

## Governance, conflict and the United Nations interventions in Somalia

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### ABSTRACT

Somalia has seen a rise of various fundamentalist groups who have engaged in terrorism and numerous wars crimes and human rights violations in the territory they control with relative impunity. It became imperative for the international community and the United Nations to intervene in limiting the massive humanitarian crisis. The United States carried out several strikes targeting Islamic terrorists in Somalia. The purpose of this paper was to provide a brief overview of governance and conflicts in Somalia and its role in facilitating the rise of various terrorist organizations in the country and the region. In this context, this paper has explored and compared the number of aerial strikes in Somalia under the last three years of President Barack Obama's presidency (2014-2016) and the first three years of President Donald Trump's presidency (2017-2019). The economy of Somalia is recovering slowly and it is improving the lives of people in areas controlled by the Somali Government (BBC News, 2017). President Donald Trump has reduced restrictions on aerial strikes. His policy has led to a significant increase in the number of strikes and casualties. It is yet to be seen if this policy can reduce extremism and terrorism in Somalia. It will also be difficult for the national government to hold a national election given that parts of the country are still controlled by militias and the autonomous territories like Somaliland and Puntland are not likely to cooperate.

### INTRODUCTION

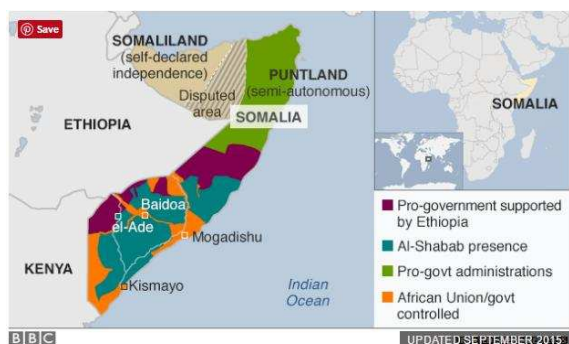
Somalia is a country on the horn of Africa; in fact, it is the horn of Africa (Figure 1). It has population of around 11 million people. It is located on the near the Gulf of Aden, a strategically vital shipping lane for oil shipping out of the Persian Gulf and traffic to the Suez Cannel. The capital of Somalia is Mogadishu, a coastal city, has more than 2.5 million inhabitants. Somalia is inhabited by mostly Ethnic Somalis who form 85% of the population. The Ogaden region in Ethiopia and the North Eastern Province in Kenya are majority ethnic Somali areas that border Somalia. They are a result of European colonialism and colonial borders. Today what is Somalia consists of what was Italian Somalia and British Somaliland during the colonial period. Somali became an independent country in 1960.

After the breakdown of governance in Somalia, British Somaliland declared independence and

became the State of Somaliland. It has experienced relative peace as a separate political entity but has failed to gain international recognition of its independence. French Somaliland chooses to be a separate entity through a referendum and today is the independent country of Djibouti. It hosts one of the most important US military base in the world and the command center in Africa of the United States Military. In 1969 after the assassination of the president, the army launched a military coup which bought Siad Barre to power. He would rule the country till 1991. He was by any measure a despotic leader (Janzen & Lewis, 2019).

Eventually in 2012 a new government was formed with International support; it has been fighting militant groups like Al-Shabaab to restore the rule of law in the country. The year also saw the first swearing in of a parliament in Somalia in 20 years. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected president in 2012, beating incumbent Sheikh Sharif Sheikh

Ahmed. This was the first Somali Presidential election since 1967. He was elected by members of parliament who were elected by tribal elders.



**Figure 1:** The present map of Somalia showing various territories in the country.

The political chaos, deteriorating security situation, widespread banditry and looting, and extent of physical destruction compounded the problem and severely constrained the delivery of humanitarian supplies. Furthermore, the conflict threatened stability in the Horn of Africa region, and its continuation occasioned threats to international peace and security in the area. The purpose of this paper was to provide a brief overview of governance and conflicts in Somalia and its role in facilitating the rise of various terrorist organizations in the country and the region

## METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research methodology for this study was predominantly dependent on secondary data sources. Content analysis was conducted for this study. It is a research approach that is used to analyze recorded communications which are systematically collected from newspaper articles, books, journals etc. The main crux of this research was to discuss the disputes in Somalia and its role in aiding the upsurge of different terrorist organizations and the interventions of the United States through Aerial and Drone Strikes in Somalia. In order to acquire a better understanding of the research topic, relevant published articles were analyzed and assessed. These articles were sourced from popular international newspaper publications such as *The New York Times* and journals published in Google Scholar,

Academia.edu, and JSTOR. Statistical data was collected from Bureau of Investigative Journalism. Data were also collected from published research papers written on Somalia and its conflicts and rise of terrorism. Statements and opinions have been chosen that debates on the research topic in question.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Conflicts and rise of terrorism

Since the 1990s Somalia has been without an effective government with parts of the country in complete anarchy and chaos; controlled by various warlords and militias (Seyle, 2015). The Army was disbanded, and the country was left without a police or a judiciary. Many have called Somalia the world's only true failed state (Jones, 2013). The absence of government and state institutions had created a vacuum which was filled by the Jihadist groups who implemented Sharia law. The imposition of Sharia law was first welcomed by the local communities as it restored some order in the territories they controlled but eventually the population turned against them after witnessing the brutality with which the law was imposed. The Wahabi inspired Sharia governance was at odds with most Somalis who follow a more moderate Sufi version of Islam.

Siad Barre was proponent of a greater Somalia ideology, which aimed to unite all majority ethnic Somalia areas in one country. This included areas that were/are parts of Ethiopia and Kenya. In that pursuit he invaded Ethiopia with the intention of capturing the Ogaden province which was a majority Somali area and formerly an important grazing land for Somali people. The Ogaden War, which initially Somalia was winning, was lost when the Soviet Union and rest of the communist world started supporting Ethiopia through the supply of weapons, supplies and ammunition. Ethiopia was then ruled by a Maoist government.

The War proved particularly taxing for Somalia with the depletion for resources and finances (Mubarak, 1996). The end of the cold war had also diminished the strategic importance of Somalia and resulted in decreased international interest in Somali affairs. The Ogaden War had weakened

support for the government. In 1991 various rebellions started, the government was removed from power and the national army was disbanded. The various fractions and clan based militias started to fight among themselves for power and control. This was the beginning of the Somali Civil war (Mubarak, 1996).

In the early months of the civil war more than 300 thousand people died and over 3 million people were made refugees. An estimated 1.5 million people faced starvation (Chayes & Chayes, 1995). In April 1992, United Nations made operation in Somalia 1. It was tasked with providing humanitarian relief and restoration of order. United Nations Security Council resolution 794, which passed unanimously created a peacekeeping force for Somalia led by the United States. This went on to become the United Nations Operation in Somalia 2. The United Nations suffered heavy casualties in the mission with the United States alone losing more than 50 soldiers.

The UN operations ended in 3 March 1995 through operation United Shield (Atkinson, 1995). In 2000 the first transnational government in Somalia was formed at the Somalia national peace conference in Arta, Djibouti. Abdiqasim Salad Hassan was elected the first president of the body whose mandate ended in 2003. It was replaced by the transnational federal government formed in 2004. It was internationally recognized, and it formed the transnational institutions and the transnational parliament (BBC News, 2018).

The government authority was still limited and by the end of 2006 much of the territory of Southern Somalia was captured by the Islamic Courts Union who imposed Sharia law in the territory under their control. The Islamic courts started near Mogadishu and spread from there fighting and defeating various warlords. Some of those Warlords were financed and supplied by the United States which led to some criticism that the US policy had further destabilized the region (Wax & DeYoung, 2000).

The Islamic courts union (ICU) also faced strong opposition from Ethiopia who described them as allies of Al-Qaeda. The ICU promised law and order and to that effect they carried out anti-piracy

operations in coastal areas. The ICU took over many territories and by the end of 2006 had declared Jihad on Ethiopia because of its support to fractions opposed to the ICU. Ethiopia intervened militarily and together with the Transnational Federal Government pushed the ICU out of the various territories they had taken over. The coalition was helped by soldiers from the African Union and air strikes by the United States Air Force. The defeat of the ICU left much of Somalia under government control for the first time since the fall of the federal government in 1991.

### Upsurge of Al-Shabaab

The Islamic courts union fractured into various groups, of which one of the most radical was Al-Shabaab. The full name of Al-Shabaab is Harakat Al-Shabaab Al-Mujahideen which roughly translated into English as Movement of Striving Youth. Today it is the most prominent violent Jihadi group in Somalia, and is quite notorious for its methods and attacks outside of Somalia.

Al Shabaab's ideology is Islamist Wahabism and Somali nationalism. The ideology "*which resonate in the Somali psyche for a number of reasons, including the UIC's relative success (despite its short-lived experience in power) in establishing order and enticing Somali businesses to invest in Somalia, the widespread presence of Islam in Somalia, and the highly contested presence of foreign troops in the country*" (Salhi, 2011). This ultimately shows the difficulty of peacekeeping in countries where the troops have no national mandate. There is a great amount of difficulty in imposing order from the outside. Al-Shabaab, whose ideology was rooted in the religious and social structure, were very successful in expanding across Somalia.

Al-Shabaab follows a radical Wahabi ideology while most Somalis tend to follow a more moderate Sufi version of Islam. It is waging Jihad on Somalia government, the African union troops and their allies in the region (Symon, 2001). Al-Shabaab senior leadership is mostly made out of ethnic Somalis and foreigners trained in Afghanistan.

The first leader of Al-Shabaab was Aden Hashi Ayro, who had served in Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya from 1991 to 1997 when the group disbanded. Al-Shabaab might have existed as a loose grouping of members of the Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya led by Aden before he joined the Islamic Courts Union. After joining the ICU, Al-Shabaab developed as the military wing of ICU. Al-Shabaab killed aid workers in Somaliland and carried out brutal attacks. It received criticism from even leadership of the ICU including Hassan Dahir Aweys (Stanford University, 2019). In 2005, it removed bodies from a colonial era Italian graveyard and dumped them in the trash.

Eden spoke for Jihad in an international context and placed emphasis on the message spread by Al-Qaeda. In December 2006, ICU was removed from power in Mogadishu by a United Nations backed Ethiopian force. The ICU was defeated and formerly disbanded on 27 December 2006 but Al-Shabaab continued to exist. It became an independent organization that operated as an insurgent group. Al-Shabaab carried out attacks targeting foreign peacekeeping forces (Shay, Piscataway).

Al-Shabaab is today the largest active militant movement in Somalia. The organization became known for its violent tactics. It kidnapped foreign aid workers and destroyed an Italian cemetery in Somalia. The arrival of Ethiopian troops boosted the support of Al-Shabaab as they were seen as foreign occupying army by many. From 2008, it started forming stronger ties with Al-Qaeda and started to emphasize the Somali conflict as a part of the wider Jihad in the world.

The group has been banned in the United States and United Kingdom. It is estimated that it has 7,000 to 9,000 fighters. It has carried a number of grisly attacks in Kenya that has renewed worldwide interest in the organization. It has been able to establish a recruitment network in Kenya, based around the city of Mombasa which has a large Muslim population. It imposes Sharia law in the territories it controls and has stoned women

and cut of the hands of those accused of thievery. In 2012, Ahmed Abdi Godane, the then leader of the group, pledged allegiance to Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the head of Al-Qaeda (BBC News, 2017).

In 2009 the Transnational Federal Government went into an alliance with the remnants of the former ICU and Ahlu Sunna Waljama'a, a Sufi militant organization with the intention of strengthening government rule. African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) has been aiding the federal government take control of the region (Shinn, 2010). The organization has proved effective in recruiting foreign members particularly from North Africa and the Middle East.

### **United States interventions through aerial and drone strikes**

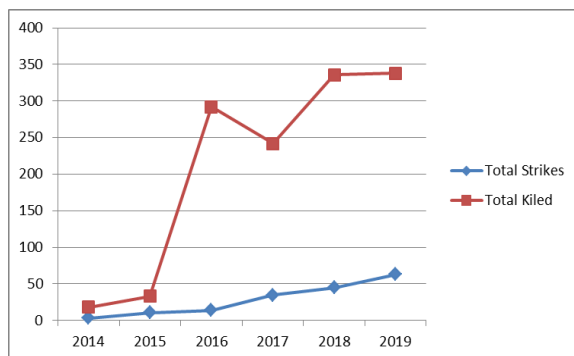
The United States (US) carried out several strikes targeting Islamic terrorists in Somalia. The US administration has made it a priority in its global attempt to defeat Islamist terrorism, escalating the use of aerial strikes and drones to fight against the militants. Aeden was killed in a US strike on 1 May 2008 in Dusmareb in Central Somalia (Salopek, 2008). He was succeeded by Ahmed Abdi Godane who pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda in 2009. He was killed in a drone strike on 1 September 2014 (Chothia, 2014). He was succeeded by Ahmad Umar, a member of the Dir Clan and former member of the ICU. He had joined Al-Shabaab in 2007 under the command of Aeden (Cleaves, 2015).

The total number of United States air strikes, including drone strikes, in Somalia from 2014 to 2019 (Table 1). These years were taken to examine the number of strikes carried out in the last three years of President Barack Obama's presidency in contrast to the first three years of President Donald Trump's presidency (Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2020).

**Table 1:** The total number of United States air strikes in Somalia from 2014 to 2019

	2014 (Obama)	2015 (Obama)	2016 (Obama)	2017 (Trump)	2018 (Trump)	2019 (Trump)
Number of confirmed U.S. strikes (including drone strikes).	3	11	14	35	45	63
Maximum Killed in the strikes	18	33	292	242	336	338
Maximum number of civilians killed in strikes	2	4	5	15	8	29

From the data it can be seen that there was a significant increase in the number of casualties during Obama's last year in office from 33 to 292 (Figure 2). Interestingly enough, there were only two additional strikes in 2016 compared to 2015. This was followed by a slight decline in the number of casualties during Trump's first year in office but more than doubling of the number of strikes. The number of strikes rose significantly during Trump's first three years. During the last three years of President Obama, the total number of confirmed strikes was 28 while during the first three years of President Trump the total number of strikes was 143 (Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2020).



Source: Bureau of Investigative Journalism, 2020

**Figure 2:** The total number of strikes by United States and the maximum number of casualties from 2013 to 2019 in Somalia

In October 2016, The New York Times reported that President Obama had escalated United States military operations in Somalia. In March 2016 the United States carried out a strike on what they described as a graduation of ceremony of Al-Shabaab which killed more than 150 people (Mazzetti, Gettleman, & Schmitt, 2016). There

significant increase in the number of casualties in 2016, while the total number of strikes only increased by two, can be explained by individual strikes with very high casualty numbers.

President Obama who had an aversion to using ground forces has significantly increased the number of air strikes during his presidency. President Trump not only continued the policy but significantly increased the number of air strikes. President Trump ordered the expansion of drone operating areas and dismantled safeguards designed to limit civilian casualties. He has also stopped the publication of data on civilian casualty in drone strikes (Harpoottian, 2020). The result of this policy is the drastic increase in the number of strikes in Somalia under President Trump. This is not limited to Somalia, under Trump, drone strikes have increased across North African and the Middle East. (Harpoottian, 2020) During President Obama's two terms in office there had been 1,878 drone strikes while during the first two years of President Trump's first two years in office there had been 2,243 drone strikes (McKelvey, 2019).

Since 2011, Turkey has developed relations with Somalia and has established a foothold in the country. Somali's main airport and seaport are managed by Turkish companies. Turkey has also been development aid and military training. Turkey is likely to seek exploration rights for offshore oil reserves. The oil reserves are located in disputed territory with Kenya and that brings with it additional diplomatic complications (Mules, 2020).

### Present and the way forward

In 2015 president Mohamud postponed elections over security fears. The arrival of the African

Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM), the African Union peacekeeping force has bought more authority to Somalia government. Somalia government reach has been slowly expanding, with that Somalia is starting to stabilize. Al-Shabaab is losing territory and influence but remains a potent foe to this day. It is still able to carry out sporadic attacks in Somalia and neighboring countries. On 24 February 2020, the President of Somalia signed a landmark law that would pave the way towards one person one vote election, universal suffrage, in Somali. The election could possibly be held in 2020 and would be the first such election in 50 years. The last such election was held in 1969 (Hujale, 2020). More Somalis are returning from abroad and bringing with them much needed resources, knowledge, and finance. The economy of Somalia is recovering slowly and it is improving the lives of people in areas controlled by the Somali Government (BBC News, 2017).

The United States, under President Barack Obama, moved away from putting soldiers on ground and focused on aerial strikes. President Donald Trump has reduced restrictions on aerial strikes. His policy has led to a significant increase in the number of strikes and casualties. It is yet to be seen if this policy can reduce extremism and terrorism in Somalia. It will also be difficult for the national government to hold a national election given that parts of the country are still controlled by militias and the autonomous territories like Somaliland and Puntland are not likely to cooperate.

## CONCLUSION

The Ogaden region in Ethiopia and the North Eastern Province in Kenya are majority ethnic Somali areas that border Somalia. They are a result of European colonialism and colonial borders. The US administration has made it a priority in its global attempt to defeat Islamist terrorism, escalating the use of aerial strikes and drones to fight against the militants. Aeden was killed in a US strike on 1 May 2008 in Dusmareb in Central Somalia (Salopek, 2008).

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