address the underlying drivers of violence while advancing U.S. security interests.



Evaluate how we classify al-Shabaab

A [2022 Crisis Group report](#) documents how the Colombian government's use of a "linguistic ceasefire" contributed to successful peace negotiations between the Colombian government and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Initially, labeling the group as "terrorist" reinforced domestic and international resistance to engagement. By shifting its rhetoric—decoupling the group from its actions and referring instead to the group's "terrorist acts"—the government helped create political space for negotiations and signaled that change was possible.

Similar approaches should be employed in Somalia. The United States has designated al-Shabaab as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) since 2008. This designation complicates humanitarian and stabilization work. A [report](#) by the Alliance for Peacebuilding and the Charity & Security Network explains how al-Shabaab's FTO designation prohibits non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from providing "material support" to the group under [18 U.S.C. § 2339B](#).

This prohibition heavily limits peacebuilding and the effectiveness of programs designed to prevent people from engaging in violent conflict or extremism. In Somalia, we have seen al-Shabaab's FTO designation result in the [disruption of aid delivery at critical times](#). Heightened legal concerns and burdensome compliance requirements have led some organizations to [reduce or avoid operations in affected regions](#).

Both [U.S. government assessments](#) and [UN reports](#) maintain that the group's primary targets remain the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), and U.S. forces in Somalia. Additionally, [al-Shabaab's operational strategy](#) remains firmly rooted in southern and central Somalia—particularly in Lower and Middle Shabelle, Lower Juba, and Hiraan. Furthermore, while the group has organized incursions across Puntland, Somaliland, and into neighboring Ethiopia and [Kenya](#), its pan-Somali and regional ambitions remain consistent.

In 2024, the State Department completed al-Shabaab's [legally required five-year FTO review](#) and determined that the designation should stay in effect. [Reports from Crisis Group](#) note that Somali lawmakers and international partners uniformly reject engagement with the group in part due to its "terrorist" status, further limiting exploratory negotiations or confidence-building efforts.

CONGRESS SHOULD call on the administration to provide a comprehensive assessment that evaluates whether the continued use of blanket terrorism designations advances U.S. policy objectives in Somalia or undermines efforts to support Somali-led peace and reconciliation.

"Five successive administrations have used the 2001 AUMF to conduct lethal force operations against an array of groups with no connection to the 9/11 attack, including al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia."

Sunset the 2001 AUMF

Somalia is currently the country where the United States [conducts the most military operations](#) under the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (2001 AUMF). This law was passed three days after the September 11 attacks to target those responsible for the attacks and those who harbored them. Five successive administrations have used the 2001 AUMF to conduct lethal force operations against an array of groups with no connection to the 9/11 attacks, including al-Shabaab and ISIS-Somalia.

To reassert Congress's authority over the use of force and ensure ongoing operations align with policy objectives,

CONGRESS SHOULD place a sunset on the 2001 AUMF. More than one-third of AUMFs have [included sunsets](#), which serve as a forcing function, compelling the executive branch to come before Congress, explain the rationale for ongoing missions, and allow lawmakers to deliberate and vote over whether to continue participation in current conflicts.

Enforce transparency

Congress has mandated several executive-branch reports to [increase transparency](#) over the use of U.S. military force.

The first is the Section 1264 report (codified in 50 U.S.C. § 1549). As per the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for fiscal year 2018 (Public Law 115-91) and as amended by the NDAA for fiscal year 2020 (Public Law 116-92), the President is required to release a public report annually on March 1 on the legal and policy frameworks guiding U.S. use of force and related national security operations.

This report should include the criteria for designating targetable forces, like al-Shabaab. In 2016, President Obama [released](#) the first version of this report, a comprehensive 61-page document; however, in the years since, successive administrations have steadily released [inadequate](#) reports or have chosen not to release one at all.

Second, Section 1285 of the FY 2020 NDAA (codified in 50 U.S.C. § 1550) requires unclassified reports and briefings every 180 days on operations conducted under the 2001 AUMF to: the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, House Foreign Affairs Committee foreign affairs, and Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The Section 1285 report also faces substantial gaps in compliance and since 2023, these reports—which must be provided in unclassified form—have not been provided to the public.

Understanding what operations the U.S. is currently conducting in Somalia is essential for members of Congress to be able to make informed decisions on whether the U.S. is playing a constructive role in the country and the threat level posed to the U.S. by the groups we are targeting there.

CONGRESS SHOULD increase transparency concerning U.S. military operations in Somalia. It should urge the executive branch to publicly release the Section 1264 and 1285 reports promptly.

CONGRESS SHOULD also support reforms that improve public access to unclassified information, including requiring that the unclassified Section 1285 report be publicly released. Americans deserve to know where and why lethal military force is being used in their name.

Place guardrails on security cooperation programs

Many current U.S. military operations in Somalia are conducted under Department of Defense-led [security cooperation programs](#)—operations carried out “by, with, or through” foreign partners abroad. A lack of oversight surrounding these partnerships has contributed to the quiet, under-the-radar expansion of U.S. military engagement in Somalia.

One key tool enabling this expansion is [10 U.S.C. § 127e](#), which authorizes U.S. forces to provide non-combat support to foreign partners engaging in authorized U.S. counterterrorism operations. Somalia is among several countries where § 127e programs are active.

However, interviews conducted by the [International Crisis Group](#) with former U.S. officials reveal that the current frameworks allow the Pentagon to establish § 127e partnerships without broader interagency consensus—notably, without requiring agreement from the Secretary of State or formal approval from Congress.

Additionally, several of these former officials [describe](#) how this authority has enabled an escalation in U.S. military involvement through so-called “unit” and “collective self-defense” strikes. These are actions that often fall outside policy restrictions and formal reporting requirements governing lethal force operations, allowing them to bypass congressional oversight.

These officials describe this secret spread of war as the precursor to the Obama administration’s [2016 decision](#) to designate al-Shabaab as an “associated force” of al-Qaeda. This move retroactively legitimized prior combat actions against the group and brought it under the scope of the 2001 AUMF, thereby entrenching Somalia more firmly into the framework of the U.S. “War on Terror.”

Another key authority is [10 U.S.C. § 333](#), the global train-and-equip authority. It allows the Department of Defense to deploy U.S. forces to train foreign partners and accompany them on specific missions.

While the Department of Defense is required to provide some information to Congress on § 333 operations, it is not required to disclose key details, including the adversaries its partner forces are fighting, the geographic location of U.S. forces undertaking train and equip missions, and whether these U.S. forces are also subject to execute orders that authorize them to engage in combat operations in addition to providing training for foreign partner forces.

The Department of Defense has also [omitted](#) required information, including identifying partner forces, in statutorily mandated reports to Congress. Regular review and transparency of this program is essential to ensure these activities align with broader U.S. foreign policy goals.

Department of Defense-led security cooperation programs in Somalia, particularly under § 127e, need to be reformed to ensure there is adequate oversight from Congress on the operations being conducted in Somalia.

CONGRESS MUST also maintain robust oversight over § 333 authorities, particularly regarding civilian harm and the effects of U.S.-trained forces on civil society.

Summary: What Congress Can Do

- ✦ Hold **hearings on the impact of U.S. strikes** on civil society and political stability in Somalia as well as the **threat posed to the U.S. by al-Shabaab** and other armed groups operating in Somalia.
- ✦ Urge the administration to **provide a comprehensive assessment** to evaluate al-Shabaab's threat level.
- ✦ Employ a **linguistic ceasefire** by urging the administration to encourage the government of Somalia to cease labeling al-Shabaab as a terrorist group and refer instead to the group's "terrorist acts" to help **create political space for negotiations**.
- ✦ Place a **sunset on the 2001 AUMF**.
- ✦ Urge the executive branch to **publicly release required Section 1264 and 1285 reports** on the legal and policy frameworks guiding U.S. use of force and operations conducted under the 2001 AUMF.
- ✦ Support **NDAA reforms to improve public access to unclassified information**, including the Section 1285 report, which must be provided to Congress in unclassified form but is not currently required to be released publicly.
- ✦ Impose **guardrails on the Department of Defense's security cooperation authorities** (10 U.S.C. § 127e and § 333) and improve relevant reporting requirements to ensure that U.S. forces **do not engage in unauthorized combat** through or alongside foreign partners.
- ✦ Conduct **regular oversight through hearings and briefings** to ensure partnerships with U.S.-trained Somali forces continue to align with U.S. policy goals.



ISSUE BRIEF #2

Support Strengthening Governance in Somalia

Continued reliance on security operations has failed to address the underlying drivers of conflict and to achieve lasting stability in Somalia. U.S. policy must shift its focus from military engagement to strengthening governance. Building resilient institutions at both the federal and regional levels is essential to achieving long-term peace and maintaining security gains.

Congress shapes the balance of U.S. engagement in Somalia through authorizations, appropriations, and oversight of executive branch strategy. Shifting focus to political capacity-building, reconciliation, and regional cooperation offer a more sustainable path to reducing the drivers of conflict and barriers to peace in Somalia.

“In the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty.”

— President George W. Bush,
National Endowment for
Democracy, 2005

Support Somali-led reconciliation efforts

Lasting peace and long-term stability in Somalia cannot be achieved through the military targeting of al-Shabaab. The group's [violence against state institutions](#), its ability to [undermine security](#), and its [financial autonomy](#) has severely hindered Somalia's state-building capabilities.

Its role as both a destabilizer and a provider of alternative governance has eroded the federal government's legitimacy among the public.

[Scholars](#) and [regional experts](#) have argued that the Somali government should explore pathways to negotiations with Al-Shabaab as part of a long-term strategy to end the conflict. These studies emphasize the need for Somali-led de-escalation efforts, with many highlighting the potential role of [clan elders](#) and mid-level Al-Shabaab defectors in helping to initiate localized dialogue.

[Reporting](#) from former U.S. officials suggests the Trump administration may be exploring avenues for engagement with Al-Shabaab, though no formal negotiations have been confirmed.

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS SHOULD encourage the administration to assess and pursue viable, Somali-led pathways toward political settlements, where appropriate.

Additionally, through requests for information, reporting requirements, oversight hearings, and briefings, Congress can help ensure that any U.S. support for dialogue efforts remains responsive to the needs of Somali communities. These tools can also help identify points of constructive U.S. engagement and entry points for peace talks.

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Strengthen U.S. Diplomatic Engagement in Somalia

Sustain a Diplomatic Footprint

A confirmed U.S. Ambassador in Somalia is critical to advancing American interests and supporting Somali state-building efforts. Following the departure of Richard H. Riley as U.S. Ambassador to Somalia in early 2026, at the time of writing, the U.S. does not have an ambassador to the country. The presence of an ambassador on the ground reinforces the United States' ability to play a role in supporting development in the country. It ensures direct engagement with Somali leaders, facilitates coordination with international partners, and allows the U.S. to better support locally driven governance and development priorities.

Most recently, Ambassador Riley's tenure demonstrated the value of this role through his support of [diplomatic efforts](#) and [economic reforms](#). And his predecessor, [Larry E. André, Jr.](#), demonstrated similar value. Ambassador André's support for Somalia's Centennial Vision 2060 plan—designed to transform Somalia from a fragile, post-conflict state into a peaceful, inclusive, economically stable, and environmentally sustainable nation by the 100-year anniversary of its independence—highlighted how U.S. leadership can help align assistance with long-term Somali-led development goals.

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS SHOULD work to fill the gap in ambassadorial representation in Somalia and ensure there are no future gaps by pressing for timely nominations and confirmations. A consistent diplomatic presence strengthens U.S. credibility, improves policy coordination, and allows the U.S. to influence better governance reforms, reconciliation efforts, and long-term stabilization strategies.

Supporting Inclusive Elections

Since the formation of Somalia's federal government in 2012, following an 8-year period of transitional government and at the time of writing, the country has had two election cycles. The first elections were held between 2016 and 2017, and the second between 2021 and 2022. Due to the instability caused by two decades of civil war, these post-transition elections have been conducted through an [indirect voting systems](#). Using this system, delegates appointed by regional clan elders choose members of the Parliament, who then vote for a president.

In December 2024, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud [promised](#) that “after 56 years, [leadership in Somalia is] committed to returning power to Somali citizens” and that he would institute a one-person, one-vote system in Somalia. The previously used indirect system lacked direct representation. A one-person, one-vote system seeks to assert the Somali people's right to self-determination and build much-needed trust in their government. In March 2024, both chambers of the Somali parliament [approved](#) constitutional amendments that would allow universal suffrage and extend the presidential term from four to five years.

Regional and Local Elections

Somalia's South West State in 2026 saw substantial [successes](#), such as the registration of more than 376,212 voters, including 211,496 women and 4,781 voters with disabilities. However, pushback from the [Somali Future Council](#) (SFC), Somalia's main opposition party, continues to jeopardize the overall success of the upcoming federal election. The SFC was founded in October 2025 by the presidents of Puntland and Jubaland following President Mohamud's push for universal suffrage and related constitutional amendments.

A delegate casts her vote during the electoral process to choose members of the Lower House of the Somali federal Parliament in Garowe, Somalia on November 23, 2016. Photo by Barut Mohamed/AMISOM.

As the election and tensions have progressed, the President of South West State has broken from the FGS and joined the opposition party. International partners are working to facilitate ongoing negotiations. However, the SFC continues to [boycott](#) the election and most recently has [stated](#) that “from the end of May 15, 2026, [current Somali president] Hassan Sheikh Mohamud is a former president, and the executive and legislature are just caretakers with no powers to take major national decisions, except to avoid a power vacuum.”

Somalia’s continued struggle toward inclusive and democratic elections reflects broader unresolved tensions surrounding constitutional legitimacy, federalism, and state centralization. While the federal government has framed this move toward universal suffrage as necessary steps toward Somalia’s state-building, arguments from the opposition that the process risks destabilizing Somalia’s already fragile federal framework should not be overlooked.

For U.S. lawmakers, the complications around Somalia’s elections highlight the limits of a military-first Somalia policy centered on counterterrorism while underlying political disputes remain unresolved. **MEMBERS OF CONGRESS SHOULD** continue to support U.S. electoral assistance programs in Somalia, including providing sufficient funding for these programs through the annual appropriations process.

Following Somalia’s next federal elections, **CONGRESS SHOULD** also request post-election briefings from the State Department and other relevant agencies to assess the impact of U.S. engagement and identify areas for improvement in future electoral cycles.



Support Cooperation Between Federal Member States and the Federal Government

In recent years, there have been increasing calls from Members of Congress and independent institutions for the formal U.S. recognition of Somaliland as an independent nation. Somaliland is a self-governing, de facto independent region in northern Somalia. It has operated with relative autonomy since the early 1990s, but remains internationally recognized as part of Somalia. U.S. policy has long [explicitly recognized](#) “the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia within its 1960 borders following the Somali provisional constitution, which includes Somaliland and Puntland.”

Those in the U.S. calling for recognition of Somaliland include the Heritage Foundation’s [Project 2025](#), which recommended the recognition of Somaliland to “counter malign Chinese activity [in Africa].” Rep. Scott Perry (PA-10) introduced the [Republic of Somaliland Independence Act](#) in June 2025, which provided a statement of U.S. policy that the Federal Republic of Somalia had no territorial claim to Somaliland and authorized the U.S. president to recognize it as an independent nation. And Rep. John Moolenaar (MI-4) submitted a [letter](#) in his capacity as chair of the Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party to then-Secretary of State Antony Blinken, calling for the establishment of representative offices in Somaliland’s capital, Hargeisa.

Somaliland has also [reportedly offered](#) President Trump the use of the Port of Berbera and military facilities within the region in exchange for U.S. recognition of statehood.

A shift away from the longstanding “One Somalia” policy could have far-reaching consequences. U.S. recognition of Somaliland risks straining relations with the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), undermining broader stabilization and security missions throughout the country.

It may also embolden separatist movements and exacerbate border disputes across the region, similar to ongoing tensions along the [South Sudan border](#) and the longstanding conflict between [Ethiopia and Eritrea](#).

CONGRESS SHOULD maintain its commitment to a “One Somalia” policy, reject legislation that seeks to recognize Somaliland as an independent nation and push back on any attempts by the administration to do so.

As a global leader, U.S. actions carry weight, and recognition of Somaliland could trigger a ripple effect across the world, undermining the [African Union’s commitment](#) to protecting African unity and regional security. Instead, **CONGRESS SHOULD** promote constructive engagement with Somaliland leaders that encourages collaboration with the FGS, strengthening dialogue and governance across the entire country.



A shift away from the longstanding ‘One Somalia’ policy could have far-reaching consequences.

Summary: What Congress Can Do

- ✦ Encourage the administration to **assess Somali-led pathways toward negotiated settlements** between the FGS and al-Shabaab.
- ✦ Conduct oversight—including through requests for information, hearings, and briefings—to **identify points of constructive U.S. engagement and entry points** for Somali-led peace talks.
- ✦ Urge the administration to **promptly nominate a U.S. Ambassador to Somalia** and work toward **timely Senate confirmation**, ensuring a continuous on-the-ground diplomatic presence, which is critical to advancing long-term stabilization goals.
- ✦ Appropriate **funding for U.S. electoral assistance programs** in Somalia to support **democratic development and political inclusion**.
- ✦ Request **post-election briefings from the State Department** to evaluate the effectiveness of U.S. election assistance.
- ✦ Reaffirm **support for the “One Somalia” policy** by rejecting legislation that calls for unilateral U.S. recognition of Somaliland.
- ✦ Promote **engagement between the FGS and FMS** that advances cooperation.



ISSUE BRIEF #3

Support Long-term, Locally Led Development and Humanitarian Solutions

The [current humanitarian crisis](#) in Somalia has been driven by decades of conflict, weak institutions, and climate-induced disasters. The population of Somalia is less than 20 million; yet in 2024, [3.1 million](#) people were internally displaced. In 2024, conflict-generated insecurity was the [leading cause](#) of internal displacement.

While the United States has invested more than [\\$2.5 billion](#) in militarized counterterrorism operations in Somalia, humanitarian and development aid has not kept pace.

This imbalance has fueled a cycle of dependency on militarized approaches and contributed to ongoing instability. U.S. assistance should prioritize long-term stability in the Horn of Africa and advance U.S. interests in Somali security and conflict prevention.

To break the cycle of crisis and reduce long-term reliance on emergency aid, the United States must invest in sustained, long-term humanitarian and development strategies in Somalia. These efforts should strengthen local institutions, reflect local priorities, and promote resilience.

Protect Critical Humanitarian and Development Funding

Somalia's humanitarian and development efforts have long relied on the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which provided approximately [\\$1.1 billion annually in assistance](#). The programs funded through USAID played a [vital role](#) in supporting health services, food security, and governance. The abrupt withdrawal of this support in January of 2025 has already [disrupted life-saving services](#), [strained local institutions](#), and heightened the [risk of al-Shabaab regaining ground](#).

As remaining programs are transitioned to the State Department, **CONGRESS MUST** take steps to safeguard this critical U.S. assistance. The Trump administration has [sought](#) to reorient U.S. foreign policy away from “wasteful foreign assistance spending and programs” that it calls “antithetical to American interests.” **CONGRESS SHOULD** recognize that targeted, preventative investments like development assistance are essential to advancing those very interests. Sustained U.S. support helps address the root causes of instability and conflict. A more peaceful and self-reliant Somalia will reduce the risk of future crises and costly, prolonged military engagement.

Support Locally Led, Civilian-Centered Development Solutions

CONGRESS SHOULD appropriate funding for agencies, such as the State Department, to prioritize locally led development strategies that empower Somali communities and local governments. Evidence presented in [congressional hearings](#) and supported by [independent studies](#) indicates that locally led programs are more tailored, cost-efficient, and widely accepted by affected communities. Despite these clear advantages, international donors continue to prioritize multilateral organizations for the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In 2021, only 1.2% of total humanitarian aid was directly allocated to local and national actors.

The [2025 UN Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for Somalia](#) outlines action plans to improve food security, education, and refugee responses. It also outlines frameworks that reflect the government's deep understanding of on-the-ground challenges. U.S. assistance should align with and reinforce such comprehensive plans that prioritize Somali-led solutions.

CONGRESS SHOULD push for regular reporting on how U.S. assistance incorporates local voices and meets the needs of marginalized populations—particularly women, youth, and displaced communities. Conducting effective oversight is critical to reinforcing these priorities.

Support Locally Led Reconciliation Efforts

Somalia is a [federal republic](#) composed of six Federal Member States (FMS) and the Banadir Regional Administration (BRA), which encompasses the capital, Mogadishu. Each FMS is largely shaped by dominant [clan structures](#). Longstanding tensions among dominant and minority clans, as well as between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and FMS, have led to political fragmentation that undermines efforts to build national unity and cooperation. This instability also creates power vacuums that violent non-state groups like al-Shabaab have used to their advantage.

In 2021, the Somalia Stability Fund released the report “[Durable Local Reconciliation](#),” which analyzed over 20 reconciliation efforts across Somalia—nine of which have resulted in over a decade of lasting peace. The report found that the most successful initiatives were those that were community-led, inclusive of women, youth, and elders, and supported by local authorities. These efforts often involved traditional Somali mechanisms of conflict resolution and focused on local power-sharing arrangements, land disputes, and historical grievances. These locally led programs improved governance at the district level and built trust between communities and the Somali state.

CONGRESS SHOULD encourage and provide funding for locally led reconciliation initiatives in Somalia through flexible, long-term support mechanisms, such as the reconciliation programs and atrocities prevention work conducted by the U.S. State Department. Reconciliation programs facilitate interpersonal dialogues between conflicting groups to strengthen social cohesion and trust. Atrocities prevention work seeks to prevent violent conflict in communities showing signs of instability. This support should prioritize inclusive, community-based programs that empower local community members to address the root causes of conflict.

Instability
creates
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advantage.

Summary: What Congress Can Do

-  Ensure a smooth and accountable **transition of reconciliation and violence prevention programs from USAID to the State Department** without service disruption.
-  Recognize **development assistance as a strategic investment** that advances U.S. security interests and prevents future crises.
-  Require **regular State Department reports** on the implementation these programs, including how U.S.-funded locally led initiatives **integrate elders, youth, and women.**
-  Ensure **robust funding for development assistance programs** that are essential to advancing lasting stability.

*An aid worker provides food
to an internally displaced
family in Somalia.
Photo by Karel Prinsloo/WFP.*



Conclusion

For over two decades, the United States has pursued a military-first approach in Somalia, spending billions of dollars on counterterrorism operations and security assistance programs while failing to address the underlying challenges that continue to drive instability. Despite hundreds of airstrikes and years of military operations, violent non-state groups remain active, humanitarian conditions continue to deteriorate, and Somalia still faces significant barriers to building a sustainable democracy.

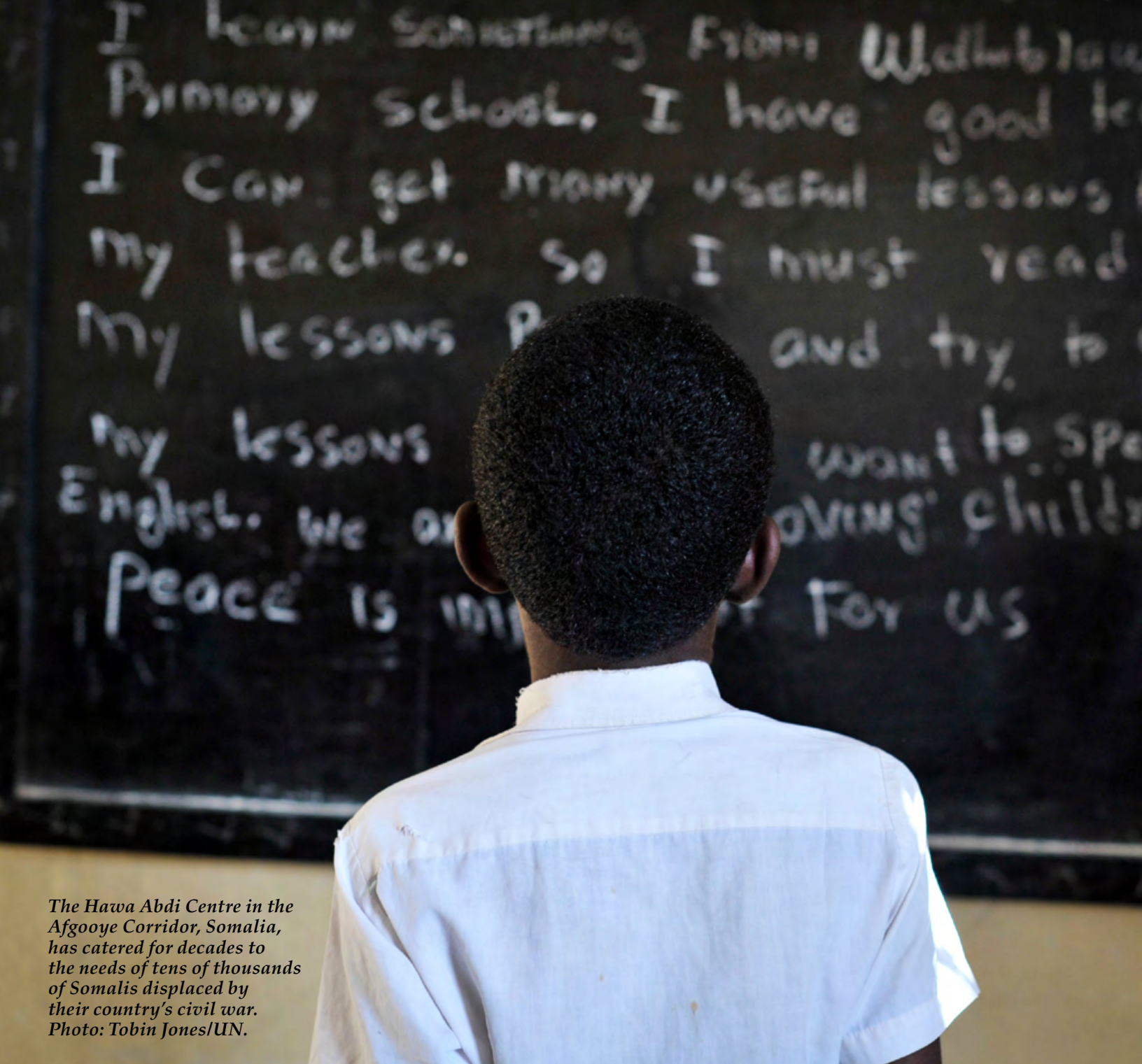
If the United States is to continue engaging in Somalia, it must shift away from policies centered primarily on military force and instead support long-term political stability and locally led development and reconciliation initiatives.

Lasting peace and security in Somalia cannot be achieved through military might alone. A sustainable U.S. approach must prioritize accountability, governance, reconciliation, and long-term investment in the Somali people rather than continued reliance on militarized counterterrorism operations.

The United States can help support Somalia's transition to a stable and strong nation by shifting toward long-term peacebuilding and other critical nonviolent solutions. These can build capacity, governance, and the rule of law, while strengthening Somalia's economy.

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS MUST recognize that building a more peaceful and resilient Somalia requires honoring the dignity and humanity of those most impacted by conflict and advancing policies that address the root causes of conflict rather than perpetuating endless war. 

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*The Hawa Abdi Centre in the Afgooye Corridor, Somalia, has catered for decades to the needs of tens of thousands of Somalis displaced by their country's civil war.
Photo: Tobin Jones/UN.*



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