Gasoline on the Fire: Withdraw From Somalia

By Emmanuel Huang (with material by Katherine Baker)

***Resolved: The United States federal government should considerably decrease its military commitments.***

Case Summary: The US has direct military involvement in Somalia, trying to reduce the effectiveness of the terrorist group Al-Shabab. But US involvement only fuels the fire. Al-Shabab derives its support by recruiting from people angry about foreign intervention in their country and by the excesses and abuses of the US-backed Somali government that uses harsh measures to crack down. The net result is that our counter-terrorism efforts are only making things worse. Whatever happens after we pull out, it won’t be worse and will likely be better than what we’re supporting now.  
  
**UPDATE: This plan went into effect within 24 hours of its set release. It is now the status quo. Since the Stoa resolution is uni-directional, meaning we can only "reduce" as Affirmative, the case cannot be inverted. We will keep this plan published for our Monument Member Archives, but this Somalia plan must be abandoned as affirming the Season 21 Stoa resolution.**

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The tragic loss of life in the US military raid in Somalia in 1993 was memorialized in the movie “Black Hawk Down.” Pres. Clinton wisely withdrew US forces after realizing our intervention in that chaotic country was causing more harm than good. Subsequent presidents have forgotten that history and, as the saying goes, are doomed to repeat it. Please join us in affirming that: The United States Federal Government should considerably reduce its military commitments.

OBSERVATION 1. DEFINITIONS

Considerable

Merriam Webster Online Dictionary copyright 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/considerably>

1**:**worth consideration:SIGNIFICANT

Military

Merriam Webster Online Dictionary copyright 2020 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/military>

b**:**of or relating to armed forces

Commitment

Merriam Webster Online Dictionary copyright 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/commitment>

c**:**the state or an instance of being obligated or emotionally [impelled](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/impel)

OBSERVATION 1. INHERENCY, the structure of the Status Quo.

FACT 1. US Presence in Somalia

A. US military presence in Somalia to fight al-Shabab

Caitlin Vito, 2018. (Research Analyst with the Conflict, Security and Development Programme at the International Institute for Strategic Studies; principal Armed Conflict Database analyst for Somalia and monitors developments in Ethiopia.) “Shifting US counter-terrorism strategy plays out in the Horn of Africa” 29 June 2018. <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2018/06/us-counter-terrorism-strategy-horn-of-africa> (Parenthesis in original)

The US has a longstanding counter-terrorism presence in Somalia focused on rooting out al-Shabaab, an Islamist extremist group that poses a serious threat to the country’s weak central government. [**END QUOTE**]The Pentagon has stated that denying al-Shabaab a ‘safe haven’ is critical to mitigating potential attacks against the US or its citizens. The stability of Somalia and the region also affects US economic and energy interests, as the neighbouring Bab-el Mandeb Strait is a critical chokepoint for international energy flows and trade. The Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, is also a threat in Somalia, and in November 2017 the US launched its first airstrike against the group in the country. [**THEY GO ON TO SAY LATER IN THE CONTEXT QUOTE**:] The US counter-terrorism strategy also relies on US special operations forces to train and advise the Somali military in joint operations with African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) forces.

B. 650 to 800 US troops in Somalia

Diana Stancy Correll, 2020 (news reporter for the Washington Examiner; graduate of Elon University) March 17, 2020 “AFRICOM predicts mission training Somalia’s ‘Lightning Brigade’ will last until 2027” <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2020/03/17/africom-predicts-mission-training-somalias-lightning-bridgade-will-last-until-2027/>

Across the entire African continent, the Department of Defense has approximately 6,000 personnel. There are between 650 to 800 U.S. troops in Somalia at any given time.

FACT 2. Airstrikes

US is ramping up airstrikes in Somalia

Daphne Eviatar 2020 (Director of the Security with Human Rights Program at Amnesty International USA ; graduate of Columbia Univ. Graduate School of Journalism, New York Univ School of Law and Dartmouth College) “US Ramps Up War in Somalia, Killing More Civilians”, April 20, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/69705/us-ramps-up-war-in-somalia-killing-more-civilians/>

Soon after President Donald Trump took office in 2017, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) began ramping up its air war. Since then, it’s only increased its tempo. In the first few months of 2020, the U.S. has already conducted at least 39 airstrikes in Somalia. To put that in perspective, AFRICOM carried out 63 air strikes during the entirety of 2019.

OBSERVATION 2. HARMS.

HARM 1. Civilian Casualties

US combat operations have caused thousands of civilian deaths

Prof. Catherine L. Besteman, 2019. (professor of Anthropology at Colby College.) September 5, 2019, “The Costs of War in Somalia” <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/Costs%20of%20War%20in%20Somalia_Besteman.pdf>

Although the United States has not formally declared war in Somalia and the US Congress has not formally approved US military engagements in Somalia, US intervention in Somalia has rapidly expanded under the Trump Administration. US airstrikes against the Somali terrorist group known as Al-Shabaab have skyrocketed, from between 15 and 21 drone strikes and other covert operations in Somalia during the period from 2007-2014 to a record high of 46 strikes in 2018 alone, which killed 326 people, to an astonishing 24 strikes in just the first two months of 2019, killing at least 252 people. Recent reports suggest other entities, such as the CIA, are also carrying out an unknown number of additional airstrikes, and the US currently has about 500 troops, mostly Special Operations, stationed in Somalia. According to a recent investigation by Amnesty International and a subsequent review by AFRICOM, the United States Africa Command, some of the US airstrikes have killed civilians. Tens of thousands of Somalis have fled areas targeted by air strikes, crowding into miserable displaced persons camps outside Mogadishu. Civilians who have lost family members or been injured by strikes have no recourse, and there is no accountability for those carrying out the strikes. In short, without a formal declaration or any particular acknowledgement or interest from the US Congress, a war is being waged in Somalia.

HARM 2: Costs exceed benefits

A. High costs. US operations in Somalia has high financial cost

Prof. Catherine L. Besteman, 2019. (professor of Anthropology at Colby College.) September 5, 2019, “The Costs of War in Somalia” <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/Costs%20of%20War%20in%20Somalia_Besteman.pdf> (Brackets added)

The financial costs of waging a non-war in Somalia include the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars per year by foreign governments to support AMISOM [African Union Mission to Somalia], including over a billion from the EU from 2007-201616 and almost a billion by the US since 2007, in addition to $720 million for the UN office that assists the army. International funding for AMISOM rose from $350 million in 2007 to $900 million a year in 2016. The funding total for US operations in Somalia, including the airstrikes, is unknown.

B. No benefit. US military intervention produces no benefit

Prof. Elizabeth Schmidt 2019 (professor emeritus of history at Loyola University Maryland and the author of six books about Africa) A Progressive Foreign Policy for Africa, Dec 2019 <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2019/12/progressive-foreign-policy-africa-libya-somalia>

What can we learn from Libya, Somalia, and the recent history of other African countries? **[END QUOTE**] Most important, contrary to popular US stereotypes, religion and ethnicity are not the root causes of African conflicts. Deeper structural inequalities are at work: poverty, underdevelopment, and the devastating impact of climate change. The encroaching desert in Darfur (western Sudan), which has pitted herders against farmers in the struggle for water and usable land; governmental neglect and the drying up of Lake Chad, which sparked the Boko Haram insurgency in northeastern Nigeria; and the destruction of the fishing industry by foreign trawlers, which led to piracy off the coast of Somalia and contributed to conflict elsewhere, are cases in point. Since the early 1990s, African pro-democracy movements have demanded better education, employment, health care, clean water, sanitation, electricity, and roads, along with programs to rehabilitate rank-and-file fighters and counter future violent extremism. They have insisted on the need for responsive, democratic governments that respect the rule of law, eliminate corruption, and address climate change, pollution, and the inequitable distribution of resources. They have called for an end to harsh counterinsurgency campaigns and to the impunity of military and police personnel who have engaged in human rights abuses. History has shown that there will be no peace if these underlying grievances are not addressed, domestic and foreign militaries continue to victimize local populations, and dysfunctional states fail to provide basic services. These concerns are long-standing, and there are no easy fixes or short-term solutions. Fundamental political, economic, and social transformations will take decades.  
The Basis of a Progressive US Africa Policy  
[**SHE GOES ON TO SAY LATER IN THE SAME CONTEXT QUOTE:]** The first step in framing a progressive and effective US Africa policy is to determine what does not work. Past interventions have been deeply flawed and often counterproductive. The seduction of quick military fixes has left policymakers blind to underlying political, economic, and social grievances. And in the aftermath of military campaigns, the powers that be have rarely addressed the deeply rooted local problems that sparked the conflicts in the first place. Counterterrorism operations have been especially catastrophic. Government actions in insurgent areas have brutalized civilians, and externally directed drone and missile strikes have killed countless unarmed non-combatants. Rather than improving the situation on the ground, such encounters have, in some instances, increased local support for reactionary insurgencies. Foreign-led victories over guerrilla fighters have generally been short-lived. Scattered by powerful military forces, insurgents have tended to regroup in new areas and shift their tactics to focus on soft targets, placing civilians at even greater risk.

HARM 3. Gasoline on the Fire. Intervention fuels our enemies and makes things worse. We have 2 sub-points:

A. The Link: Military escalation to fight Al-Shabab ends up strengthening them by resentment of our outside intervention

Dr. Stephanie Savell, 2019. (PhD; anthropologist of militarism, security, and civic engagement co-director of Brown University's renowned Costs of War Project.) “When is America going to end its shadow war in Somalia?”, The Guardian, Sept. 5, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/05/ilhan-omar-send-her-back-somalia-us-foreign-policy>

Al-Shabaab is not just a terrorist group in the sense of a group that commits violence against civilians, it is also a local resistance movement against foreign interventionism. The US has played a significant role in Somali politics for decades, starting in the 1970s supporting Somalia’s brutal dictator, Siad Barre, during the cold war, and later attempting ineffectually to rebuild the collapsed state. In 1993, when the infamous Black Hawk Down incident occurred, the US military withdrew from Somalia after a local militia group shot down an American helicopter that was going after its leaders. After 9/11, however, the US once more began conducting military operations in Somalia; as the report states: “US security panics identified Somalia’s ongoing statelessness as offering a potential opportunity for terrorists.” Al-Shabaab has been gaining strength and power ever since, fueled by Somali rage over now decades-long foreign interference in their country. Thus the growth of al-Shabaab has not only been fed by a long history of US operations in Somalia but also by the current US war against it.

B. The Impact: Increased suffering of the Somali people

Dr. Stephanie Savell, 2019. (PhD; anthropologist of militarism, security, and civic engagement co-director of Brown University's renowned Costs of War Project.) “When is America going to end its shadow war in Somalia?”, The Guardian, Sept. 5, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/05/ilhan-omar-send-her-back-somalia-us-foreign-policy

The high cost of the US war in Somalia is borne by the Somali people.[**END QUOTE**] In March, Amnesty International called for the US government to investigate credible evidence that its airstrikes have killed numerous civilians in Somalia, despite the denial of most of these deaths by US Africa Command (AfriCom). [**SHE CONTINUES LATER IN THE CONTEXT QUOTE**:] Caught between the extortion of al-Shabaab and US bombs, Somalis are struggling to forge secure livelihoods and self governance. Millions have fled their homes to take refuge both within Somalia’s borders and beyond. Decades of political turmoil in Somalia and US military operations since the early 2000s have led to 4 million people living in dire conditions and in need of humanitarian assistance.

OBSERVATION 3. We offer the following PLAN implemented by Congress and the President

1. Cancel all airstrikes in Somalia, remove U.S. troops, and end all military engagement in Somalia.

2. Funding through general federal revenues. Congress cancels funding for anything inconsistent with the Plan.

3. Enforcement through normal discipline in the military chain of command.

4. Timeline is phase out over 3 months starting 10 days after an Affirmative ballot.

5. All Affirmative speeches may clarify

OBSERVATION 4. Withdrawal is the solution

The US has no responsibility to fix Somalia, and it isn’t worth risking even one more American life

Charles V. Pena 2017 (senior fellow with Defense Priorities. He has more than 25 years of experience as a policy and program analyst and senior manager, supporting both the Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security. Peña is the former Director of Defense Policy Studies at the Cato Institute) HOW IS SOMALIA A THREAT TO U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY? 1 Dec 2017 <https://www.defensepriorities.org/opinion/how-is-somalia-a-threat-to-us-national-security>

According to the U.S. mission in Somalia, “Such cowardly attacks reinvigorate the commitment of the United States to assist our Somali and African Union partners to combat the scourge of terrorism.” But an amorphous “scourge of terrorism”—especially in Somalia—is not a direct threat to America that warrants the sacrifice of U.S. lives—such as U.S. Navy SEAL Senior Chief Kyle Milliken, who was killed on a mission in Somalia in early May. Yet, every radical Islamist everywhere in the world is not a direct threat to the United States. ISIS is primarily a threat in Iraq and Syria. Boko Haram is a threat in Nigeria. Al Shabab is a threat in Somalia. As such, it is up to those countries and their neighbors—who are most imperiled and have the most to lose—to take primary responsibility for combating the terrorist threats in their own backyards. More important, we must recognize that the threat that al Shabab really represents is the civil war raging within Islam. Ultimately, al Shabab—like al Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram—is at war with its fellow Muslims who do not agree with and do not want to live by their radical version of Islam. Involving the U.S. military only puts us in the middle of thier civil war—U.S. troops should stop terrorists from killing Americans, not from killing each other.

2A Evidence: Somalia

INHERENCY

US intervention in Somalia has rapidly expanded, even though war has not been declared

Prof. Catherine L. Besteman, 2019. (professor of Anthropology at Colby College.) September 5, 2019, “The Costs of War in Somalia” <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/Costs%20of%20War%20in%20Somalia_Besteman.pdf>

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Overview of US position and goals in Somalia

Prof. Catherine L. Besteman, 2019. (professor of Anthropology at Colby College.) September 5, 2019, “The Costs of War in Somalia” <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/Costs%20of%20War%20in%20Somalia_Besteman.pdf>

The current goal of US policy in Somalia is explicitly to attack and disable Al- Shabaab, which has successfully launched attacks of mass terror within Somalia against foreign intervention as well as in Kenya, and Uganda, in retaliation for those country’s military interventions and their contributions to AMISOM. Current US military policy in Africa is based on a claim of “African solutions for African problems,” which means that US resources are used to train Somali National Security Forces and to support AMISOM and its over 22,000 uniformed personnel in their fight against Al-Shabaab. In the shift from the boots-on-the-ground intervention that characterized US intervention in the early 1990s, US military involvement in Somalia since 9/11 thus turned toward secretive operations, private security contractors, foreign mercenaries, military proxies and drone strikes. The US contracts private security firms that pay former soldiers from France, South Africa, and Scandinavia to provide African Union troops with training in urban warfare, the CIA built a base for secret interrogations in Mogadishu of suspected terrorists rendered from Somalia and abroad, and US covert operations and drone attacks target suspected Al-Shabaab members.

US more actively engaged in Somalia now than any time since ‘94

Ryan Browne 2019 (CNN reporter based in Washington covering the Department of Defense from the Pentagon. Master of Business Administration from Columbia University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Government from Harvard Univ.) April 13, 2019 “US military mission in Somalia could take seven years to complete <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/13/politics/us-military-somalia-mission/index.html>

A quarter century after the events surrounding "Black Hawk Down," the incident that killed 18 US soldiers in Mogadishu, the US military finds itself more actively engaged in Somalia than at any time since. Though the US has higher troop levels in Niger and Djibouti, Somalia is the only place in Africa where the US military is regularly carrying out airstrikes against enemy forces. The Pentagon has about 500 to 600 personnel in Somalia according to US Africa Command.

Increased airstrikes: 2020 airstrikes doubled compared to 2019

Amnesty International 2020 (international human rights advocacy NGO) 1 April 2020 “Somalia: Zero accountability as civilian deaths mount from US air strikes” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/04/somalia-zero-accountability-as-civilian-deaths-mount-from-us-air-strikes/>

In the first three months of 2020 alone, US forces have conducted a total of 32 air strikes in Somalia, according to the monitoring group Airwars. This is double the pace of 2019, when AFRICOM conducted a record 63 strikes in the country. Since Amnesty International’s ground-breaking March 2019 report The Hidden US War in Somalia, the organization has carried out in-depth investigations into eight US air strikes that killed civilians in Somalia’s Lower Shabelle and Middle Juba regions. Along with the El Buur strike, they killed a total of 21 civilians and wounded 11. In every case AFRICOM has failed to contact the families of the deceased.

Increased airstrikes: 2020 airstrikes have exceeded airstrikes in 2019

Human Rights Watch, 2020 (nonprofit, nongovernmental human rights organization made up of roughly 400 staff members around the globe) “Somalia: Inadequate US Airstrike Investigations”, June 16, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/16/somalia-inadequate-us-airstrike-investigations>

The US has been involved in military operations against Al-Shabab in Somalia since at least 2007. Airstrikes have increased since early 2017. The US military said it conducted 63 strikes in 2019 and at least 40 during the first 5 months of 2020. 

Trump relaxed standards for conducting airstrikes, leading to more of them

Nick Turse, 2020 (contributing writer for The Intercept, reporting on national security and foreign policy; has written for the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle; fellow at The Nation Institute and the managing editor of TomDispatch.com.) February 25 2020 “NEW DATA SHOWS THE U.S. MILITARY IS SEVERELY UNDERCOUNTING CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN SOMALIA” <https://theintercept.com/2020/02/25/africom-airstrikes-somalia/> (Brackets added)

In March 2017, President Donald Trump reportedly designated parts of Somalia as “areas of active hostilities,” removing Obama-era rules requiring that there be near certainty that strikes will not injure or kill noncombatants. The White House refuses to explicitly confirm or deny this, but retired Brig. Gen. Donald Bolduc, who headed Special Operations Command Africa at the time, was more forthcoming. “The burden of proof as to who could be targeted and for what reason changed dramatically,” he [retired Brig. Gen. Donald Bolduc] told The Intercept. That change, he added, led AFRICOM to conduct airstrikes that previously would not have been carried out.

Since then, U.S. airstrikes in Somalia have spiked, from 14 under President Barack Obama in 2016 to 47 in 2018, and 63 in 2019 under Trump.

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE

Civilian Casualties

Killing civilians who have no link to Al-Shabab

Human Rights Watch, 2020 (nonprofit, nongovernmental human rights advocacy organization) “Somalia: Inadequate US Airstrike Investigations”, June 16, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/16/somalia-inadequate-us-airstrike-investigations> (Brackets added)

In its initial quarterly report on civilian casualty assessments published on April 27, 2020, AFRICOM [US Africa Command] said it examined 20 alleged airstrikes that caused civilian casualties between February 2019 and March 2020, and was still investigating 7 additional incidents, 2 of which Human Rights Watch investigated. The Human Rights Watch investigations found that 7 civilians were killed and 3 injured and found no evidence that they had links to Al-Shabab. Human Rights Watch was not able to identify the intended targets of the strikes, which occurred in Al-Shabab-controlled territory.

Civilians are getting killed in violation of the laws of war

Human Rights Watch, 2020 (nonprofit, nongovernmental human rights advocacy organization) “Somalia: Inadequate US Airstrike Investigations”, June 16, 2020 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/16/somalia-inadequate-us-airstrike-investigations>

Two United States airstrikes in Somalia in early 2020 killed seven civilians in apparent violation of the laws of war. US forces have not adequately investigated a February 2 strike killing one woman at her home, and a March 10 attack that killed five men and a child in a minibus.

Failure to investigate civilian deaths in airstrikes

Amnesty International 2020 (international human rights advocacy NGO) 1 April 2020 “Somalia: Zero accountability as civilian deaths mount from US air strikes” https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/04/somalia-zero-accountability-as-civilian-deaths-mount-from-us-air-strikes/

In the first three months of 2020 alone, US forces have conducted a total of 32 air strikes in Somalia, according to the monitoring group Airwars. This is double the pace of 2019, when AFRICOM conducted a record 63 strikes in the country. Since Amnesty International’s ground-breaking March 2019 report The Hidden US War in Somalia, the organization has carried out in-depth investigations into eight US air strikes that killed civilians in Somalia’s Lower Shabelle and Middle Juba regions. Along with the El Buur strike, they killed a total of 21 civilians and wounded 11. In every case AFRICOM has failed to contact the families of the deceased.

Inadequate investigation of civilian casualties

Nick Turse, 2020 (contributing writer for The Intercept, reporting on national security and foreign policy; has written for the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle; fellow at The Nation Institute and the managing editor of TomDispatch.com.) February 25 2020 “NEW DATA SHOWS THE U.S. MILITARY IS SEVERELY UNDERCOUNTING CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN SOMALIA” <https://theintercept.com/2020/02/25/africom-airstrikes-somalia/>

In fact, AFRICOM contends that hundreds of airstrikes and commando missions over more than a decade – aimed at members of the terrorist groups al-Shabab and the Islamic State – have caused only two civilian casualties in Somalia: a woman and a child killed in an airstrike near the central Somali town of El Buur on April 1, 2018. New data released Tuesday by Airwars, a U.K.-based airstrike monitoring group, offers a stark rebuke to AFRICOM’s claims. The group contends that the number of civilian deaths may be as much as 6,800 percent greater than the command asserts.

President Trump relaxing protections against civilian casualties

Letta Tayler, 2017. (researches terrorism and counterterrorism at Human Rights Watch. Her focus includes the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda, counterterrorism; has worked in more than three dozen countries as a human rights defender and in her previous capacity as a journalist; graduated Magna Cum Laude from Barnard College.) “WHY THE MASSIVE BOMB BLAST IN SOMALIA SHOULD BE A WAKE-UP CALL TO THE WEST” October 23, 2017. https://www.newsweek.com/how-massive-bomb-blast-somalia-could-put-more-american-lives-risk-689817

First, some reports predict that US military involvement in Somalia may intensify as a result of Saturday’s attack. Already on October 16, the US launched another drone strike on alleged Al-Shabab targets outside Mogadishu. In March, President Trump designated Somalia a “zone of active hostilities” for lethal counterterrorism operations, allowing commanders -- as a matter of US policy -- to strike suspected Shabab fighters regardless of whether they posed an imminent threat to Americans, and relaxing certain protections against killing civilian bystanders. US airstrikes and other use of force increased significantly in Somalia from June through September, with reports that one operation in late August resulted in a number of civilian deaths, including children. One newspaper reported that investigators in Somalia believe Saturday’s attack may partly have been a tit-for-tat for civilians killed in that August operation. The US has about 400 troops as well as dozens of trainers in Somalia—the largest US military deployment there in nearly 25 years. If the US increases its use of force in Somalia, while loosening protections against killing bystanders, more civilians are likely to be killed. Wrongful killings of civilians carry the risk of generating more support for armed groups like Al-Shabab that are seeking to destabilize Somalia.

Relaxed U.S. government targeting standards

Nick Turse, 2020 (contributing writer for The Intercept, reporting on national security and foreign policy; has written for the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle; fellow at The Nation Institute and the managing editor of TomDispatch.com.) February 25 2020 “NEW DATA SHOWS THE U.S. MILITARY IS SEVERELY UNDERCOUNTING CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN SOMALIA” <https://theintercept.com/2020/02/25/africom-airstrikes-somalia/> (Brackets added)

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Since then, U.S. airstrikes in Somalia have spiked, from 14 under President Barack Obama in 2016 to 47 in 2018, and 63 in 2019 under Trump.

Impact of relaxing standards: US is playing ‘whack-a-mole’ that increases collateral damage and civilian casualties

Max Bearak, 2020. (Washington Post's Nairobi bureau chief. Previously, he reported from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Somalia and Washington.) January 14, 2020, “2019 saw record U.S. airstrikes in Somalia. Why is al-Shabab surging?” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/2019-saw-record-us-airstrikes-in-somalia-why-is-al-shabab-surging/2020/01/15/be9bc808-30c2-11ea-971b-43bec3ff9860_story.html> (Brackets added)

“By making it a ‘kill as much as you can’ strategy, it has become hard to avoid collateral damage and civilian casualties whether by the airstrikes themselves or because they provoke al-Shabab,” Sheikh-Ali [former national security adviser to the Somali president] said. “I believe that this strategy will not in any way affect al-Shabab’s short- or long-term capabilities. The U.S. is just playing whack-a-mole. Somali people don’t take this strategy seriously anymore.”

All Cost / No Benefit / Not Effective

Airstrikes fail. They’re simply not effective at stopping Al-Shabaab

Prof. Paul D. Williams 2020 (professor in the Elliott School of International Affairs at the George Washington University) July 2020 “Understanding US Policy in Somalia Current Challenges and Future Options” <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/research/2020-07-14-us-policy-somalia-williams.pdf>

US strikes are also important because they provide AMISOM and the SNA with a capability to strike al-Shabaab from depth and to defend their own forces. But these tactical benefits have not altered the strategic terrain, and US operations have sometimes backfired. Al-Shabaab have essentially weathered the comparative storm of airstrikes, have continued to make regular assaults on Mogadishu, and have retained most areas of territorial influence since 2016. There are also reports that al-Shabaab continue to operate a very effective underground extortion of businesses in Mogadishu.

Al Shabab is not being defeated by current policy

Daphne Eviatar 2020 (Director of the Security with Human Rights Program at Amnesty International USA; graduate of Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, New York University School of Law and Dartmouth College) “US Ramps Up War in Somalia, Killing More Civilians”, April 20, 2020, <https://www.justsecurity.org/69705/us-ramps-up-war-in-somalia-killing-more-civilians/>

The U.S. says these airstrikes are to assist the government of Somalia in its war against the non-state armed group al-Shabaab and “increase the security of the Somali people as these terrorists indiscriminately attack and extort innocent civilians.” Yet the increase in strike activity has not fulfilled its purpose on the ground. Al-Shabaab was driven out of the Somali capital, Mogadishu, by a multinational force led by the African Union Mission to Somalia, or AMISOM, in 2011, but still controls vast swaths of the Somali countryside. Even if al-Shabaab was pushed out of this territory, the government of Somalia appears to be incapable of securing and governing those parts of the country. On top of that, al-Shabaab’s lethal attacks on civilians in Somalia have only increased even as the U.S. ramps up its bombing.

[After all of our efforts…] Al Shabab is still strong and stable and Somalia’s government is corrupt and dysfunctional

Abdi Latif Dahir, 2019 (East Africa correspondent for The NY Times; master’s degree from Columbia Univ. Graduate School of Journalism; lives in Nairobi, Kenya.) “Somali Terror Group Al Shabab Remains Resilient Despite Setbacks”. Dec. 29, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/29/world/africa/somalia-attack-shabab.html>

“Al Shabab is still strong and stable,” said Stig Jarle Hansen, the author of “Horn, Sahel and Rift: Fault-lines of the African Jihad.” The ongoing threat it poses, he said, goes to show that the “government still has a lot of work to do when it comes to providing safety and security for its ordinary citizens.” The government said at least 79 people were killed and 149 injured when a truck bomb detonated at a busy intersection on Saturday — the deadliest attack in the country in more two years. While no group has taken responsibility yet, suspicion immediately fell on the Shabab, which remains a serious threat to peace and stability in Somalia and the wider Horn of Africa region. The magnitude of the attack was the latest reminder of the deteriorating security situation in Somalia — one of the world’s most fragile states — even as the nation takes piecemeal efforts toward recovery from a decades-long civil war. The weak government is afflicted by internal dysfunction and corruption and oversees an ineffective security force.

Al-Shabab is too deeply rooted in Somalia’s economy for any US military efforts to be fruitful

Prof. Catherine L. Besteman, 2019. (professor of Anthropology at Colby College.) September 5, 2019, “The Costs of War in Somalia” <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/Costs%20of%20War%20in%20Somalia_Besteman.pdf>

US military policy in Somalia is based on a presumption that Al-Shabaab is a terrorist group that must be confronted through counterinsurgency tactics of the US-led Global War on Terror. But this policy ignores the fact that Al-Shabaab operates with and through connections to the government, business interests, Somali National Security Forces, AMISOM and regional entities. Al-Shabaab claims authority over vast regions of central-southern Somalia, reportedly relying on foreigners with experience fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, on Somalis in the diaspora for expertise and tactical assistance, and on networks and connections with Somali politicians, businesspeople and military personnel, AMISOM personnel and others outside the country. It relies on exporting charcoal and sugar through the port in Kismayo, with the collusion of the regional government, to raise tens of millions of dollars, despite a UN ban on such exports. A recent report claims that members of the Somali National Army and its US-trained elite force, Danab, provide the US with incorrect information about Al-Shabaab’s location to minimize the impact of drone strikes on the organization.

Foreign Intervention won’t solve

Max Bearak, 2020. (Washington Post's Nairobi bureau chief. Previously, he reported from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Somalia and Washington) January 14, 2020, “2019 saw record U.S. airstrikes in Somalia. Why is al-Shabab surging?” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/2019-saw-record-us-airstrikes-in-somalia-why-is-al-shabab-surging/2020/01/15/be9bc808-30c2-11ea-971b-43bec3ff9860_story.html> (Brackets added)

Sheikh-Ali [former national security adviser to the Somali president] and Menkhaus [a Somalia scholar] said that although the Pentagon’s ­airstrike-heavy strategy doesn’t seem to be tipping the scale, foreign intervention can only achieve so much in Somalia, and the only way the country will overcome the threat from al-Shabab is with a government stronger than the weak and notoriously corrupt one it has now.

Fuel on the Fire (intervention makes problems worse)

Military intervention increases fragmentation and division within Somalia and sets back the process of nation-building

Dr. Debora V. Malito 2019 (PhD; lecturer at Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Dept of International Relations) Oct 2019 Destabilising Interventions in Somalia. Sovereignty Transformations and Subversions “ <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337144585_Destabilising_Interventions_in_Somalia_Sovereignty_Transformations_and_Subversions> (brackets added)

During the UN–US intervention, interposition forces not only became part of the conflict, but also actively supported some actors in the ongoing international efforts at reconciliation by entering the political space where rival groups negotiated and fought for their military and political leadership. Trying to influence the decision beyond inclusion–exclusion and friend–enemy distinctions, interveners actively entered the process of peace- and state-building in a violent and antagonistic way. Furthermore, the regional proxy war in the late 1990s between Ethiopia and Eritrea sustained a competition in the reconciliation process between a federalist (building block) versus a nationalist solution, which further encouraged instances of territorial fragmentation. During the GWoT [global war on terror], this divide became entrenched in peace- and state-building initiatives, leading in 2004 to the formation of a federal government but at the same time inaugurating a process of fragmentation, in which regional ‘federal’ units did not necessarily recognise the superiority of the national federal unit.

Outside intervention makes the conflict worse in Somalia

Dr. Debora V. Malito 2019 (PhD; lecturer at Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, Dept of International Relations) Oct 2019 Destabilising Interventions in Somalia. Sovereignty Transformations and Subversions “ <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337144585_Destabilising_Interventions_in_Somalia_Sovereignty_Transformations_and_Subversions> (brackets added)

In a context of persistent and protracted rivalries, the involvement of external parties, their interests, roles and strategies, might complicate or expand existing conflicts’ scope and intensity. By elaborating on the concept of political partisanship, this book disarticulates the notion of impartiality at the core of the UN interventionist doctrine as the UN and US involvement became part of the war economy and factional conflict in the mid-1990s. The presence of foreign actors became an instrument of exclusionary and divisive politics, unable to facilitate the negotiation of violence. Peace operations under UN authorisation had exclusionary purposes, and tried to subvert the internal distribution of power in favour of one political faction over another. Similarly, during the 1998 Ethiopia–Eritrea mutual interference, the two regional rivals fed the conflict’s regionalisation by the means of direct confrontation or indirect support to regional allies. The interference supported the military capabilities of competing parties, making the Somali conflict more resilient and dependent on regional dynamics. The GWoT [global war on terror] conducted by Ethiopia and the USA in Somalia added another layer of complexity. By manipulating alliances and destabilising enemies on the basis of their own preferences, the two interveners have exercised in Somalia a series of empowering and disempowering strategies, which have encouraged the insurgency’s political polarisation and military opposition.

SOLVENCY / ADVOCACY

Withdrawal from Somalia is the answer

Bonnie Kristian 2019. (Fellow at Defense Priorities, a research / think tank organization) 8 Jan 2019 “If Trump Isn't Planning to Draw Down U.S. Intervention in Somalia, He Should Be” <https://reason.com/2019/01/08/if-trump-isnt-planning-to-draw-down-us-i/>

It is not hard to surmise what happened here: Trump wanted U.S. troops to leave Syria; Bolton and other reflexively pro-war members of his advisory team—as well as most of "permanent Washington"—did not. [**END QUOTE**] Trump made the initial announcement, but the subsequent implementation, handled by Bolton and his allies, has endangered, if not outright killed, the withdrawal plan. One could be excused for wondering exactly how much Trump controls his own administration's policy. There is a lesson here about [advisor selection](https://reason.com/archives/2017/09/08/once-dovish-sounding-trump-getting-very), and there is also likely insight into what is happening with the administration's Somalia policy. The president and/or some portion of his team are ready to extricate the United States, having rightly recognized this is not a battle crucial to American security. But they seemingly have been forestalled by more interventionist elements in the White House—figures like Bolton, who in December gave [a speech](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-national-security-advisor-ambassador-john-r-bolton-trump-administrations-new-africa-strategy/) outlining a widespread, activist, military role for the U.S. in Africa. [**SHE GOES ON TO CONCLUDE QUOTE:]** That is unfortunate because the initial push to draw down U.S. military intervention in Somalia was the right one. If Trump isn't planning to draw down U.S. intervention in Somalia, he should be. Counter-terror in Somalia is a parochial issue which poses no existential threat to America, and there's no reason for Washington to do Mogadishu's job.

Intervention in Somalia isn’t justified by any “terrorist threat.” It’s just foolhardy

Charles V. Pena 2017 (senior fellow with Defense Priorities. He has more than 25 years of experience as a policy and program analyst and senior manager, supporting both the Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security. Peña is the former Director of Defense Policy Studies at the Cato Institute) HOW IS SOMALIA A THREAT TO U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY? 1 Dec 2017 <https://www.defensepriorities.org/opinion/how-is-somalia-a-threat-to-us-national-security>

Indeed, since 9/11 there hasn’t been a successful attack by a foreign terrorist organization. The real threat has been lone wolf and largely homegrown terrorism. According to the Global Terrorism Index, since 2006, 98 percent of all deaths from terrorism in the U.S. have been from attacks carried out by lone actors, resulting in 156 deaths. And according to the New America Foundation, of those accused of jihadist related terrorism crimes in the U.S., more than 80 percent of them were either U.S. citizens or U.S. legal residents, and about half were American born citizens. The data does not bear out the logic that killing would-be terrorists overseas in places like Somalia will make us inherently safer. So continuing to pursue such a strategy is folly. In 1993, the U.S. military was in Somalia on a humanitarian intervention mission that was neither vital nor important to U.S. national security. The mission resulted in the tragic deaths of 18 U.S. Army Rangers. Today, the U.S. military is in Somalia to help Somali president Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo wage a war against al Shabab—a war neither vital nor important to U.S. national security. If the first time was simply a tragedy, the second time is foolhardy.

Airstrikes are a failure; we should change to non-military action

Melissa Salyk-Virk, 2019 (Melissa Salyk-Virk is a senior policy analyst with New America’s International Security Program.) “The Hidden Damage of Trump’s Secret War in Somalia”, OCTOBER 3, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/10/hidden-damage-trumps-secret-war-somalia/160339/>

What about non-military action? Supporting the government of Somalia and its National Army are critical to stabilizing the country, but airstrikes are not making Somalia more secure or reducing terrorist activity. The increased precision airstrike approach by the United States feels as if it is setting Somalia up for failure by primarily choosing military intervention instead of assisting Somalia with addressing driving forces of the conflict. If the latter concern was fully addressed, civilians such as those in Illimey could live without the dual fear of terrorism and the resultant airstrikes.

DISADVANTAGE RESPONSES

A/T “Instability in Somalia”:

US airstrikes aren’t solving Al Shabab

Nick Turse, 2020 (contributing writer for The Intercept, reporting on national security and foreign policy; has written for the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, San Francisco Chronicle, The Nation, and Village Voice, among other publications. Turse is a fellow at The Nation Institute and the managing editor of TomDispatch.com.) February 25 2020 “NEW DATA SHOWS THE U.S. MILITARY IS SEVERELY UNDERCOUNTING CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN SOMALIA”https://theintercept.com/2020/02/25/africom-airstrikes-somalia/

Since the U.S. escalated its air campaign in 2017, al-Shabab has still managed to carry out nearly 900 attacks on civilians resulting almost 2,000 deaths. While security has improved in Somalia’s capital, Mogadishu, the Defense Department’s Africa Center for Strategic Studies, a Pentagon research institution, found that “al Shabaab continues to exert widespread influence in outlying areas.” For example, a U.S. drone and training outpost, about 60 miles from the capital, in Baledogle, Somalia, was attacked by al-Shabab last September. And last month, the terror group assaulted the U.S. base at Manda Bay, Kenya, killing one American service member and two U.S. contractors.

A/T “Need Build-up of Somalia’s Army” - Troops trained by US are not helping fight Al-Shabab

Ryan Browne 2019 (CNN reporter based in Washington covering the Department of Defense from the Pentagon. Master of Business Administration from Columbia University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Government from Harvard University) April 13, 2019 “US military mission in Somalia could take seven years to complete <https://www.cnn.com/2019/04/13/politics/us-military-somalia-mission/index.html>

A State Department official told CNN that while there have been some successes in integrating Somali troops trained by Turkish and UAE advisers into the national army, many of the 6,000 Somali troops trained by the EU did not join the national army and "most of them have gone off to militias and local clans.”

Increased US aggressiveness doesn’t stop, and only increases, Al-Shabab attacks

Max Bearak, 2020. (Washington Post's Nairobi bureau chief) January 14, 2020, “2019 saw record U.S. airstrikes in Somalia. Why is al-Shabab surging?” <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/2019-saw-record-us-airstrikes-in-somalia-why-is-al-shabab-surging/2020/01/15/be9bc808-30c2-11ea-971b-43bec3ff9860_story.html>

Just as soon as the U.S. military closed out a year in which it struck al-Shabab militants more times than ever — at a pace of just over one airstrike per week — the Somali militant group carried out its most brazen and successful attack on U.S. forces in its history, killing one soldier and two private contractors and destroying six aircraft at an airstrip in Kenya. It was symbolic of the greater U.S. effort against al-Shabab: Since the Trump administration loosened the rules of engagement in Somalia in March 2017, leading to a more aggressive use of airstrikes, the group has staged nearly 900 attacks on civilians alone, not counting hundreds more against U.S., Somali, Kenyan and other armed forces.

A/T “Al Shabab terrorism threat to the US”

No foreign terrorist organization has attacked US soil since 9/11, so Al-Shabab risk is low

Melissa Salyk-Virk, 2019 (senior policy analyst with New America’s International Security Program.) “The Hidden Damage of Trump’s Secret War in Somalia”, OCTOBER 3, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/10/hidden-damage-trumps-secret-war-somalia/160339/>

Last December, then-National Security Advisor John Bolton rolled out the Trump administration’s Africa strategy, saying, “Our goal is for the nations of the region to take ownership over peace and security in their own neighborhood.” Even as reports emerged in January that said Pentagon leaders planned to reduce the troop presence in Somalia, President Trump gave the military more authority to conduct strikes across the country. He extended the 2010 executive order that says unrest in Somalia poses a serious threat to the United States. But no foreign terrorist organization has carried out a deadly attack inside the United States since 2001.

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