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# Ending the Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: Realigning Our Engagement with Our Interests in Somalia

by Elizabeth Shackelford



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## I. Executive Summary

In U.S. foreign policy circles today, the bar to justify ending a military intervention is higher than it is to keep one going. Small wars have become routine foreign policy tools, executed with minimal oversight or scrutiny. Somalia offers a clear example of how this approach leads to high accumulated costs for the American people with little to show in gains for the U.S. national interest. The current military-led strategy promises no end to lethal interventions, and the costs and risks associated with it exceed the threats it is meant to address. Expanding U.S. military activity over the past five years has done little to impede the Somali terrorist insurgency group al-Shabaab, but it has continued to overshadow and undermine diplomatic and development efforts to address Somalia's political and governance problems. At the same time, military intervention has propped up an ineffective government, disincentivizing Somali political leaders from taking the hard steps necessary to reach a sustainable peace and build a functioning state.

The U.S. military cannot be expected to stay indefinitely in Somalia to maintain a messy stalemate. Rather than reflexively increase U.S. military activity when it falls short of stated objectives, the United States should reassess its overall strategy in Somalia by returning to basic questions: Why is the U.S. military fighting a war there? What U.S. national interest is the war serving? And are America's actions in Somalia and the region furthering that national interest?

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*'Today, the bar to justify ending a military intervention is higher than it is to keep one going.'*

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Some U.S. national interests in Somalia are clear: preventing attacks on Americans and American property — U.S. embassies, citizens, and, of course, the homeland — and, to a measured extent, preventing attacks on U.S. partners in the region, based on common interests. Somalia also sits on the Gulf of Aden, a strategic waterway critical to international trade. Protecting the safe transit of commercial ships through the gulf and the Indian Ocean is valuable for the U.S. and global economies alike. Beyond those core goals, however, U.S. interests in Somalia are less evident. For example, is it in the U.S. national interest to have a functioning, uncorrupted, and inclusive government in Somalia, led by a credible central authority? Generally, yes, to the extent that this has implications for stability and strategic American interests in East Africa and the broader region. A stable and democratic Somali state, however, is not inherently essential to U.S. national security, so that interest must be balanced with the associated cost, risk, and the impact of the intervention which may work against that goal.

America's long-running but largely hidden war against al-Shabaab has been justified as necessary to prevent attacks on Americans and American interests, but the military operations are not commensurate with the actual risk al-Shabaab poses to America. Like U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, what began as an effort to track and target those connected to or planning direct attacks on U.S. interests expanded into a broad state-building effort to prop up a preferred government. Not only does it exceed the scope of that risk today, but U.S. military activity in Somalia also appears to be the driving force behind the threat al-Shabaab poses to Americans in the region. This raises the question of whether U.S. interests are served at all by a military intervention that puts U.S. forces in harm's way and has cost billions of dollars.

Diplomatic and development interventions are far less costly and less likely to risk aggravating or expanding violent conflict, including actions against the United States. Reducing and ultimately ending U.S. military engagement, while reorienting around civilian capacities and enhancing its investment in diplomatic and development interventions would better align the costs and risks of U.S. intervention with its national security interests. This approach would not guarantee the facilitation of a functioning and democratic Somali state, but the military-led strategy has already proven unable to secure the same. Such an outcome might be attractive, but it is not essential to U.S. national security interests in the region, and guaranteeing it is beyond the capacity of the United States. Accordingly, the United States needs to launch a new civilian-led strategy in Somalia that aligns the investment, cost, and risk of the intervention to the national interests involved.

Critics of this approach will argue that stepping down U.S. military engagement could lead other military interventions to wind down, too—in particular the regional peacekeeping African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) — and that this could open the door to a resurgence of al-Shabaab that could ultimately defeat the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). Al-Shabaab is a bad actor, and the insurgency has caused significant public harm, including an estimated 3,000 civilian casualties from 2017 to 2019.<sup>1</sup> But this fact alone is not enough to justify continuing U.S. participation in war activities against it, with the accompanying cost and risks to American interests, as well as the risk that the use of lethal force by the United States could be compounding the conflict further by aggravating local grievances and propping up an ineffective government rife with corruption.

The U.S. government should reorient its intervention in Somalia, leading with diplomacy and development endeavors targeted at political and governance challenges, while reducing and eventually ending military engagement. Congress and the American people should insist on a clear articulation of U.S. interests in Somalia, and interventions should be designed specifically to promote and achieve them. Key recommendations include:

- End the military intervention as responsibly as possible, over a period of approximately five years, and shift the focus of engagement to encouraging better governance.
- Prioritize the resolution of ongoing tensions and the conflict between the central government and the administrations of the five Federal Member States, by intensifying diplomacy, by pursuing milestones and metrics for progress toward a more stable state, and by including improved service delivery, inclusion, and development goals.
- Empower and fund diplomacy adequately to meet the challenge.
- Prior to ending the military intervention, leverage targeted military assistance to promote and incentivize progress on these political and governance priorities.
- Dramatically increase congressional oversight of U.S. counterterrorism strategy—including deployments of Special Operations Forces (SOF), foreign military training, and drone strikes.

A rebalance of U.S. focus and resources in Somalia could provide a playbook for winding down other U.S. counterterrorism missions that have similarly reached a counterproductive impasse. The aim should be aligning investment, costs, and risks with clear and articulated U.S. national interests and reducing to a minimum the potential negative externalities that military action often incurs. This shift need not result in retrenchment of America's influence on the world stage. Indeed, enhancing the capacity and authority of civilians to lead in fragile states increases the potential for U.S. influence to be positive, or at least neutral, rather than unintentionally destabilizing at an even higher cost.

## II. About the Author

Elizabeth Shackelford is a Non-Resident Fellow at the Quincy Institute and an independent consultant. She was a career diplomat in the U.S. State Department until December 2017, when she resigned in protest against the Trump administration. During her tenure with the Foreign Service, Shackelford served in the U.S. embassies in Warsaw, Poland; Juba, South Sudan; the U.S. Mission to Somalia, and in Washington, D.C. For her work in South Sudan during the outbreak of civil war, Shackelford received the Barbara Watson Award for Consular Excellence, the State Department's highest honor for consular work. Shackelford is author of *The Dissent Channel: American Diplomacy in a Dishonest Age* (PublicAffairs, 2020).

## III. Acknowledgements

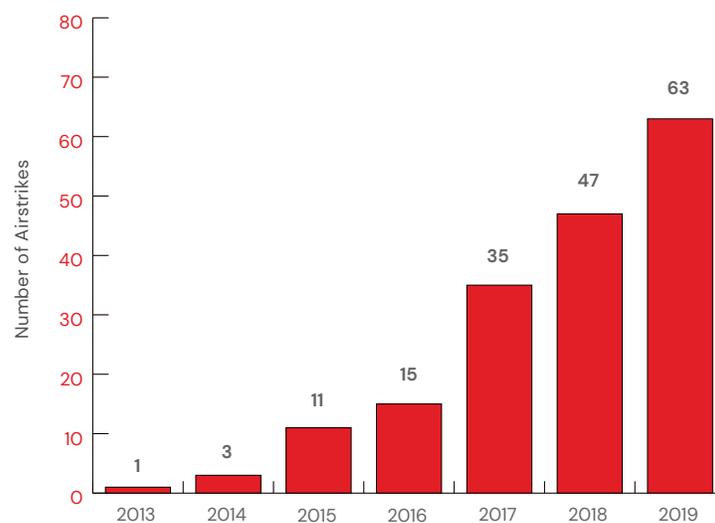
I am grateful to Jessie Evans, Emily Renard, and Ambassador Stephen Schwartz for many thoughtful conversations and debates that have long informed and challenged my analysis on this topic. I am also thankful to Paul Williams, Steve Feldstein, and Scott Paul for providing insightful feedback and rigorous critiques. I am particularly indebted to Lora Lumpe for encouraging me to think boldly on this topic and providing significant editorial support, and to Stephen Wertheim for his guidance in helping shape this report. I also owe thanks to Veronica Petrikas for assisting with the research.

## IV. Introduction: U.S. Counterterrorism in Africa

On October 4, 2017, four U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers were killed in an ambush during a training mission with Nigerien soldiers along Niger's border with Mali. At the Pentagon, the incident raised questions. How did such a routine mission turn deadly? How was the threat assessment so wrong? Why did the chain of command approve the mission? Outside the Pentagon, the question was more basic. What were U.S. soldiers doing there in the first place? A similar question could well have been asked in January 2020, when an al-Shabaab attack on Camp Simba, near the Somali border in Kenya, killed one U.S. service member and two Defense Department contractors. The pertinent question was not asked on this occasion. Instead, within days, the U.S. Africa Command's East African Response Force deployed reinforcements, and in September 2020, *The New York Times* reported that AFRICOM was seeking authorization to expand its drone strike operation into Kenya.<sup>2</sup>

U.S. intelligence services were tracking Osama bin Laden in Sudan in the 1990s, well before al-Qaeda gained infamy in 1998 with the bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam.<sup>3</sup> Only after the September 11 attacks, however, did U.S. counterterrorism efforts in Africa assume a permanent footprint. In 2002, the George W. Bush administration established the Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa in Djibouti. In 2003, the administration announced a \$100 million counterterrorism initiative in East Africa and the Horn. By 2007, the U.S. military's focus on Africa was substantial enough to merit a dedicated combatant command: AFRICOM. Under President Obama, the counterterrorism focus in Africa continued to grow, further drowning out development and diplomacy initiatives. The Obama administration increased drone strikes in Somalia fourfold over the Bush administration; it also dramatically expanded military arms sales and training across the continent.<sup>4</sup> The precision approach and arms-length nature helped the growing wars in Africa largely escape congressional oversight and public scrutiny.

Figure 1. U.S. Airstrikes in Somalia



Source: Congressional Research Service. "Al Shabaab," January 16, 2020. Data compiled from DOD and AFRICOM statements.

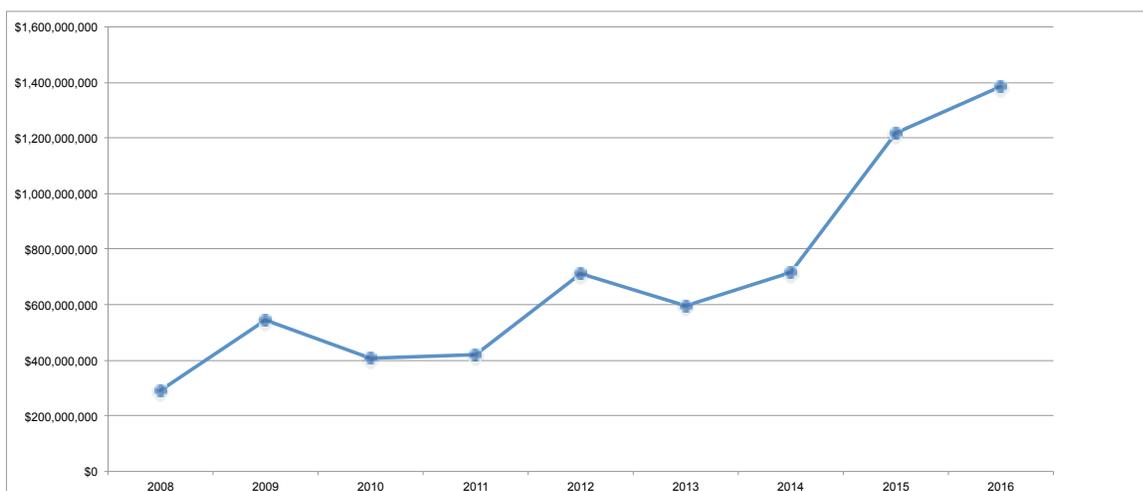
U.S. military activities in Africa have grown under the Trump administration, and civilian oversight has declined even further.<sup>5</sup> In March 2017, the White House expanded targeting authority in Somalia to allow the military to conduct strikes with less vetting and less-restrictive battlefield rules, which led to an unprecedented increase in targeted killings.<sup>6</sup> The administration quadrupled the number of strikes in Somalia in less than a single term. Today, the U.S. military has 29 bases and approximately 6,000 Department of Defense personnel across Africa, not including an additional 2,000 personnel staffing AFRICOM in Stuttgart, Germany, and elsewhere, in what the Pentagon describes as a light footprint and low-cost endeavor.<sup>7</sup>

Notably, by December 2019 the Pentagon had begun to question the utility of these initiatives.<sup>8</sup> But rather than welcoming an effort by Secretary of Defense Mark Esper to assess the purpose and efficacy of U.S. military action across the continent, Congress defended it on a bipartisan basis.<sup>9</sup> This response reflected a view by lawmakers that the only option for meaningful engagement with the African continent, given the United States' chronic underfunding and dismissal of diplomatic alternatives, is military engagement.

As the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq became less tenable, the military turned to smaller operations, executed primarily by Special Operations Forces with maximum flexibility and minimal bureaucratic impediment. SOF engagements in Africa, as elsewhere, are highly classified. They include support for foreign and irregular forces, over which the United States has little control, as well as direct actions such as airstrikes. Their activities escape the layers of oversight that Congress requires of all other assistance programs — from annual monitoring and evaluation reporting to intensive approval processes and public disclosures — thus severely hindering efforts to impose accountability.<sup>10</sup>

With inadequate scrutiny, these interventions grew not only in number but also in their objectives. What began as efforts to target America's enemies became complex programs to fortify friends and transform societies — without strategies that could realistically achieve the latter goal. Conventional wisdom suggested that building up partner security forces through training, weapons, and other supplies would naturally enhance stability. When partner forces continually fell short of target standards, U.S. policymakers relabeled the security assistance as an exercise in maintaining influence and favor, a boon to the great-power competition that has recently heated up in Africa. Increasingly, the purpose was shaped to meet the activity rather than the other way around. With such amorphous goals, assessing the utility of these interventions would be difficult even if they had been transparent.

Figure 2. U.S. Assistance to Militaries in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2008–2016



By 2019, SOF were deployed in 141 countries worldwide, up from 60 a decade earlier. These missions grow but rarely wind down. Their success is measured in military metrics — terrorist targets killed and partner military personnel trained or equipped — rather than in metrics aligned with a clear national security interest or with the decrease in terrorism these missions are allegedly aiding. The vast majority of the insurgency groups targeted by U.S. activity in Africa, of which there are now more than two dozen, pose no threat to the American homeland or to American citizens, other than the U.S. service members or contractors sent to fight them.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it is now the American military presence that heightens the risk that these insurgent groups will turn their sights on U.S. targets.<sup>12</sup>

This situation raises questions that Americans, and Congress specifically, should have been asking long ago: What is the purpose of these missions today? What are U.S. forces trying to achieve, and what does it take to achieve it? Rather than fight the Pentagon's plan to finally assess counterterrorism programming in Africa, as it has done to date, Congress should demand the purpose and endgame be clearly stated and should welcome the end of these interventions rather than fear it.

## V. The Somalia Case: Lessons Not Learned

As the most robust U.S. counterterrorism effort on the continent, Somalia provides a stark example of the slippery slope. In a situation reminiscent of Afghanistan, what began in the early 2000s as an effort to track and target those with connections to the attacks on U.S. embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam gradually expanded into an effort to employ lethal force to facilitate preferred leadership where there was little effective governance.<sup>13</sup> The campaign to prop up a weak government has continued unabated. What is striking about the Somalia example is that it developed nearly two decades after the United States first learned the risks of moving beyond a clearly defined mission there. In 1993, a relatively successful humanitarian relief effort became an attempt to restore governance by disarming militant factions controlling the capital. This led to the Battle of Mogadishu, which ended in the deaths of 18 American soldiers. The fallout from that raid raised the bar for U.S. military intervention for many years, until the United States embarked on a global war on jihadist terror after the September 11 attacks.

Washington made Somalia the centerpiece of its counterterrorism effort in Africa, beginning in the mid-2000s. This focus coincided but did not align with an internal fight in Somalia against predatory warlords. The Islamic Courts Union, an alliance of Sharia courts, emerged from the anarchy in Somalia and brought stability for the first time in decades, but the United States and Somalia's neighbors sided with the warlords—some of whom the CIA was secretly financing to assist in the war on terror—instead of the ICU.<sup>14</sup> In 2006, the ICU took control of Mogadishu with the support of Somali businesses. In contrast to the chaos of warlord rule, the ICU (and al-Shabaab in its early stages) was a relative success. It ended clan-based harassment and facilitated mobility. The ICU provided clear rules for public conduct and justice based on those rules. Life was more predictable and safer. The impunity and abuse that had persisted for years was reduced — a marked improvement over the prior 15 years.<sup>15</sup> But the overtly Islamic nature of the new power structure did not sit well with Washington or neighboring Ethiopia. The United States supported Ethiopia's military intervention later that year and the installation in Mogadishu of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), a pro-Ethiopian government established in exile through international mediation in Kenya in 2004. Prior to the ICU's takeover, Mogadishu had been under the control of warlords, and the TFG had remained outside the capital. It was the foreign intervention specifically that turned al-Shabaab, which according to Paul Williams, had been the youth militia of the ICU, "from a tiny radical faction into a large and well-funded insurgency."<sup>16</sup>

### ***Al-Shabaab's Origins***

*Al-Shabaab is believed to have spun off from al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI), a militant Salafi group that peaked after the fall of Siad Barre's regime in the 1990s. AIAI split in the early 2000s, with the old guard seeking to create a political front while younger members took a harder line pursuing fundamentalist Islamic rule. It was these hard-liners who eventually joined forces with the ICU to serve as its youth militia and helped take control of Mogadishu in June 2006. Following the Ethiopian intervention, much of the ICU fled to neighboring countries, and al-Shabaab retreated south and began organizing guerrilla assaults on Ethiopian forces. In the years to come, al-Shabaab would morph into a full insurgency and gain control over significant territory in South and Central Somalia.<sup>17</sup>*

Following the Ethiopian invasion, Somalia was again a battleground for influence, control, and pillage. In late December 2006, the transitional government moved into Mogadishu, and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), a regional peacekeeping force, was launched to gradually take the reins from Ethiopia in an attempt to make the intervention more palatable. What began with a six-month mandate is now on its thirteenth year, and the Somali National Army is nowhere close to being able to defend the country on its own. By 2010, al-Shabaab had begun striking targets in Uganda and Kenya in retaliation for their roles in the AMISOM mission, belatedly bringing life to

U.S. and regional claims that the group was an international threat. Through a combination of U.S. counterterrorism measures, AMISOM offensives, and direct action by regional militaries including Kenya, the security landscape had shifted by 2014; al-Shabaab was on its back foot and retained little definitive territorial control compared to what it had held at its peak in 2011. That success, however, proved the limits of military endeavors when the good governance necessary for sustainable peace did not follow. U.S. and regional forces had presumptuously assumed that they could successfully replace a disfavored form of rule with a government of their own choosing. The Somali people appear to have less security today than they did in the days of ICU rule.

U.S. policy in Somalia has remained consistent for several presidential administrations since the ICU's defeat, driven by a counterterrorism agenda that has seen little shift beyond an expansion of military operations to now include U.S. direct military action, assistance to AMISOM, and training and assistance for the Somali National Army. An estimated 500 to 700 U.S. troops are deployed in Somalia, mostly SOF, though this does not paint the full picture of the war since activities are also conducted from U.S. military facilities in neighboring Kenya and Djibouti. Recent estimates put U.S. spending in the past decade in support of AMISOM at \$2.5 billion and more than half a billion dollars in security assistance for Somali forces,<sup>18</sup> though the full costs of the war are unknown.<sup>19</sup> AFRICOM touts U.S. spending as "an ounce of prevention that is just pennies on the defense dollar,"<sup>20</sup> but General Stephen Townsend, AFRICOM's commanding general, acknowledges that the wider effort has not made durable progress because military efforts have not been adequately balanced with nonmilitary investments in programs supporting democracy and development.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, U.S. airstrikes and participation in offensive ground operations have become controversial. Somalia's rural southern population is caught between trying to live within al-Shabaab territory and avoiding U.S. airstrikes.<sup>22</sup> The U.S. government reports only five civilian casualties. According to the independent monitoring group Airwars, however, U.S. actions in 31 separate incidents are estimated to have caused 72 to 145 civilian deaths since 2007, with most occurring in the past three years.<sup>23</sup> These tragedies feed the conflict the U.S. government purports it is trying to end.

U.S. counterterrorism efforts in Somalia have warped U.S. policy within the region. As the uneasy guarantors of AMISOM's manpower, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya are frequently given passes on other foreign policy concerns in return for staying the course with the Somalia security mission. Uganda, for example, is one of the United States' most important military partners on the continent and, as such, routinely escapes consequences for its destabilizing behavior. Security forces that the U.S. has long trained and equipped have helped President Yoweri Museveni retain power for three decades through brutal oppression of political opposition. In 2014, U.S. efforts to punish Uganda in response to a law criminalizing homosexuality were limited and short-lived, reinforcing the primacy of the

Figure 3: **Insurgent Violence in Somalia, 2012 – 2019**

Year	Incidents	Civilians Killed	Civilians Injured
2012	76	217	388
2013	40	136	272
2014	41	84	203
2015	41	205	246
2016	78	315	511
2017	81	816	731
2018	96	317	508
2019	76	317	615

Source: Explosive Violence Monitoring Project [explosiveviolencedata.com](http://explosiveviolencedata.com). These numbers reflect numbers of total violent incidents, civilian deaths, and civilian injuries in Somalia, less the numbers of incidents and civilian casualties from U.S. action. Not all of the violent incidents have been confirmed to be perpetrated by al-Shabaab, but many of the non-attributed attacks were likely perpetrated by al-Shabaab. For example, this data does not attribute the October 14, 2017 attack to al-Shabaab because al-Shabaab did not claim it, though it is widely believed to have been perpetrated by al-Shabaab. Other non-attributed attacks are believed to be perpetrated by criminal elements that operate freely within the wider atmosphere of insecurity and poor governance.



African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peacekeepers from Burundi patrol after fighting between insurgents and government soldiers erupted on the outskirts of Mogadishu, Somalia, May 22, 2012. REUTERS/Feisal Omar

counterterror mission over all other interests. Similarly, the United States has turned a blind eye to the destabilizing acts of Uganda's military in South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The result of the longstanding international intervention in Somalia has been at best a messy security stalemate. After more than a decade of robust U.S. military support and assistance, the Somali National Army is nowhere close to becoming an effective fighting force. AMISOM has deemed even the limited goal of creating a security cocoon around Mogadishu as remaining out of reach.<sup>24</sup> A recent uptick in U.S. airstrikes failed to improve the security situation, as al-Shabaab has responded with stubbornly persistent insurgent violence. In October 2017, two truck bombs killed almost 600 people, and a bomb in December 2019 killed almost 80. Al-Shabaab can still strike targets inside the heavily fortified Mogadishu International Airport complex, which houses diplomatic facilities and residences; it hit the UN compound twice in 2019.<sup>25</sup> A suicide bomber killed the mayor of Mogadishu in his office in 2019, demonstrating al-Shabaab's continued ability to infiltrate the government.<sup>26</sup> The attack on January 5, 2020 on a U.S. base in Kenya confirmed al-Shabaab's continued ability to strike outside Somalia's borders. On August 17 of this year, at least 16 people were killed in an attack on a beachside hotel in Mogadishu. The U.S. approach to Somalia has changed little through all of this.

U.S. and AMISOM military action was supposed to have created space and time for the leadership in Mogadishu to pursue the hard work of institution-building and governance. Instead, Somalia's political elites have for years used U.S. assistance as cover to pursue their own political and financial ends. Transparency International has repeatedly named Somalia the most corrupt country in the world due to personal appropriation of foreign assistance by

politicians and businesspeople.<sup>27</sup> While external military actors continue to prop up the federal government, it has failed to hold up its end of the deal by building up a properly functioning country, choosing to focus instead on internal political battles with rivals in Mogadishu and the Federal Member States. Government services are still almost nonexistent, and marginalized communities remain excluded from political and economic systems. The country's powerful and privileged elites are beneficiaries of a security economy in which even al-Shabaab remains active, colluding with at least some of the very parties the United States and other international partners generously support in a fight against them.<sup>28</sup>

While senior AFRICOM officials have raised concerns that al-Shabaab, which became an al-Qaeda affiliate in 2012, is a real threat to U.S. interests in the region and at home,<sup>29</sup> the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency has assessed that al-Shabaab poses only "a low threat to the U.S. homeland."<sup>30</sup> Its record, unlike al-Qaeda's, demonstrates that Somalia is its primary focus, with attacks beyond its borders specifically directed to the countries currently attacking it inside Somalia. This suggests that reducing U.S. military engagement would lower al-Shabaab's threat to U.S. interests.

Even if state-building in Somalia were deemed essential to U.S. national security interests, this military-led approach has not worked. While it aims to support progress toward a functioning democracy, it has instead eclipsed the diplomatic and development efforts that might have facilitated those ends. A policy centered on droning al-Shabaab into submission also fails to account for the fact that the group is motivated by opposition to foreign invasion and the poor governance that foreign forces continue to prop up. Unless the objective is to play whack-a-mole in Somalia forever, America's military-led policy in Somalia has failed.

## VI. Defining the Endgame and Working toward It

America has a terrorism problem in Somalia in large part because America has overplayed its hand. Doubling down on the counterterrorism campaign that helped fuel its enemy there is not the answer. Not only is the U.S. military unable to solve Somalia's instability; it may well be contributing to instability at significant cost and risk. Civilian deaths from U.S. strikes are on the rise,<sup>31</sup> and the impact of an increasing number of airstrikes on local conflict dynamics is unknown. Expanding lethal activity into Kenya would only increase the uncertainty of this impact. The goal should instead be ending military intervention as responsibly as possible and shifting the focus of engagement to cultivating civilian capacities to encourage better governance.

### *What are U.S. interests in Somalia?*

Establishing an appropriate strategy in Somalia first requires articulating the national interests that this strategy is meant to promote. The most obvious U.S. national security interests in Somalia are preventing attacks on Americans and American property — the embassies in the region, citizens, and, of course, the homeland — and, to a measured extent, preventing attacks on U.S. partners in the region, based on our common interests with those countries. Somalia's strategic location for trade also factors into these determinations. Ensuring the safe transit of commercial ships through the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean is valuable for the U.S. and global economies. Beyond these core goals, however, U.S. interests in Somalia are more difficult to articulate and quantify. AFRICOM has taken a turn at doing so, but our national security interests as defined by the Department of Defense are so broad and all-encompassing as to justify any level of military intervention — which goes a long way in explaining the current status of U.S. engagement in Somalia.

The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review asserted that “preventing conflict, stabilizing crises, and building security sector capacity are essential elements of America's national security approach.”<sup>32</sup> This applies broadly to concerns about the “acute risk” to U.S. national security posed by failed states, ungoverned spaces, and other potential safe havens for terrorists.<sup>33</sup> These risk factors are certainly evident in Somalia, but what specifically does that justify in terms of U.S. commitment, cost, and risk? This question remains open so long as our military engagement remains beyond scrutiny. A stable and democratic Somali state, while desirable, is not inherently essential to U.S. national security, so it should not be pursued at any cost. For example, an international antipiracy coalition managed to bring piracy in the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean into check by 2017 with little help from Somali authorities, even as insecurity within Somalia persisted. Fixing the Somali state was not a prerequisite for addressing this international trade imperative. The U.S. must continue to track direct threats to the homeland, but U.S. military activities in Somalia have long exceeded that scope, quite possibly creating more targets than they have defeated. The U.S. military should be able to justify its actions on that basis, explaining what is in it for the American people and why the cost and risk are worthwhile.

If the Defense Department defines U.S. national security interests in Somalia according to the broad target of “preventing conflict, stabilizing crises, and building security sector capacity,” the U.S. military is surely dug in for an endless war. There is limited evidence that U.S. military intervention to date has made any progress toward these

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Policemen carry the dead body of Somalia's assistant labor minister Saqar Ibrahim Abdala who was killed when al-Shabaab militia stormed a government building in Mogadishu, Somalia, March 23, 2019. REUTERS/Feisal Omar

professed goals. Indeed, by propping up a poorly performing government rife with corruption, the United States may well be extending what is essentially a civil war within the country by focusing on a goal that U.S. military and civilian leaders have deemed unachievable: the military defeat of al-Shabaab. Without greater scrutiny of the connections between our military actions, our national interests, and the target outcomes of our intervention in Somalia, we cannot be certain the United States isn't doing more harm than good and that our investment and risk exposure does not exceed what is justified by the national interest we are pursuing there.

The United States should instead focus on specific and attainable goals pursued through an intervention that is commensurate with the level of U.S. national interests involved. Rather than pursuing an endless military campaign against al-Shabaab, the U.S. should look at other options for ending the conflict using resources that are less risky and costly than military action. This would involve not only changing goals but also restructuring engagement by putting civilian leadership in charge of a holistic foreign policy strategy that considers the impact and consequences of U.S. action and support beyond the narrow counterterrorism lens. This shift in focus could foster the stability our military engagement failed to bring and provide a new playbook for how to approach counterterrorism on the continent without stumbling into war with no foreseeable endgame. If the United States does not succeed in doing so, however, it would fail at less cost and less risk than the current approach, since diplomatic and development undertakings are far less costly and less likely to risk aggravating or expanding violent conflict than is military intervention.

This approach would not necessarily guarantee the facilitation of a functioning and democratic Somali state, but the military-led strategy has already proven it is unable to do so. Such an outcome would be attractive, but it is not essential to U.S. national security interests in the region, and guaranteeing it is beyond the capacity of the United States anyway. Accordingly, the United States needs to launch a new civilian-led strategy in Somalia that aligns the investment, cost, and risk of our intervention to the national interests involved.

### *Redefining priorities and approaches*

The war against al-Shabaab will not be won until the Somali government has greater local credibility, provides services, and earns the trust of the Somali people. The critical obstacles to progress are endemic corruption, weak governance, and crippling political infighting. These obstacles not only impact the country's fight against al-Shabaab, which remains a threat to the government; they also undermine the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Where U.S. military efforts have fallen short, other U.S. foreign policy efforts could prove beneficial, without the associated risk of potentially adding fuel to the fire. Military action can create space for this to happen, but it can't bring about these results. Political and governance problems need political and governance solutions.

The Global Fragility Act of 2019 provides a possible framework for this approach. It aims to establish the first comprehensive U.S. government approach to preventing violence and instability by addressing the conditions that allow violence to thrive. The law puts the State Department in the lead on diplomatic and political matters and the U.S. Agency for International Development in charge of development and humanitarian matters, while specifying that the Defense Department will provide support as needed.<sup>34</sup> This approach should be the path and structure for a reevaluation of U.S. policy toward Somalia. A rebalancing of U.S. foreign affairs expenditures in a meaningful way will be necessary, too, though even that will not be sufficient. The new approach devised for U.S. policy in Somalia must make clear that military assistance and action will be applied in support of, and contingent on, real governance and political progress and

under the guidance of civilian leadership in the embassy. This approach should entail giving civilian U.S. leaders the authority to wield U.S. assistance in support of these outcomes. For example, progress on finalizing a constitution that specifies power sharing and revenue sharing between the central government and the states, as well as an electoral system that aligns with the representative system the central government has promised its people, can be milestones set for the provision of certain assistance. The United States must also effectively communicate this shift in priorities to the Somali government if it hopes to move it toward greater attention to these issues. The United States cannot command or force the federal government or the Federal Member States to agree to these kinds of provisions on America's timeline, nor should it try to. Diplomatic intervention is a tool of persuasion. Progress will ultimately depend on Somalia's political leaders, but the United States has control over its assistance and can choose to end that assistance if it proves ineffective or fails to promote U.S. interests.

To address these imperatives effectively, priority should be given to diplomatic pressure and engagement over military action. The outsized influence that military leaders command over political dimensions of U.S. policy has left U.S. civilian foreign policymakers outranked and out-resourced in Somalia by a large margin. This disparity has facilitated the military-driven approach to U.S. engagement that has been unnecessarily risky, expensive, and ineffective. An important part of successfully implementing a broader civilian-led strategy will be staffing that reflects clearly that civilians are empowered and in the lead. The U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu must be headed by an ambassador with weight and experience sufficient to lead policymaking at the table with four-star generals. However, until the White House and Congress prioritize a civilian agenda, even the most experienced ambassador will lack the resources and influence to direct policy.

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*'A stable and democratic Somali state, while desirable, is not inherently essential to U.S. national security, so it should not be pursued at any cost.'*

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With the U.S. Mission operating out of Nairobi for the past several decades, the recent reopening of a permanent diplomatic presence in Mogadishu provides an opportunity for the next ambassador to ensure U.S.–Somalia policy is civilian–led, if she or he receives sufficient support from Washington. The ambassador is the lead U.S. official in the country, and military leadership needs openly to support and respect that. If the U.S. military respects that the mission is civilian–led, and demonstrates this, the Somali government is more likely to do so as well. Diplomats and development professionals representing the United States also require security and logistical support sufficient to facilitate expeditionary diplomacy under challenging security conditions. They must be able to routinely travel and engage officials at the national and state levels outside the Mogadishu International Airport Compound and frequently beyond Mogadishu into the five Federal Member States. Even with the U.S. Embassy reestablished in Somalia in 2019, U.S. diplomats remain prohibited by U.S. government policy from traveling outside the compound into Mogadishu and are the only foreign diplomats so restricted.

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*‘If the Defense Department defines U.S. national security interests in Somalia according to the broad target of preventing conflict, stabilizing crises, and building security sector capacity, the U.S. military is surely dug in for an endless war.’*

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Redirecting military support to enable diplomatic activity of this kind could be one effective method of demonstrating the importance of political and civilian engagement and progress. This outcome requires political support on both sides of the aisle in Washington, since civilian foreign policy engagement has been the unfortunate casualty of domestic political battles ever since the Benghazi attacks in 2012. The State Department will need assurances and resources to overcome what has become a counterproductive level of risk aversion in diplomatic pursuits. This undermines our ability to engage more robustly in challenging diplomatic activities. The embassy must be sufficiently staffed to pursue this policy agenda effectively and given the support needed to execute it in the field.

Somalia’s current political stalemate makes clear certain foundational priorities for such enhanced diplomatic engagement. The central government has still failed to establish the basic structure of the federal–state relationship. Without greater cooperation between Mogadishu and Federal Member State leaders, Somalia will be unable to reach agreement on a final constitution, which is essential to assign roles and responsibilities at the state, national, and local levels, to frame the government’s branches, and to establish a security

structure. Overcoming political competition and persuading these leaders to work together is critical for securing a stable and functioning Somalia. Not only could it encourage more predictable governance; it could also lay the groundwork for collaborative efforts between the center and the states to work together against a common enemy. If the United States and other international partners were to prioritize negotiations between Mogadishu and the states, diplomatic pressure could be brought to bear to better facilitate negotiations. Progress has been stymied by political competition and an unwillingness on both sides to compromise, though perhaps most stubbornly by the federal government. The Federal Government of Somalia currently offers little concrete benefit to the stronger and better functioning states, some of which retain territorial and security control that the central government lacks, but Mogadishu has been emboldened by continued international support. Making that international support more contingent on compromise with the states could help break the deadlock. U.S. diplomats would need to convince not only the FGS but also neighboring Ethiopia and Kenya, whose backing of rival Somali leaders has intensified domestic divisions, that this is a priority area in urgent need of resolution.<sup>35</sup>

Negotiating a resolution between the central government and the states would lay the groundwork for pursuing many other benchmarks and metrics for progress toward a more stable nation, including improved service delivery and accommodating marginalized communities. It could also facilitate a more promising approach to ending the al-Shabaab insurgency. In accepting that military victory against al-Shabaab is not achievable, the U.S. should adjust its goal to ending the violence through political reconciliation.<sup>36</sup> While military efforts can be utilized to help promote that goal, diplomacy will be the primary mechanism for these negotiations, as well as those between the FGS and the states. This approach as a whole will require a pivot to prioritizing civilian foreign policy tools over military ones.

A stronger emphasis on diplomacy can push the government to take steps toward progress on these priorities, and development assistance can help build the human capacity needed for the government to get things done and help fund and deliver key services. But international partners must also accept that these outcomes are achievable only with political will in the government they are assisting. When assistance not only fails to make progress toward those goals but also helps perpetuate conflict by propping up a government that chooses not to address them, donors should be prepared to reduce engagement and assistance, military and otherwise, to avoid making a situation worse or more entrenched. For the United States, this means always recognizing the limitations of its national security interests, regularly reevaluating efforts to promote these interests, and adjusting activity and engagement accordingly.

### ***Redirecting assistance: carrots and sticks***

The U.S. should work toward a clear end to military intervention, but a responsible withdrawal period could leverage military assistance to promote political and governance priorities. Lacking the weight and influence of U.S. military assistance, diplomatic and development efforts to steer the FGS to address governance and political controversies have thus far fallen short. In addition to reinforcing diplomatic capacity in Somalia, conditioning sought-after military support could also help incentivize positive developments in these areas.<sup>37</sup> In a country such as Somalia, where U.S. assistance is already robust, this would require a recalibration. A strong diplomatic effort could help frame this approach as a positive joint effort associated with a broader pursuit of shared objectives, so as to incentivize positive actions rather than punish harmful ones. The plan should lay out clearly identifiable conditions at the outset along with ultimate objectives and achievable intermediate milestones. Mogadishu should participate in negotiating the roadmap for how certain reform benchmarks can unlock military assistance, building in joint ownership and ensuring that compliance benefits U.S. and Somali interests alike.<sup>38</sup>



Somali government soldiers pay their respects next to the flag-draped casket of Mogadishu Mayor Abdirahman Omar Osman, who died after a suicide bomb attack in his offices in August 2019. REUTERS/Feisal Omar

Relevant milestones could include transparency and accountability actions within the security sector, such as publishing budgets, completing audits, and investigating waste and diversion.<sup>39</sup> But an improved security sector should not be the primary goal, given the understanding that broader governance shortcomings remain a greater obstacle to a more stable Somalia. This assistance can and should be used to encourage broader governance and

political goals, too. Some critics would contend that conditioning military support will only lead Mogadishu to look elsewhere, since many other countries provide military assistance in Somalia, but the United States offers some incentives that the central government particularly values, including training for the Somali National Army's special forces unit, Danab, and — perhaps the assistance the FGS favors most — airstrikes against al-Shabaab.

Military assistance is not the only leverage the United States holds to press for more effective government action. Development assistance, democracy programs, and high-level diplomatic engagement can all be utilized to encourage more positive steps by the FGS and state leaders. With less U.S. focus on or guarantee of military support, the FGS might feel pressure to get more out of development assistance, and U.S. officials would be at liberty to take these tools more seriously, too. The United States is also Somalia's largest creditor and has a significant role in deciding how potential debt relief will flow.<sup>40</sup> This is another strong leverage point that the United States could use in negotiating a comprehensive, conditioned assistance plan that lays out mutual goals and identifiable milestones that work toward improved institutions, greater inclusion, and overall enhanced legitimacy of the FGS.

Finally, the United States must be ready to follow through with its commitments and conditions — to provide the agreed support when milestones are reached and to withhold it when Mogadishu falls short. Crucially, this requires an understanding of the limited nature of U.S. national security interests in the country. Leverage is only as effective as the intent of its holder to use it.

### ***Ending our military intervention***

The ultimate leverage point in a country that relies heavily on U.S. military support, such as Somalia does, is to ensure that support is not open-ended. If the FGS believes America's military presence is permanent and that the airstrikes keeping al-Shabaab sufficiently at bay will continue indefinitely, its leaders have less incentive and will feel little urgency to do the hard work and make the political compromises necessary to build an effective government. Instead, they can put their energy into personal political battles that bring no relief to the Somali people. This is why a holistic assistance plan based on incentives must be time-bound. An FGS that knows it cannot stand alone against the threat of al-Shabaab will be far more motivated to work toward a point where it is able to do so if it knows that its guarantor has limits. However, a drawdown presents its own challenges; so the allowed time period should be responsible, providing the central government reasonable time to achieve milestones identified to ensure progress along the indicated trajectory. Given a high level of dependence on external security assistance, which the United States has helped perpetuate, a gradual, five-year timeline would likely be the minimum period that would allow for a responsible withdrawal and corresponding security improvements.

Setting up a realistic, time-bound plan of engagement will require an honest assessment of U.S. national security interests and of longstanding U.S. military programs in Somalia. To the extent that the Pentagon believes lethal programming to be warranted, that case should be made to Congress for specific authorization subject to oversight. An enduring military presence should require explicit justification. Whether or not the conditions are effective, the objective for the United States should be an end to military intervention. Unless continuing U.S. military engagement advances national security goals in Somalia sufficiently to justify the substantial cost and risk this entails, there is no reason to prolong that engagement indefinitely. Continued support for AMISOM should also prove an effective leverage point, though the efficacy of this support must also be routinely evaluated. A permanent AMISOM presence prolonging poor governance is no more durable or effective a strategy than a permanent U.S. presence and comes with the same broad risks of continued instability, even if with less direct risk and cost to the United States.

## VII. Risks and Criticisms: The Potential Downside of a Civilian-led Approach

Some Somalia analysts and observers fear a U.S. commitment to withdraw raises moral questions and could empower al-Shabaab,<sup>41</sup> but the military operation as it stands is not on track to defeat the group, and no plan is in place to effectively address non-security obstacles to stability. The question is whether America's ongoing military action and the risks and costs it brings are justified in a war with no endgame. Even if one cannot prove that lethal U.S. military activity is potentially contributing to Somalia's instability, one also cannot justify continued American participation if it is not protecting identifiable U.S. interests and is even creating additional risk. After all, the greatest risk to American lives and interests in Somalia is currently the risks that our continued military intervention poses by placing American lives in harm's way.

A U.S. move toward military disengagement might call into question donors' support of AMISOM as well as the commitment of countries in the region to continue contributing troops to the mission. However, if Somalia's neighbors, particularly Kenya and Ethiopia, actually deem al-Shabaab to be a risk to the region, posing a core cross-border threat, then they should remain committed to AMISOM. If they withdraw entirely, that would suggest that they do not perceive the threat to actually be reduced by the ongoing military intervention. Indeed, the threat al-Shabaab poses to other countries in the region may be driven primarily by their intervention in Somalia. Given al-Shabaab's longstanding focus on fighting foreign intervention, even if it were to resurge as international partners disengage, facilities, citizens, or the homelands of those countries would not likely be targets. Al-Shabaab works on incentive structures as well and would be loath to take action that would lead to a return of foreign military operations on Somali soil.

### ***Budgets Reflect Priorities***

*The disparity in resources the United States expends between defense on the one hand and diplomacy and development on the other is hard to overcome. The fiscal year 2020 budget requests were \$718 billion for the Defense Department and \$40 billion for the State Department and USAID combined, of which \$19 billion was foreign aid. The Defense Department employs 1.3 million military personnel on active duty, 800,000 in the reserves, 750,000 civilians, and 800,000 contractors. State, in contrast, has just 75,000 employees, of which 50,000 are locally-employed staff working for embassies and consulates across the globe. Under these circumstances, rebalancing the "three Ds" — diplomacy, development, and defense — is nearly impossible. The situation in Somalia is no different, and our support trajectory there is going in the wrong direction. The administration's fiscal year 2020 foreign aid request proposed cuts to governance, health, education, social service, and agricultural programs.*

This is not to say that neighboring countries and the United States have nothing to gain from helping to resolve the conflict through less costly and less potentially destabilizing means. That is where negotiations come in. Some foreign observers and Somalis, however, object to the very idea of negotiating with al-Shabaab for ethical reasons: Al-Shabaab has inflicted extensive harm on civilian populations through large-scale atrocities, targeted assassinations, and harsh violations of human rights in the areas it controls. Al-Shabaab is indeed a bad actor, and its insurgency has caused significant public harm. This does raise moral questions regarding the disengagement of longstanding international partners, but that is not enough to justify continuing U.S. participation in the war against al-Shabaab, particularly in the absence of a full assessment of the cost and risks America's ongoing lethal engagement itself poses, both to Americans and to exacerbating the conflict in Somalia. A commitment to helping end harm to civilians and human rights violations need not involve lethal force, and lethal force is not even necessarily the most effective approach. The ongoing insurgency has demonstrated the limits of such interventions, after all.



U.S. Army Soldiers, assigned to Task Force Guardian, 41st Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT), 1-186th Infantry Battalion, Oregon National Guard, discuss security patrol operations during a security patrol stop in Somalia. The 41st IBCT provides base security and force protection for Combined Joint Task Force–Horn of Africa personnel and partner U.S. forces deployed in Somalia. December 3, 2019. U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Nick Kibbey

With a military victory out of reach, improving the circumstances of civilians living under al-Shabaab's influence will require nonmilitary engagement, and some level of compromise. Political negotiation will be necessary to end the war.<sup>42</sup> Negotiation also offers an opportunity to peel off the less-extreme arms of the organization, which is known to have members of varying levels of commitment to the extremist mission. Concern regarding atrocities can and should be addressed by incorporating transitional justice mechanisms into any peace settlement, and human rights considerations must be incorporated into any political agreements. At the same time, questions should be raised about how ethical it is to participate in dragging out a war and attenuating the human costs associated with it, which remain substantial. If we recognize that we cannot end the war through military means, we also have a moral obligation to look for other ways to end a war we helped create.

Legal restrictions in countries such as the United States are also an obstacle to using economic tools to incentivize al-Shabaab to move toward peace. The United States designated al-Shabaab a terrorist organization in 2008. This has legal implications, including making it unlawful for anyone in the U.S. to provide material support or resources to

such an organization or for U.S. financial institutions to facilitate their financial transactions. Legal restrictions could prove obstacles to U.S. diplomats negotiating with members of al-Shabaab, but these can and should be removed, at least conditionally, once talks have begun to progress.<sup>43</sup> Incentives in a negotiation context might include the provision of material support, whether for individual members who defect so as to bring portions of the organization to peace, or for the organization as a whole. Under the Immigration and Nationality Act, the Secretary of State can revoke the terrorist designation if it is in the U.S. national security interest to do so.<sup>44</sup> This tool could be used to encourage al-Shabaab to commit to refraining from terrorist attacks during a negotiation period.

In U.S. foreign policy circles, proposals to reduce military activity in Africa are often interpreted as arguments for overall disengagement, but the U.S. military often is not our most effective tool for engagement. Finding ways to facilitate nonmilitary strategies and set a new direction for success will require changing a prevailing assumption that anything other than military engagement is a weaker choice. The military drawdown proposed should be replaced with far greater diplomatic and development engagement, shifting the nature of the intervention and reducing its overall cost and risk.

This framing also applies to concerns about great power competition in the region. China has not only increased its arms sales in Africa but also its diplomatic presence. China now has 52 embassies across the continent, compared with the United States' 49. Maintaining influence on the continent is a valid undertaking. Diplomatic representation is a sign of normal relations and generally facilitates information sharing and cooperation. It can also serve a wide range of U.S. goals, whether in facilitating support on multilateral engagements, encouraging stability and prosperity in the host country, or enabling resolution of crises involving American citizens. Such influence need not be military to promote U.S. interests, and nonmilitary undertakings are far less likely to drag the U.S. inadvertently into conflicts. Engagement should be focused not on the heaviest footprint but the most effective.

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*'The military drawdown should be replaced with far greater diplomatic and development engagement.'*

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### ***Enhanced congressional oversight***

Any discussion of effective use of military tools would be incomplete without addressing the need for much greater congressional oversight, particularly over the missions executed by Special Operations Forces. The traditional military services have two centuries of history and the tradition and discipline that comes with it. Special Operations Forces, on the other hand, serve with far less scrutiny and oversight. In 2005, Congress authorized SOF to support foreign and irregular forces engaged in operations to combat terrorism, and in 2016 it made this program permanent law.<sup>45</sup> As noted above, these activities are classified, so little is publicly known about their scope, type, or impact, and they escape the multiple layers of oversight Congress requires of all other assistance programs. Such activities incur a high risk of inadvertently harming innocent communities, facilitating abusive security-sector behavior, or drawing U.S. forces into direct combat. Congress has recently enacted greater transparency and oversight measures regarding civilian casualties, but it should conduct much greater oversight to ensure U.S. security cooperation is more broadly accountable, not only regarding what U.S. forces do but also what is done by those foreign forces the U.S. military supports. Harm to civilian communities, whether committed by U.S. forces or home-government forces, can feed extremist narratives that undermine government legitimacy in the eyes of that government's people.<sup>46</sup>

The SOF program to support state and non-state armed groups is in dire need of greater oversight and transparency. The House of Representatives version of the Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, still in final conference with the Senate bill at the time of writing, calls for a comprehensive review of that authority. This review is a badly needed step toward greater transparency and would support an assessment as to whether these operations have been effective in promoting national security goals from a holistic rather than narrowly military point of view.<sup>47</sup> Greater scrutiny of the impact and risks inherent in these small-war activities could make a sound case for prioritizing a diplomacy-forward approach.

## VIII. Conclusion

U.S. foreign policy debates have reached a point such that drawing down military presence must be justified while perpetuating military activity need not be. As a result, inertia fuels counterterrorism missions that are ineffective in achieving their purpose at the best of times and undermine their purpose at others. The imbalance in U.S. foreign policy in Somalia favoring and facilitating the use of military over diplomatic muscle is a reflection of a larger imbalance in U.S. foreign policy globally. Enhancing the focus on and investment in diplomacy and development, while decreasing and ultimately ending military interventions would better align the costs and risks of U.S. interventions with U.S. national security interests. This approach could also lay the groundwork for a rebalance of U.S. policy in Africa more broadly, toward greater reliance on civilian foreign policy tools and less reflexive use of risky and costly military ones. It should start with more scrutiny and oversight over counterterrorism missions, particularly those of Special Operations Forces, and more resources and empowerment for diplomacy. It is time for a new, civilian-led approach. Maybe it doesn't guarantee a more stable Somalia, but neither does the status quo. This shift could help bring stability and peace to Somalia, and the lessons learned could help extricate the United States from dozens of ineffective counterterrorism operations elsewhere.

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37 Negative conditionality — ending assistance as a result of specific actions by the recipient — is required by several laws relating to foreign assistance, including the “Leahy Law” first passed in 1998, which prohibits the provision of military assistance to foreign security forces that violate human rights with impunity, and the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs appropriations legislation, which restricts foreign assistance following a military coup. Negative conditionality has proven ineffective for several reasons. Often, the U.S. interest in continuing military assistance prevails and results in weak or non-enforcement of these laws. As a result, their deterrent effect has been minimal, and even where such conditions have been invoked, they have not typically led to improved partner behavior. The U.S. Institute for Peace Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States has suggested that positive conditionality might be more promising, including utilizing graduated security-sector assistance, with assistance calibrated according to a jointly agreed plan that provides escalating levels of support as partners achieve reform milestones towards more inclusive governance. Tommy Ross and Melissa Dalton. “A Roadmap for Better Choices from Security Partners.” War on the Rocks. January 17, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/01/a-roadmap-for-better-choices-from-security-partners/>.

The full Task Force report can be found here: <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/preventing-extremism-in-fragile-states-a-new-approach.pdf>

38 Dalton, Melissa. “Smart Conditions: A Strategic Framework for Leveraging Security Assistance.” Center for Strategic and International Studies. 21.

39 Ross and Dalton; Federal Republic of Somalia. Office of the Auditor General. “Consolidated Compliance Audit Report from the Office of the Inspector General.” June 30, 2019. <http://oag.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Consolidated-Compliance-Audit-Report-2018-Security-Sector.pdf>

40 Williams. “Understanding U.S. Policy in Somalia: Current Challenges and Future Options.” 10.

41 Williams. “Understanding U.S. Policy in Somalia Current Challenges and Future Options.” 23. Williams argues for continuity of U.S. military engagement but accompanied with significantly greater diplomatic and political engagement to pursue the two sets of negotiations discussed above – negotiations between the FGS and the federated states and negotiations between the FGS and al-Shabaab. He offers a good description of how such negotiations could be conducted. Williams raises concern that rapid military disengagement would undermine the operational effectiveness of AMISOM and the Somali army and that the FGS would then be less able to withstand sustained al-Shabaab assaults. He also suggests it raises moral issues due to sunk costs and sacrifices already made by partner forces.

42 Civil wars offer three potential outcomes: decisive victory, negotiated settlement, or ongoing violence. Negotiated settlements have been less common since September 11 due to an unwillingness to negotiate with organizations designated as terrorists, and expansive views of terrorism in this period have led the United States to deem any insurgent group that used terrorist tactics as a terrorist organization equivalent to al-Qaeda. It is arguable that this approach has not only impeded resolution of certain conflicts but could also be exacerbating them. Prior to its designation as a terrorist group, al-Shabaab had conducted attacks only in Somalia. See Jason Hartwig. “How to End the Civil War in Somalia: Negotiate with al-Shabaab.” War on the Rocks. May 13, 2019. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/05/how-to-end-the-civil-war-in-somalia-negotiate-with-al-shabaab/>

43 Williams. “Understanding U.S. Policy in Somalia: Current Challenges and Future Options.” 20.

44 Congressional Research Service. “Foreign Terrorist Organization.” January 15, 2019. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/terror/IF10613.pdf>

45 This program is codified in Title 10 U.S. Code Section 127e. See Lora Lumpe and Jacob Marx. “Congress must know about special operations before tragedy strikes.” *The Hill*. October 31, 2017. <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/357862-congress-must-know-about-special-operations-before-tragedy-strikes>

46 Mahanty. 5.

47 Ross. “House and Senate Chart Different Courses on US Clandestine Support of Foreign Militias.”

## X. About the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft

*America “goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy.” — John Quincy Adams*

The foreign policy of the United States has become detached from any defensible conception of U.S. interests and from a decent respect for the rights and dignity of humankind. Political leaders have increasingly deployed the military in a costly, counterproductive, and indiscriminate manner, normalizing war and treating armed dominance as an end in itself.

Moreover, much of the foreign policy community in Washington has succumbed to intellectual lethargy and dysfunction. It suppresses or avoids serious debate and fails to hold policymakers and commentators accountable for disastrous policies. It has forfeited the confidence of the American public. The result is a foreign policy that undermines American interests and tramples on American values while sacrificing the stores of influence that the United States had earned.

The Quincy Institute is an action-oriented think tank whose intent is to lay the foundation for a new foreign policy centered on diplomatic engagement and military restraint. The current, rare moment presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring together like-minded progressives and conservatives and set U.S. foreign policy on a sensible and humane footing. Our intent is to seize this opportunity while it lies before us. Our country’s current circumstances demand it.

QI is committed to improving the standards for think tank transparency and potential conflict of interest avoidance. QI’s conflict of interest policy can be viewed on <https://quincyinst.org/coi/>.



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