



Somalia

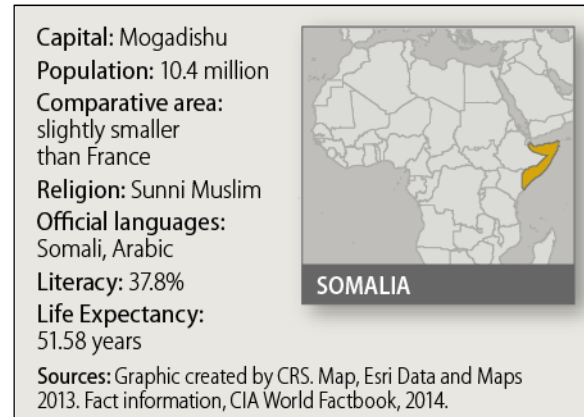
Somalia has long been characterized as the classic “failed state,” plagued for more than two decades by seemingly chronic instability and humanitarian need. Since the collapse of the authoritarian Siad Barre regime in 1991, the country has lacked a viable central authority capable of exerting territorial control, securing its borders, or meeting the needs of its people. Terrorism, piracy, illicit trafficking, chronic food insecurity, and mass refugee flows have been, in part, symptoms of Somalia’s political disorder.

After numerous attempts to reunite Somalia’s regions, clans, and sub-clans within a credible central government, the international community has rallied behind a new Somali federal government. The election of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in September 2012 by a new federal parliament followed the approval of a provisional constitution through an internationally facilitated political process. U.S. and U.N. officials viewed that process as the most credible, inclusive, and representative effort to date to reestablish central governance. In January 2013, the United States officially recognized the Somali government for the first time in 22 years. Diplomatic recognition sought, in part, to highlight fragile improvements in the country’s stability, reflecting both political developments in the capital, Mogadishu, and significant regional military advances against the violent Islamist insurgency led by Al Shabaab (an “affiliate” of Al Qaeda designated by the United States as a foreign terrorist organization in 2008).

This progress has increasingly led donors to focus on development assistance, including efforts to increase stability; bolster access to government services, economic growth, and political reconciliation; improve governance and the rule of law; expand critical infrastructure; and build resilience to drought and other humanitarian emergencies. The United States, European donors, and the U.N. (with member state funding) also provide substantial support for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), and for the nascent Somali National Security Forces.

The year 2013 was a critical time in Somalia’s engagement with international donors, and U.S. recognition was important in building international support for Somali efforts. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank adjusted their positions on Somalia, making the country eligible for technical assistance and policy advice. Donor governments, regional organizations, and international financial institutions gathered in Brussels to endorse a New Deal Compact with the Somali government; donors pledged more than \$2.4 billion, including \$69 million from the United States, to support its implementation (2014-2016). The Compact provides a strategic framework for coordinating peace- and state-building activities and sets governance arrangements for various multi-donor financing mechanisms.

Figure 1. Somalia Facts



Recent Security Developments

Challenges to stabilizing and rebuilding the Somali state are substantial. Military offensives led by AMISOM and allied Somali and regional forces facilitated critical gains against Al Shabaab in 2011-2012, pushing the group out of Mogadishu and other major southern cities and ports and depriving it of key revenue sources. More recent offensives have reclaimed additional towns, including the port city Barawe, a key Al Shabaab base until October 2014. The insurgents continue to control some rural areas, though, and AMISOM and Somali forces struggle to provide security in liberated areas and along main supply routes, impeding the delivery of humanitarian and development aid. Al Shabaab is not the government’s only rival; some local militias have also resisted efforts to expand central authority.

Al Shabaab continues to attack government, civilian, and international targets, primarily in Somalia, but also in Kenya, and periodically elsewhere in East Africa. The group released a video in February 2015 calling for attacks in Kenya and abroad, and naming several shopping malls in Europe and the United States as potential targets, including Minnesota’s Mall of America. The threat was a reminder of the 2013 Westgate mall attack in Nairobi, in which at least 67 people died. The English-language message reflects Al Shabaab’s successful efforts to recruit and raise funds abroad—several American foreign fighters, some but not all of Somali descent, reportedly have been killed in Somalia.

The United States has provided substantial support for AMISOM and Somali efforts against Al Shabaab. The United States has also taken direct action in Somalia against members of Al Qaeda, including those members of Al Shabaab “who are engaged in efforts to carry out terrorist attacks against the United States and our interests,” as described in White House reports to Congress. U.S. strikes have resulted in the deaths of several senior Al Shabaab operatives, including its leader, Ahmed Abdi Godane in

September 2014, and at least three key figures reportedly responsible for coordinating operations outside Somalia (including the Westgate attack) in early 2015. Other countries have also conducted strikes against Al Shabaab.

After Godane's death, Al Shabaab announced Ahmad Dirie Abdikadir Umar (aka Abu Ubaidah) as the group's new leader. Divisions under Godane, whose highly centralized leadership style provoked dissent, led several commanders to surrender to local authorities; some additional defections have occurred since his death. The Somali government has offered amnesty to those who surrender and renounce violence. In March 2015, the United States removed a \$3 million reward for Al Shabaab's former intelligence chief after he surrendered to Somali authorities.

State-Building Challenges

The government faces major challenges in extending its authority beyond Mogadishu and overcoming contentious clan dynamics. After more than 20 years without central authority, the sharing of power, revenue and resources remains subject to considerable national debate. Most clans favor a decentralized system of governance as the best way to achieve power-sharing among clans and sub-clans. Untapped petroleum resources complicate revenue sharing discussions. Gaps in the legal and regulatory framework governing the hydrocarbons sector are a potential flashpoint for conflict. The nation building process is also complicated by pervasive corruption, insecurity, and spoiler networks working against the consolidation of state authority.

Federalism is enshrined in the provisional constitution, but the document is vague on how it will work in practice. The state building process is proceeding—two interim federal states, Jubaland and Southwest, have been formed since 2013 (semi-autonomous Puntland in the northeast is widely considered the first federal state). These processes have been controversial, however, and there is significant tension around efforts to create a state for central Somalia. The government's relations with Puntland resumed in October 2014, after being suspended for over a year, although underlying questions about power and revenue sharing remain. Another major challenge for the government is the incorporation of clan and regional militia into the army. The government is still seeking to define its relationship with the autonomous northwest region of Somaliland, which declared itself independent from Somalia in 1991.

The government is behind schedule on benchmarks it must meet before its mandate expires in 2016. Political infighting between the president and former prime minister delayed action on key tasks in 2014, notably the approval of laws establishing institutions for state formation and elections. President Mohamud named Somalia's then-ambassador to the United States, Omar Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke, as the new prime minister in December. A constitutional review is underway; a draft is to be approved via national referendum to pave the way for elections in 2016.

According to the U.N. Monitoring Group on Somalia, corruption is a "system of governance" in Somalia. The Group reported in 2013 that at least 80% of withdrawals

from the Central Bank were made for private purposes, rather than for running the government, representing "a patronage system and set of social relations that defy the institutionalization of the state." The most recent U.N. report suggests that the systematic diversion of funds continues, undermining efforts to build an effective public financial management system. The report also suggests that in some cases funds are used "for partisan agendas that constitute threats to peace and security." The Group has reported on violations by senior Somali officials of the U.N. arms embargo, which was modified in 2013 to allow the government to buy light weapons. The Group has raised serious concern with the diversion of government arms and ammunition, including to arms markets in Mogadishu and to clan-based militias, and has implicated a former advisor to the president in the leakage of weapons to Al Shabaab.

Humanitarian Situation

Humanitarian conditions remain extremely poor in much of Somalia, with some 3 million people in need of aid and more than 730,000 Somalis facing acute food insecurity. One million people remain internally displaced. By U.N. estimates, 1.7 million children are not in school; 1 in 12 women die in childbirth; 1 in 10 children die before their first birthday; and only 1 in 3 Somalis has access to safe water. Insecurity constrains humanitarian access—this is one of the most dangerous operating environments in the world for aid workers. Funding shortages also threaten relief programs. Advocacy groups have criticized the decision by U.S. and British banks to close the accounts of Somali money transfer businesses: many Somalis rely heavily on remittances from family abroad, which are estimated to represent one third of Somalia's total income.

U.S. Policy and Foreign Assistance

The Obama Administration's Somalia strategy is based on three key elements: security, governance, and development. The United States has been a key supporter of AMISOM and coordinated diplomatic and military responses to the threat of Somali maritime piracy. In late 2013, the U.S. military, which had maintained a small contingent of personnel in Somalia for several years, deployed a team of military advisors to liaise with the Somali security forces (previously, engagement had been focused on advising and sharing information with AMISOM). U.S. diplomats based in Kenya travel frequently to Mogadishu, but the State Department has yet to reestablish an embassy there. In February 2015, President Obama nominated the first U.S. ambassador to Somalia since 1991; in May 2015, John Kerry became the first Secretary of State to visit Mogadishu. Efforts to promote stability through governance and economic aid are increasing. The FY2016 foreign aid request for Somalia is \$209 million, over half of which is focused on security assistance for AMISOM and Somali forces. Humanitarian aid in FY2014 and FY2015 has totaled over \$230 million. The United States has provided more than \$1 billion in training, equipment, logistics support for AMISOM since 2007 and almost \$200 million for Somali forces.

Lauren Ploch Blanchard, lploch@crs.loc.gov, 7-7640