



Somalia

Updated July 21, 2026

Instability and humanitarian crises have beset Somalia for decades. After the authoritarian Siad Barre regime fell amid civil war in 1991, the country was widely viewed for years as a “[failed state](#).” The formation of a new federal government in 2012 was a turning point, and Somalia, with international support, made halting progress against a violent Islamist insurgency led by Al Shabaab. Political infighting, clan competition, and [corruption](#) threaten hard-won gains, however. Al Shabaab has grown into Al Qaeda’s largest and wealthiest affiliate, and a local Islamic State (IS) cell has become a central node for the IS global network. Conflict, drought, and flooding have fueled displacement and widespread food insecurity, and Somalia faces a [rapidly worsening hunger emergency](#) in 2026.

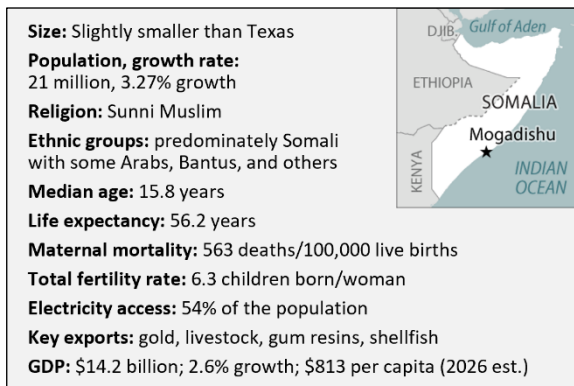
The United States has conducted counterterrorism strikes in Somalia since 2003 and supported African Union (AU) and Somali forces fighting jihadist groups in the country since 2007. [Hundreds of U.S. military personnel](#) are deployed in Somalia to advise and assist Somali and AU forces; other U.S. personnel support counterterrorism operations from neighboring Djibouti and Kenya. The United States was Somalia’s largest bilateral creditor until 2024 and its [largest humanitarian donor until 2025](#). Congress has conducted oversight of U.S. strategy and efforts; provided appropriations for foreign aid, security cooperation, military efforts, and debt relief; and debated the [U.S. military presence](#) and [use of force](#). Members may explore whether or how [aid cuts](#) or other changes to U.S. engagement could affect U.S. interests in the country and broader region.

From Failed to Fragile State

Military operations by AU and other regional forces in 2011–2012 pushed Al Shabaab out of Mogadishu and other cities and ports, reducing its access to revenue and giving Somalia’s transitional government [control of the capital](#). In 2013, the United States [officially recognized](#) the Somali government for the first time in 22 years, highlighting tenuous political and security improvements. The International Monetary Fund followed, enabling IMF technical assistance. In 2016, the United States sent its first ambassador to Somalia since 1991 and, in 2018, reestablished a permanent diplomatic presence.

With support from the AU forces, donors, and other foreign partners, Somalia has transitioned over the past 15 years from a “[failed state](#)” to a “[fragile state](#).” Public financial management reforms by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) [enabled \\$4.5 billion](#) in multilateral debt relief, including the cancellation of Somalia’s longstanding [debt](#) to the United States. In 2024, the UN Security Council authorized the [transfer of peace- and state-building responsibilities](#) from the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (now known as UNTMIS) to the FGS and the UN Country Team by October 2026. Somalia is serving a two-year term (2025–2026) on the UN Security Council.

Figure 1. Somalia Facts



Source: CRS map. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau, World Bank, and IMF.

Nation-Building Challenges

Political and clan rivalries and competing visions for sharing power complicate Somalia’s path forward. The country’s 2012 [provisional constitution](#) enshrined federalism but was [vague on how it should work](#). After over 20 years without central authority, Somalia’s federal and state authorities have differing views on how power and resources should be divided.

Somalia has not held direct national elections since 1969. Clan-based [indirect elections](#) have been held since 2000, and each has resulted in a presidential transfer of power, but direct elections have been repeatedly postponed. In 2021, an electoral impasse spurred [fighting in the capital](#) and [fears of civil war](#). When the (indirect) elections were finally held in 2022, former [President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud](#) (2012–2017) defeated the incumbent and returned to office. He has promised one-person, one-vote elections, but [challenges abound](#), and some Somalis see his plan as part of an effort to [consolidate power](#). Mohamud’s term was set to expire in May 2025, but the parliament [controversially amended the constitution](#), extending its own term and that of the president to 2027. Several state governments have [cut ties](#) with the FGS, and the unfolding [political crisis](#) has sparked [clashes](#) and growing [tensions over the control of security forces](#).

Somaliland

Somaliland, a former British protectorate that in 1991 declared its independence from Somalia, has maintained its autonomy for over three decades. It holds direct elections, and the most recent, in 2024, resulted in a [peaceful transfer of power](#) to opposition leader Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi “Cirro.” The FGS views Somaliland as its territory and opposes the state’s [quest for international recognition](#). Somaliland ties with Taiwan have drawn ire from [Beijing](#) and [Mogadishu](#). Turkey [defused tensions](#) between Somalia and Ethiopia in 2024 after the latter reportedly offered Somaliland [recognition in exchange for sea access](#). Israel became the first country to [recognize](#) Somaliland in late 2025, a move rejected by the [African Union](#) and [Arab League](#).

Security Challenges

Major challenges to securing and stabilizing Somalia remain. Al Shabaab still [controls parts](#) of the country, reportedly collects up to [\\$200 million annually](#) through [taxes and “mafia-like” extortion](#), and may have up to [18,000 fighters](#). UN monitors assess it maintains a [close relationship with Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula](#) and has developed a [transactional relationship](#) with the [Houthis in Yemen](#), from whom it receives weapons and technical expertise.

Al Shabaab maintains the ability to conduct terrorist attacks in Mogadishu and sometimes fires mortars at the heavily guarded international airport complex where the U.S. embassy and other diplomatic facilities are located. Several of its fighters [breached](#) the complex perimeter in 2022. For more on the group and the regional threat it poses, see CRS In Focus IF10170, [Al Shabaab](#).

In the northeast state of Puntland, an IS faction that split from Al Shabaab in 2015 evolved into an operational, logistical, and financial [hub for the Islamic State](#). By some accounts, its emir became the [network’s leader](#) in 2023, and with an [influx of foreign fighters](#), IS-Somalia grew. [Operations](#) since 2024 by Puntland forces, aided by [U.S. airstrikes](#) and [Emirati drone support](#), appear to have [degraded, but not defeated](#) the IS cell.

President Mohamud declared “[total war](#)” on Al Shabaab in 2022, and, building on a [clan uprising](#) against the group in central Somalia, an offensive by Somali forces in 2022-2023 made the most important [territorial gains](#) in a decade. The army struggled to [maintain momentum](#), though, and by 2024 the offensive had stalled. A [resurgent Al Shabaab](#) has since [retaken territory](#), reversing FGS gains amid [political distractions](#), [debate](#) over the future of the AU mission in Somalia, and donor fatigue.

The AU mission, launched in 2007, has been described as [the world’s deadliest peace operation](#). Originally known as AMISOM, it has [downsized](#) over the past decade from over 22,000 troops to [12,000](#) in 2025, after it was [reauthorized](#) as the AU Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM). [The mission](#) faces [uncertain prospects](#) as stakeholders continue to debate [its financing and its future](#). The [European Union \(EU\)](#) has been its largest source of direct funding, providing almost €2.8 billion to the mission since 2007. The United States has provided nearly [\\$1.6 billion](#) in bilateral support to the troop-contributing countries and almost [\\$2 billion](#) for the [UN Support Office in Somalia](#) (UNSOS), which has provided critical operational support to the AU mission since 2009. The United States, the EU, [Turkey](#), and the [United Arab Emirates](#), among others, have also sought to build the capacity of Somali security forces to take over responsibilities from the AU mission, but the Somali forces face [funding, cohesion, and capacity challenges](#). The Trump Administration’s reported plan to [end U.S. support for UNSOS](#) has spurred concerns that it [may force AUSSOM’s exit](#) and create a [security vacuum](#) for Al Shabaab to exploit, as [threats](#) and [rivalries in the Red Sea/Horn of Africa arena](#) grow.

Humanitarian Situation

Conflict, drought, flooding, and disease outbreaks have fueled a protracted humanitarian crisis in Somalia. [Six million people](#) are acutely food insecure, with a [risk of famine](#) for the first time since 2022. Acute malnutrition is [surging](#). Over [three million](#)

Somalis are internally displaced; nearly a million are refugees in neighboring countries. Aid agencies face [major funding gaps](#): [the 2026 UN appeal](#) is less than a quarter funded mid-year, with donor pledges at the lowest level in over a decade.

U.S. Policy, Operations, and Foreign Aid

Under the Biden and [first Trump](#) Administrations, [U.S. Somalia policy](#) focused on promoting political and economic stability, preventing Somalia from being used as a terrorist safe haven, and easing humanitarian crises. Both administrations maintained that the United States “[recognizes](#) the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia within its 1960 borders in accordance with the Somali provisional constitution, which includes Somaliland and Puntland.” As the current Administration and Congress weigh the U.S. approach going forward, some Members have suggested reexamining this “[One Somalia](#)” policy, and some [advocates](#) and [Members](#) have urged U.S. recognition of Somaliland’s independence, as called for in [H.R. 3992](#). U.S. officials have made several visits to Somaliland and discussed opportunities for further engagement, but the State Department [reported to Congress](#) in 2026 that the United States continues to recognize “the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia, which includes the region of Somaliland.”

U.S. airstrikes in Somalia have [increased sharply](#) under the Trump Administration, with [over 130 strikes in 2025](#) and nearly 70 in the first half of 2026. AFRICOM continues to report that the strikes are done [in coordination with Somalia’s government](#). Successive U.S. Administrations have termed Al Shabaab an “[associated force](#)” of Al Qaeda in the context of the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF; P.L. 107-40) and have interpreted the AUMF as authorizing operations against the Islamic State. U.S. strikes have [killed](#) several [key Al Shabaab leaders](#), but UN terrorism experts suggest the attrition of leaders is [unlikely to affect the group’s stability](#).

The United States has provided training, equipment, logistics, and intelligence support to AU and Somali forces, including the elite special operations unit, [Danab](#). U.S. military personnel in Somalia have provided advise-and-assist support. President Trump ordered U.S. forces “[repositioned](#)” from Somalia at the end of his first term, but President Biden [authorized their return](#) in 2022. In 2023, Congress rejected [H.Con.Res. 30](#), which called for the removal of U.S. forces from Somalia.

The Biden Administration allocated over \$1 billion in FY2024 foreign aid for Somalia, covering security assistance for Somali and AU forces; UNSOS funding; stabilization, resilience, education, and health programs; and [over \\$400 million](#) in humanitarian aid. The Trump Administration has not published country-specific details on its aid cuts, but most U.S. assistance programs in Somalia have [reportedly been terminated](#) or allowed to expire. [Humanitarian aid](#) has [dropped markedly](#).

The Trump Administration has [barred nationals of Somalia from entry](#) to the United States, citing terrorism concerns, the Somali government’s limited control of its territory, and insufficient screening and vetting measures. The Administration’s [termination of Temporary Protected Status](#) for Somalia has been [paused](#) by a federal court order.

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