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1.2.3. Updated list of main actors

Somalia is characterised by the presence of numerous state and non-state armed actors. As Somali security expert Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown151 put it '[m]ore than 60 warring parties are present in the country, ranging from clan and warlord militias to various other militant groups', including the Islamic State in Somalia (ISIS-Somalia).152

Most of these military and security forces have been addressed in detail in EASO COI report Somalia: Actors (July 2021),153 and integrated in the following EASO COI report Somalia: Security Situation (September 2021),154 and EUAA COI report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023).155 Each armed actor's general strength, territorial control/presence, and overall dynamics are discussed in the referenced pages in those reports. For the main changes that have occurred during the reference period (April 2023 - March 2025), or for additional information, see further details in the remainder of this section.

The FGS Security Forces include the Somali National Army (SNA), the Somali Air Force, the Navy, the Special Forces, the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), Police Forces, Prison Forces;156 regarding some relevant updates on these forces:

- SNA: while on paper it counts 32 000 personnel, the de facto deployable force is closer to 19 000, with an additional 24 000 that the FGS claimed would have been trained and integrated in the army by the end of 2024.157 Overall cohesion is undermined by 'a very fragmented' composition, heavy clan-based recruitment, disparities in training and equipment. Other issues are 'desertion, defections, soldiers working multiple jobs, and infiltration by Al-Shabaab, although these problems have become less acute'.158 While the the Air force is not functional, the Navy is slightly more advanced but still unable to meet the challenges it is confronted with;159

- Danab Infantry Brigade: as of August 2023, 342 new recruits completed their training and joined the 1 700 SNA-Danab forces operationally active in the country;160 as of November 2022, the US had trained almost 2 000 fighters,161 since 2017;162 In January 2025, the new Trump administration in the US suspended all US foreign aid programmes, including military security assistance, for 90 days. Implications for Danab forces are still unclear;163

- Gorgor Brigade: as of March 2024, Gorgor's strength was of about 4 000 soldiers, approximately 1 900 soldiers from the 17th Brigade and 2 100 from the 18th Brigade;164 since 2017, according to the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), Türkiye had trained more than 6 000 Gorgor soldiers,165 but in the meantime over 2 000 have either

deserted or lost their lives in operations;166

- SNA soldiers trained elsewhere: as of October 2023, a second batch of 3 000 Somali soldiers were being trained in Eritrea,167 while the first batch of 5 000 had started to return to Mogadishu by December 2022;168 another set of approximately 3 000 soldiers were reported to be receiving military training from Uganda and other countries as from October 2022.169

The FMS armed forces, Darwish (state level paramilitary/militia) and police forces, under each FMS administration, namely: Jubbaland, South West State, Benadir Regional Administration [BRA]-Mogadishu, Hirshabelle, Galmudug, Puntland, and Somaliland.170

- According to an operational readiness assessment of regional security forces conducted in 2019 there were an estimated 19 700 registered individuals in the following FMS: Jubbaland, Galmudug, South-West State, and Puntland;171

- In the course of the reference period a new administrative entity was set up in the contested regions between Puntland and Somaliland - in the Sool, Sanaag and Cayn regions, with Cayn basically corresponding to the Buhodle district of the Togdheer region. 172 This autonomous regional SSC-Khatumo administration,173 later recognised by the FGS,174 also relies on its own security forces. According to Somalia expert Markus Hoehne, they are about 8 000 in total, the vast majority of which are drawn from the Dhulbahante clan.175

The Clan militias. In the reference period, there were in Somalia more than 100 clan or sub-clan militias.176 For additional information on clan militias and clan conflict dynamics at the regional level, during the reference period, see the remainder of this report as well as the section on 'Individuals involved in blood feuds/clan disputes and other clan issues' in the EUAA COI report Somalia: Country focus (May 2025).177 For general background information see the EASO COI report Somalia: Actors (July 2021),178 among other EUAA sources.179

Macawisley (also in the variants Macawiisleey, Ma'awisley, among others) was originally an Hawadle-led clan militia,180 operating in the Lower Shabelle region and consisting of around 200 fighters.181 Similar forms of clan based, self-organised and self-styled protection forces against Al-Shabaab were also set-up in Gedo,182 in Hirshabelle,183 in Middle Shabelle,184 and in Galmudug,185 at different times in recent years. More recently, on the backdrop of the joint offensive against Al-Shabaab launched in mid-2022, their number was estimated at between 8 000 and 10 000 members across Hirshabelle and Galmudug.186 In October 2023, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud appointed Ali Jeyte, the former governor of the Hiraan region, as the presidential coordinator for these forces, also referred to as 'community defence forces',187 despite the fact that they are not mentioned in the Somali National Security Architecture.188 However, reliance on Macawisley forces and their arming is controversial among FMS, with Puntland, Jubaland and Southwest state administrations opposing it.189

AUSSOM, ATMIS. With United Nations (UN) Security Council resolution no. 2628, from 31 March 2022, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) replaced the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) with a similar mandate.190 Its progressive phase out ended on 31

December 2024, when it was replaced by the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM). With UNSC resolution no. 2767, in the period 1 January 2025 - 30 June 2025 (phase 1 of the mission) the members states of the African Union were authorised to continue to deploy 12 626 uniformed personnel, including 1 040 police forces, and to complete the re-alignment of troops from ATMIS to AUSSOM.191 During the first 6 months of phase 2 of the mission (1 July 2025 – 31 December 2027), the number of uniformed personnel will instead be 11 826, including 680 police.192 On 25 February 2025, the African Union and the FGS agreed on the contributing countries and the number of their troops as follows: 4 500 Uganda, 2 500 Ethiopia, 1 520 Djibouti, 1 410 Kenya, and 1 091 Egypt.193 The mission's funding and financial sustainability was uncertain from the start.194

United States Africa Command (AFRICOM). In May 2022 the Biden administration, reversing President Trump's 2020 decision, decided to send US troops back to Somalia, with sources indicating between around 450,195 and 500 redeployed soldiers.196 US AFRICOM in Somalia provides assistance to Somali and African Union forces,197 conducts air, drone, and ground operations,198 and trains Danab's special forces.199 Regarding airstrikes, based on ACLED data, US Military Forces in Somalia were responsible for 62 air/drone strikes in the period April 2023 – 21 March 2025, causing at least 381 fatalities, including civilians. At the same time, 'unidentified military forces' were responsible for another 155 instances resulting in 1 206 reported fatalities and an unspecified number of casualties.200 Conversely, Airwars reported that the number of 'alleged' airstrikes at the hands of the US military forces in the reference period were 36.201 With an even lower estimate, the Long War Journal Tracker reported that the number of airstrikes was 18 in 2023 and 6 in 2024.202 Other international partner engaged in air/drone strikes are Kenya, Ethiopia, the UAE, and ATMIS/AUSSOM.203

Al-Shabaab. See section 1.2.2 Al-Shabaab control areas, presence, and influence above.

Islamic State in Somalia (ISIS-Somalia or ISS). With its al-Karrar office, the Islamic State in Somalia has recently regained prominence as a key administrative and financial hub for the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) at the global level.204 Some national administrations claim as well that the ISIL's global leader, al-Qurashi, is actually Abdul Qadir Mumin - the head of ISIS,205 or that he has relocated to Puntland.206 Within this context, the UN Panel of Experts on Somalia, in its latest report, noted 'a significant shift in the strength and disposition of the [ISIL] faction in Somalia', whose capabilities vis a vis Al-Shabaab had been recently enhanced by a strong injection of foreign fighters.207 Recent estimates indicate that the group' size ranges between 600 and 700 fighters,208 or even between 700 and 1 500-1600 fighters.209 Half of them are estimated to be foreign and coming from Ethiopia210 – notably Somali-Ethiopians, but also Oromo and Amhara – Tanzania, North Africa countries, and other Arab countries such as Yemen and Sudan.211 The leadership, however, remains in the hand of Puntland clans, notably from the Bari region, and dominated by the Ali Salebaan, a small sub-clan of the Majerteen/ Darood.212

Between late 2023 and mid-2024, ISIS had made significant gains against Al-Shabaab in the Bari region of Puntland, substantially pushing them out of the Al-Miskaad mountain range and claiming full control of the area by April 2024. By then ISIS had established bases in four districts: Balidhidin, Hunbays, Iskushuban, and Qandala.213 However, in January 2025, the

Puntland authorities launched a ‘relatively successful’ offensive against the group with air support from the US and the UAE.214 By the end of March, the offensive, also labelled Hilac offensive,215 had cleared the Al-Miskaad mountain range from the major ISIS military bases, but the militant group was not defeated. Several hundred fighters,216 believed to be hiding out and regrouping in the remotest areas of the mountain range, were still facing the third phase of the offensive at the time of writing.217

Based on ACLED data, overall, in the reference period ISIS-Somalia was responsible for 34 security incidents,218 mostly IED attacks, but also drone strikes and armed clashes, with following distribution from north to south: 32 in Bari - 22 Qandala, notably in the Al-Miskaat area, 8 in Bosasso, 2 in Iskushuban - and 2 in Mogadishu.219 For further background information see chapter 6 Islamic State in Somalia in the EASO COI report Somalia: Actors (July 2021).220

Ahlu Sunna Wal-Jama’ah (ASWJ). The multi-clan (Ayr, Dir and Marehan clans)221 armed Sufi group, operating mostly in Galmudug and in part of Hiraan, had by 2017 an estimated force of about 5 000 soldiers.222 While it was considered to be defeated both militarily and politically, 223 its leadership reappeared in Galmudug in mid-2021.224 Throughout 2021 and 2022, the group clashed sporadically with the SNA and the Galmudug State’s forces.225

Ethiopian National Defence Force (ENDF), Kenya Defence Force (KDF), others. Both Ethiopia and Kenya provide extrabudgetary security assistance to Somalia.226 In addition to the AUSSOM contingent of 2 500 troops from Ethiopia and 1 410 from Kenya,227 both countries reportedly have thousands of additional troops in Somalia bilaterally.228 While Ethiopia’s AUSSOM troops will be deployed to the same Somali regions as before - Gedo, Bay, Bakool and Hiran regions - additional ENDF troops will be stationed in Somalia based on the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) signed bilaterally with the FGS in February 2025.229 KDF forces are bilaterally deployed in Lower Juba in the context of Operation Amani Boni.230 Under a bilateral agreement Egypt may also send additional special forces,231 while Türkiye reportedly plans to deploy 3 000 soldiers from Sadat, the private military company linked to President Erdogan, as early as the beginning of April 2025 to counter Al-Shabaab offensive in the Shabelle regions.232

For further information about the nature and character of the security forces and the armed groups touched upon above, including their fluid membership, please refer to the EUAA COI report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023), section 1.3 Armed actors,233 as well as EASO COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (September 2021), section 1.2 Armed actors.234

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