



# CDRC

## Digest

### Content

#### *Somalia: A Fragile State in a Complex Regional Landscape*



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## Somalia: A Fragile State in a Complex Regional Landscape

### Context

Since the outbreak of civil war in 1991, Somalia has endured persistent violence, the collapse of state structures, and the significant weakening of institutional capacities established after independence. This prolonged instability has deepened fissures in state-society relations, reshaped the political and security landscape, and attracted the intervention of regional and international actors with vested interests in the Horn of Africa.

Somalia's experience parallels that of many post-colonial African nations struggling with weak state institutions and ineffective leadership. Before its collapse, the centralized government in Mogadishu exercised considerable control over governance frameworks. However, the disintegration of these centralized structures following the civil war in 1991 led to severe institutional deficiencies, creating a vacuum that fostered the rise of clan-based and warlord-led political mobilization.

The absence of a strong central government following Siad Barre's departure left no legitimate authority to enforce laws or maintain order. Fragmented militia groups, along clan lines and sustained by patronage systems, failed to fill the void, resulting in anarchy. This fragmentation perpetuated instability, enabling a cycle of violence and rivalry that became deeply entrenched in Somalia's social and political fabric.

In southern Somalia, armed factions competed for control, escalating violence and further fragmenting the region between 1991 and 1992. International interventions,

including the UNOSOM I mission in 1992, the US-led UNITAF, and the expanded UNOSOM II mission, aimed to restore order through peace enforcement, faced significant obstacles. The 1993 clashes between Somali factions and UNOSOM II forces highlighted these challenges, culminating in the mission's failure and the UN's withdrawal in 1995.

Despite the turmoil, parts of northern Somalia managed to achieve relative stability. Somaliland (declared separation in 1991) and Puntland (established in 1998) emerged as regions with functioning administrations that reduced violence and provided a measure of order. Efforts to rebuild a national government began with the Transitional National Government (TNG) in 2000 and the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004. However, renewed hostilities between 2005 and 2009, particularly in southern Somalia, underscored the fragility of these efforts, as militant groups such as the Islamic Courts Union (later Al-Shabaab) escalated conflicts, further threatening regional security.

While the longevity of the intensity of violence declined compared to the early 1990s, the persistent instability revealed the challenges of achieving peace. Somalia's internal political, economic, and security dynamics are primarily shaped by fluid elite interactions and manipulated clan-based rivalries, where threats are securitized for the clans or sub-clans, but profits are shared among the patronage system the political elite created. Yet, external actors have profoundly influenced local developments based on their perceived or real security interests, complicating the path toward sustainable state-building.

Somalia's fragmented political landscape

and ongoing contestations underscore the complexities of rebuilding state structures and fostering sustainable peace. Achieving these goals requires a nuanced understanding of local dynamics and the regional geopolitical environment. While clan affiliations and elite cooperation or rivalries dominate the internal discourse, external actors play an equally significant role in shaping and leveraging outcomes, often driven by their strategic interests in the Horn of Africa.

This highlights the need for concerted efforts to address Somalia's internal divisions while mitigating the impact of external interventions. A stable and resilient Somali state is essential for sustainable regional peace and security, but this requires reconciling local, regional, and international priorities within a cohesive framework of state-building and governance. While Somalia's internal political and security dynamics can be analyzed through multiple perspectives, this paper focuses on the factors driving the contest between federalism and centralization. It delves into the challenges and opportunities linked to institution-building, examining how these efforts shape Somalia's transition toward becoming a functional modern state. The analysis also considers the interplay between internal and external influences, highlighting the roles of regional and global actors in either exacerbating or mitigating Somalia's fragilities. Additionally, the paper explores how these vulnerabilities are intertwined with sovereignty-related foreign policy challenges, shedding light on the broader implications of Somalia's internal developments for its external relations.

## **Rebuilding Somalia and Its Regional Implications**

### **The Broader Context**

Somalia's prolonged state collapse continues to have far-reaching implications for regional and global peace and security, necessitating sustained efforts toward reconstruction and stabilization. The crisis has posed serious security threats to the interests of both regional and international actors, compelling their involvement. Ignoring Somalia's instability risks exacerbating insecurity across the Horn of Africa, with global ramifications for security and economic interests.

Faced with this reality, neighboring countries and global actors have prioritized initiatives to rebuild the Somali state, recognizing the need to transform a failed state into a functional one to safeguard their interests. This situation presents a stark choice: tolerate a failed state or invest in rebuilding efforts to address the threats stemming from the status quo. Consequently, regional states, sub-regional organizations, and international stakeholders have incorporated Somalia into their security agendas, emphasizing reconstruction and stabilization as urgent priorities. Efforts to rebuild Somalia's political, economic, and security capacities have necessitated coordination among both state and non-state actors.

However, the process faces significant challenges, including weak institutional capacities, limited financial and human resources, political disagreements, and persistent contestations over power dynamics and resource allocation. These internal constraints are further exacerbated by external interventions, often driven by divergent agendas, which add layers of complexity to an already fragile state-building process.

### **Progress and Challenges in Rebuilding Somalia's State Institutions**

While Somalia has made strides in re-establishing essential state institutions, progress remains slow and uneven. Domestic challenges—including political rivalries, economic instability, and persistent insecurity—continue to undermine efforts to consolidate governance. These issues are further complicated by external actors pursuing their own strategic interests, which often exacerbate internal divisions and impede Somalia's path toward sustainable peace and stability.

A significant obstacle lies in the absence of a comprehensive elite bargain on power-sharing and resource distribution. This lack of agreement has entrenched a fragile status quo and hindered efforts to establish unity. Any political settlement must acknowledge Somalia's fragmented political landscape and prioritize agreements on power and resource distribution to foster trust among stakeholders. Without such foundational agreements, Somalia risks further fragmentation, leaving it vulnerable to both internal discord and external exploitation.

### **The Complexities of Rebuilding Formal State Institutions**

Clan-based informal governance structures and a prolonged legacy of statelessness have become deeply entrenched in Somalia due to the weakness of formal governance mechanisms. Fragile state institutions have created a vacuum that has allowed informal economies and clan-based systems to thrive. While these informal structures have provided critical support—facilitating financial flows, bolstering local military capacities, and sustaining political activities—they have also perpetuated violence and undermined the legitimacy of formal state authority.

In the absence of a strong central

government, clan leaders have stepped in to fill the void. They have gained legitimacy by providing basic services and maintaining security within their communities. However, these informal governance mechanisms frequently challenge and compete with formal state frameworks, further complicating Somalia's state-building efforts. Clan leaders, often wary of reforms that could threaten their control over resources and influence, resist measures aimed at strengthening formal institutions, thereby perpetuating governance challenges.

While informal governance mechanisms have proven indispensable to local communities, their dominance perpetuates clan and sub-clan interests, obstructing the development of cohesive state institutions. Analysts examining the interplay between formal and informal systems in Somalia note that informal institutions characterized by flexibility, adaptability, and self-reinforcing mechanisms are more likely to endure. These systems often provide clear distributional benefits to a broad segment of the population and demonstrate resilience in the face of external shocks. However, their reliance on traditional hierarchies and gendered exclusions highlights the limitations of these mechanisms in addressing broader societal challenges.

The persistence of clan customary laws, even in the absence of a central state, underscores the importance of recognizing the legitimacy of these practices within the broader context of state-building. Efforts to establish a cohesive legal framework during the 1960s failed, but customary laws have continued to play a vital role in governance. This historical context demonstrates the need for a nuanced approach that integrates informal governance systems into the formal state-building process.

## **Toward Sustainable Institution-Building**

Building public trust in formal institutions requires an inclusive approach that addresses key issues of power, resources, and security. However, strengthening formal governance structures must not come at the expense of the informal mechanisms that remain essential to many communities. Instead, the Somali state-building process must balance the integration of these systems to ensure long-term stability.

By fostering collaboration between informal and formal structures, Somalia can create a foundation for cohesive state institutions that garner both elite and communal support. Achieving this balance will require addressing the historical obstacles that have undermined previous attempts to establish unified governance. Managing the competition between these systems will be critical to achieving a sustainable political settlement and ensuring Somalia's long-term stability.

## **Current Internal Political and Security Dynamics in Somalia**

Somalia's internal dynamics are deeply intertwined with its state-building challenges, encompassing ongoing struggles over regime consolidation, power dynamics, weak legal frameworks, and fragile security conditions.

## **Federalism Versus Centralization**

The relationship between the federal government and its member states is marked by persistent disputes over power-sharing, resource allocation, and governance. These tensions are further complicated by Somalia's political economy, which is heavily influenced by clan-based networks dominating governance and power

structures. This environment perpetuates mistrust, factionalism, and stagnation, hindering efforts to build a stable and unified state.

The tension between federalism and centralization remains a pivotal issue. Regional states frequently resist federal authority, perceiving it as an attempt to re-centralize power contrary to Somalia's federal structure. For instance, Puntland's withdrawal from the federal system reflects dissatisfaction with the federal government's approach to constitutional reform, accusing the Somalia Federal Government (SFG) of sidelining it. Puntland's institutional frameworks allow it to opt out of federal processes it opposes, holding the reform agenda hostage. Similarly, Jubaland has severed ties with Mogadishu, citing federal interference and unmet promises regarding territorial control and electoral rights.

Advocates of centralization seek greater control over peripheral regions, viewing it as essential for national cohesion. However, supporters of federalism see these efforts as threats to clan autonomy. Scholars argue that federalism offers a crucial framework for managing Somalia's intricate clan dynamics, providing mechanisms for local representation, power distribution, and resource management.

Moves toward centralization, such as abandoning the 4.5 power-sharing formula foundational to Somalia's federal system, risk fostering further fragmentation rather than establishing a cohesive central authority. These actions could alienate pro-federalism member states and undermine Somalia's sovereignty. Additionally, proposals to implement a "one person, one vote" electoral system raise concerns about destabilizing the existing clan-based political framework, potentially exacerbating tensions between the federal government

and member states as well as rival clans.

Opponents of this electoral shift must be included in discussions, as its implications are far-reaching. Any transition should prioritize restoring stability, improving citizens' lives, and fostering peace in the region. Shortsighted reforms that neglect dissenting voices risk undermining progress. A comprehensive dialogue involving all stakeholders is critical for ensuring an inclusive and equitable political framework.

### Threats to Stability

Rising discontent among federal member states reflects growing concerns about Villa Somalia's centralization efforts, perceived as marginalizing key clans. The absence of an inclusive national dialogue on constitutional reforms exacerbates these grievances, hindering political cohesion and governance. Disputes over power-sharing and constitutional amendments further complicate Somalia's political and security landscape, impeding collaborative governance and increasing the risk of conflict.

This fragmentation creates opportunities for groups like al-Shabaab to exploit divisions between the SFG and Federal Member States (FMS). The lack of coordination among internal actors and external stakeholders undermines efforts to combat al-Shabaab, as political squabbles overshadow collective security goals.

Prolonged discord weakens Somalia's capacity to address security challenges, build institutions, and achieve consensus on resource and power distribution. Without substantial progress toward an inclusive political settlement and international cooperation, the risk of al-Shabaab consolidating power—through force, negotiation, or accommodation—becomes

more likely.

To prevent this outcome, Somalia must pursue a genuinely inclusive national discourse, addressing constitutional ambiguities and power struggles through principled and participatory approaches. Resolving disputes between the federal government and member states, fostering cooperation between formal and informal governance systems, and addressing power-sharing and resource distribution are critical for stability.

By rebuilding trust, strengthening institutions, and fostering inclusive political engagement, Somalia can mitigate internal tensions and focus on sustainable peace and development. Such efforts are essential not only for Somalia's future but also for stability in the broader region.

### Security Challenges and Sovereignty

The enduring challenges of restoring full sovereignty are tied to the legacies of statelessness and ongoing political and security issues that impede stability. Restoring Somalia's sovereignty—characterized by preventing external interference, asserting territorial control, and establishing a monopoly on the legitimate use of force—requires addressing the root causes of instability and fragility. It also means that the state controls all its territories and non-state actors are not in a position to use Somalia to challenge the state authority and disturb Somalia's neighbors. This is far from reality since 1991. In this context, state collapse and its detrimental impacts on sovereignty, coupled with the rise of clan-based militias and terrorist groups, have significantly weakened state authority in Somalia. This situation has compelled the nation to rely increasingly on external military and financial support for security, which further

undermines its capacity to make independent decisions. As international actors often exert considerable influence over both domestic and foreign policies, Somalia's fragile security environment continues to pose a persistent threat to its sovereignty and autonomy in shaping its foreign policy.

In this context, while restoring the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force is essential for Somalia's stability and for preventing a recurrence of the post-1991 crisis in the country, a purely securitized approach has proven inadequate. Stability cannot be achieved solely through military measures; it requires inclusive and principled legal and institutional frameworks to address the underlying drivers of conflict. Without such frameworks, Somalia will continue to struggle to maintain and assert its sovereignty effectively.

Achieving sustainable peace necessitates the establishment of institutional and legal mechanisms capable of resolving disputes over power-sharing, resource allocation, and governance. Genuine dialogue between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), Federal Member States (FMS), and influential non-state actors is imperative to address these longstanding issues. This inclusive approach is critical to fostering trust, strengthening governance structures, and ensuring Somalia's transition to a stable and functional modern state.

This scenario reflects broader challenges faced by fragile states, underscoring the interconnectedness of sovereignty and stability. Somalia exemplifies the complexities of fragile sovereignty in a region marked by geopolitical rivalries. Weak governance, regional disputes, and external interventions have created a web of interdependent challenges that no single state can resolve alone. For decades,

Somalia has served as a theater for proxy conflicts involving both regional and extra-regional actors, highlighting how its instability is intricately linked to broader regional and global dynamics.

Addressing these challenges requires a collective, multilateral approach. However, the shifting power alignments in the Horn of Africa have often diminished the effectiveness of multilateral frameworks. Such approaches, while offering potential solutions, frequently introduce additional complexities that further complicate regional sovereignty. The evolving dynamics in the Horn of Africa and shifts in the global order emphasize the need for coordinated strategies that balance national, regional, and international interests while addressing Somalia's unique security and sovereignty challenges.

### **Regional Dynamics and Relations with Neighboring Countries**

Somalia's fragility has significant implications for neighboring countries and the broader region. Weak security structures have allowed terrorist groups and non-state armed factions to operate with impunity, threatening regional stability. This has prompted coordinated interventions by regional states, often driven by their national security concerns. However, these interventions have sometimes deepened Somalia's internal divisions, as external actors exploit local rivalries to advance their agendas.

Somalia's relationships with neighboring countries, particularly Ethiopia and Kenya, are marked by complexity and periodic tension. Both nations have historically played significant roles in Somalia's internal affairs, balancing security assistance with the pursuit of their own strategic interests. Disputes over border regions like Jubaland

and competition over maritime resources have periodically strained these relationships.

Additionally, the large Somali populations within Ethiopia and Kenya influence both countries' foreign policies toward Somalia. In Ethiopia, the presence of ethnic Somali groups affects both federal and state-level politics, complicating Addis Ababa's ability to craft consistent foreign policy. Similarly, in Kenya, the interplay of domestic Somali communities and cross-border clan dynamics challenges efforts to develop cohesive regional strategies.

### **Ethiopia and Somalia**

Somalia-Ethiopia relations have oscillated between conflict and cooperation. The first and second Ogaden wars (1963 and 1977-1978) over the Ogaden region's sovereignty left a lasting imprint on their interactions. Despite Ethiopia's military advantage following the second war, the Ogaden Liberation Front continued its struggle for self-determination until political changes in 2018 integrated it into Ethiopian politics.

The fall of the Derg regime in Ethiopia and the collapse of the Somali state in the early 1990s introduced new challenges. Somalia's security problems prompted Ethiopia's involvement, driven by national security concerns, regional stability goals, and counter-terrorism efforts. Ethiopia has made peacemaking efforts and military interventions in Somalia, including campaigns against al-Shabaab, and has been a key contributor to AMISOM, ATMIS, the African Union's peacekeeping mission to Somalia. Through the OAU and IGAD mandates, Ethiopia also played a diplomatic role in encouraging political dialogue among Somali factions.

However, these efforts have not been

without contention. Historical grievances, such as Ethiopia's refusal to recognize General Aideed's Salbalaar "government" and its military actions against the Salbalaar group in Baidoa during the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict in 1999, have fueled distrust. Ethiopia's role in the 2004 Kenya-hosted Somalia peace process and its opposition to the Arta outcome of the Djibouti-hosted peace process also impacted Somalia's internal politics.

Ethiopia's intervention in 2006 to dismantle the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) marked another significant episode in their relations, with Ethiopia seeking to neutralize the ICU's challenge to the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). The interventions in 1999 and 2006-9 weakened the ICU and, by extension, the Habir Gedir sub-clan's influence in Somali politics. But that influence has resurfaced challenging the SFG relations with FMS and its neighbors.

While common security threats, such as al-Shabaab, have necessitated pragmatic cooperation, tensions have recently escalated. Somalia's response to the January 2024 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Ethiopia and Somaliland, which Mogadishu viewed as undermining its sovereignty, has been particularly contentious. Somalia expelled Ethiopia's ambassador and sought external alliances to counterbalance Ethiopian influence.

Somalia's growing alignment with Egypt and Eritrea has further complicated relations. The Cairo-Mogadishu defense agreement highlights Egypt's strategic interest in expanding its influence, mirroring historical alignments where Egypt supported Somalia against Ethiopia. Additionally, Somalia's announcement that Ethiopian troops would no longer participate in the African Union force in Somalia starting January 2025

underscores the deepening rift. But this is changing since the Ankara declaration of December 2024.

Somalia's evolving relationships with Ethiopia and Kenya reflect the challenges of balancing regional security cooperation with competing national interests and historical grievances. The increasingly fragmented dynamics in the region demand renewed diplomatic efforts to prevent further escalation and foster stability in the Horn of Africa.

Despite bilateral and multilateral efforts to resolve tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia, progress has remained elusive until the Ankara declaration. After nearly a year of friction and diplomatic fallout affecting regional dynamics, Turkey—a nation with strong bilateral ties and influence in both Ethiopia and Somalia—initiated a series of talks. These negotiations culminated in a joint communiqué following the third and final round of discussions. In this communiqué, Ethiopia and Somalia expressed their commitment to addressing the longstanding dispute surrounding Addis Ababa's plans to construct a corridor in Somaliland, a region that is opting out of the union with Somalia.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan hailed the agreement as a "historic breakthrough," emphasizing its potential to provide landlocked Ethiopia with access to the sea while promoting regional cooperation. The agreement was widely celebrated as a diplomatic success for Turkey and a positive step for stability in the Horn of Africa.

The challenge, however, lies in crafting a framework that balances Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity with Ethiopia's strategic need for sea access. Achieving this balance requires innovative

solutions that acknowledge the political and economic realities of both nations. Although the specifics and implementation of the Ankara agreement remain uncertain, tensions between the two countries, which had escalated since January 2024, appear to have subsided.

Mogadishu's decision to re-engage in negotiations, dropping its earlier precondition that Ethiopia officially rescind its MoU with Somaliland, marks a notable shift. Whether this shift stems from internal dynamics within Somalia or external pressures is open to interpretation. Some observers suggest that practical necessities within Somalia played a key role, while others point to the influence of regional and international actors leveraging developments to encourage dialogue.

Notably absent from the final communiqué was any mention of Ethiopian soldiers stationed in Somalia. For those within the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) security orbit, maintaining Ethiopian troops in Somalia is seen as essential for ensuring stability. The continued involvement of Ethiopian troops in the Post-ATMIS mission in Somalia is a positive development in mitigating the security vacuum that could arise from their exclusion. However, uncertainty persists regarding the future of bilateral security arrangements between the two countries.

While the Ankara deal has temporarily eased tensions, it remains unclear whether it offers a comprehensive framework for addressing the core interests of both Ethiopia and Somalia. Questions linger over Ethiopia's naval ambitions and Somalia's insistence on protecting its territorial sovereignty. Without addressing these foundational issues, sustaining the agreement's momentum may prove challenging.

Ultimately, Ethiopia's willingness to reconsider its naval strategy and engage in further discussions to translate the Ankara deal into mutually beneficial agreements will be pivotal. A failure to do so risks undermining the fragile progress achieved thus far, potentially reigniting tensions and complicating regional peace and stability.

## Somalia and Kenya

Somalia-Kenya relations are shaped by interconnected economic and security interests, with Kenya grappling with persistent threats from insurgent groups like al-Shabaab. These threats significantly impact Kenya's national security and necessitate both bilateral and multilateral measures to address them. In response to these challenges, Kenya has implemented strategies such as establishing a buffer zone in the Juba land region to bolster its security. However, the outcomes have fallen short of expectations, mainly due to local community dynamics, corruption, and challenges in coordination on the ground.

## Peacekeeping and Security Cooperation

Initially, Kenyan leaders were hesitant to engage militarily against al-Shabaab. However, the increasing frequency and severity of attacks compelled Kenya to adopt a proactive approach, drawing inspiration from Ethiopia's example. This shift led to Kenya opting for enhanced collaboration with Ethiopia to address the security threat. While Kenya's intervention in Somalia garnered domestic and international support, it encountered significant challenges, including operational difficulties, logistical constraints, and the complexities of counterinsurgency, underscoring the inherent risks of military engagements in the region.

Kenya's primary objective was to create a buffer zone separating al-Shabaab from the instability affecting southern Somalia and Kenya. Strategically, Kenya also aimed to position itself as a reliable ally in the U.S.-led "global war on terrorism." Beyond addressing the immediate security threats posed by al-Shabaab, institutional motivations within the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) and the ambitions of political figures such as Internal Security Minister George Saitoti and Defense Minister Yusuf Haji in 2011 further influenced the intervention, driven by economic and political interests.

Operation Linda Nchi, launched on October 16, 2011, was a unilateral military intervention targeting al-Shabaab's strongholds in Somalia. While the operation received broad public and international support, it raised concerns among some Somali Federal Government (SFG) leaders about sovereignty and its potential impact on local clan dynamics. Declared complete in March 2012, the operation did not lead to the withdrawal of Kenyan troops. Instead, they were integrated into the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), extending their presence in the region.

To address tensions arising from Kenya's involvement, the Kenyan government invited Somalia's Prime Minister for discussions, culminating in a joint agreement emphasizing decisive action against al-Shabaab. However, unresolved differences between the two governments necessitated a tripartite meeting in November 2011 involving the presidents of Kenya, Uganda, and Somalia. Despite these efforts, mistrust persisted.

The SFG accused Kenya of pursuing its strategic interests without adequately considering Somalia's sovereignty and clan dynamics. Suspicions grew when leadership

changes in the proposed Azania administration involved politicians linked to Kenya and Ethiopia, raising fears that the buffer zone might serve the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Ultimately, Kenya established an administration in Kismayo, endorsed by IGAD but lacking full SFG approval. A temporary administration in Juba consolidated the buffer zone along the Kenya-Somalia border, addressing immediate security concerns but exacerbating mistrust and disrupting trade relations.

Although Kenya's military intervention since 2011 has not eradicated al-Shabaab, it has weakened the group's operational capacity and addressed pressing security concerns. However, the buffer zone's effectiveness has been undermined by local complexities, making it challenging to fully protect Kenya's population from al-Shabaab's threats. The continued attacks and attempts by al-Shabaab to expand its influence underscore the need for a robust deterrence strategy.

Kenya remains focused on maintaining its deterrence posture through joint military campaigns and the strategic use of its buffer zone to weaken al-Shabaab. These efforts aim to mitigate immediate security risks while countering the group's encroachment, which threatens Kenya's sovereignty and fosters regional instability. Al-Shabaab's ability to exploit local grievances increases the risk of radicalization and recruitment within Kenya, further jeopardizing national security and complicating efforts to sustain peace and stability in the region.

Moreover, while Kenya has pledged to withdraw its forces from Somalia once the al-Shabaab threat is neutralized, the situation has fostered complex new dynamics. Experts have noted that a key domestic motivation for Kenya's intervention

lies in the economic opportunities associated with such actions. Financial benefits from peacekeeping missions have the potential to reshape political dynamics, allowing leaders to reward loyalists or forge new alliances through the distribution of resources tied to these operations. The significantly higher compensation provided by these missions often serves as a tool to solidify political networks and consolidate power.

Additionally, individuals involved in peacekeeping missions may seek to maximize their economic gains through trade, which at times includes illicit goods and activities. These financial incentives create a nexus between political economy, resource distribution, and military operations, complicating the pursuit of security objectives. The alignment of military officials with ruling elites due to economic benefits further underscores this relationship.

George Kegoro has observed that rising terrorism-related insecurity in Kenya is partly driven by these dynamics. This insight aligns with Reno's (2000) analysis, which suggests that governments facing internal pressure often exploit neighboring states—or allow supporters to do so—as a strategy for political consolidation. Kenya's role in Somalia reflects this historical pattern, intertwining political and economic interests with security operations.

However, the persistent uncertainties surrounding Somalia's stability and the immediate and long-term security threats posed by al-Shabaab demand a carefully crafted, multi-stakeholder strategy. Effectively mitigating these threats will require robust coordination between Kenya, the Somali Federal Government (SFG), and other troop-contributing countries, without which risks undermining progress and falling short of achieving its security objectives, as

well as those of the broader region.

### **Economic Relations, Maritime Dispute, and Influence**

Kenya and Somalia maintain significant trade ties. In 2023, Kenya's imports from Somalia were valued at approximately USD 345.34 thousand, while its exports to Somalia reached about USD 154.26 million, according to the United Nations COMTRADE database. Notable imports from Somalia include fish, crustaceans, mollusks, aquatic invertebrates, and electrical and electronic equipment. While Kenya's exports to Somalia have grown, imports from Somalia have shown a declining trend.

Economic relations, influenced by local and international factors, have also been shaped by political tensions. For instance, the export of khat from Kenya to Somalia has been affected by the maritime dispute between the two nations. After bans on khat in the Netherlands (2012) and Britain (2014), Somalia became a crucial market for Kenyan khat traders. However, political tensions disrupted this trade, exemplified by Somalia's March 2020 ban on Kenyan khat imports during the COVID-19 pandemic. This ban significantly impacted Kenyan farmers, forcing them to sell khat locally at reduced prices, and causing job losses among those involved in the trade. Nevertheless, the lifting of the ban nearly two years later led to a quick recovery, with Kenya exporting USD 2.2 million worth of khat within just four days, according to Business Daily.

The interplay between economic and political ambitions continues to shape interstate relations. Reports of growing Somali business influence in Kenya, coupled with the political interests of the Islamic Ulama—often linked to Somali leadership through clan connections—highlight the

complex relationship between economics and politics. This dynamic could complicate internal Kenyan politics, especially among its elite, mirroring historical tensions in Ethiopia, where Eritrean businessmen's involvement strained Ethiopia-Eritrea relations. Such scenarios underscore the need for careful management of the intersection between economic influence and political relations.

Somalia's new President, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, has sought to improve relations with Kenya, reversing policies of the previous administration. His efforts, including engaging with outgoing Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, have reduced tensions. However, the maritime dispute over coastal areas believed to contain valuable oil and gas deposits remains unresolved. Kenya rejected the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling on October 12, 2021, citing alleged bias, further straining relations and complicating efforts to address territorial claims and resource rights.

Kenya favors bilateral negotiations to resolve the maritime dispute, while Somalia advocates for the ICJ verdict, which contradicts the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in 2009. Under the MoU, both governments agreed to defer maritime boundary delimitation and allow the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) to review their submissions. Despite this agreement, the dispute persists, underscoring the need for a solution that aligns with both countries' fundamental interests.

The relationship between Kenya and Somalia is marked by intricate security, economic, and political challenges, particularly regarding trade, investment, maritime boundaries, and resource management. To address these issues and foster stability, both nations must prioritize joint security cooperation to tackle common

threats like piracy and terrorism. Mutually beneficial agreements on resource control and sovereignty are essential for long-term peace and stability. By focusing on shared interests, enhancing regional collaboration, and managing economic motivations effectively, Kenya and Somalia can strengthen constructive negotiations and promote lasting development in the Horn of Africa.

### The Role of Multilateral Institutions

Multilateral institutions, particularly the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the African Union (AU), and the United Nations (UN), are pivotal in supporting Somalia's stabilization efforts. IGAD has historically facilitated dialogue between Somalia's government and regional stakeholders, although its impact is constrained by internal divisions and competing priorities among member states.

The African Union, through the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), has provided essential security support, enabling Somalia to reclaim territories from al-Shabaab. However, the planned drawdown of ATMIS forces presents significant challenges, including the Somalia National Army's (SNA) readiness to take over security responsibilities. A key issue is the lack of a well-established force generation process for the SNA, which is critical for a seamless and effective transition. This underscores the urgent need for sustained international support and robust capacity-building initiatives. Predictability and sustainability of funding are particularly important, given ATMIS's \$150 million deficit since its mandate began in April 2022, driven by declining financial contributions from both multilateral and bilateral donors. Multilateral efforts to mitigate these financial shortfalls are

essential for maintaining momentum in Somalia's stabilization process.

Security cooperation with troop-contributing countries (TCCs) under ATMIS has been central to countering al-Shabaab. However, issues such as coordination challenges, uneven resource allocation, and diverging national priorities among TCCs often undermine the effectiveness of these efforts. Somalia must carefully balance its reliance on regional security partnerships with its goal of asserting greater autonomy over its security priorities.

The transition to the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), led by the AU and authorized by the UN, necessitates effective collaboration among the AU, UN, Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), and donor countries. Cooperation in areas such as funding mechanisms, mission design, and operational strategies is critical. Delays in reaching consensus on these aspects could jeopardize Somalia's security and risk undoing hard-won gains.

To prevent a security vacuum and safeguard progress, the new mission must receive adequate funding, and existing partnerships between the AU, UN, and the Somali government should be strengthened. While coordination among the UN, AU, and IGAD has been instrumental in addressing al-Shabaab's threat in Somalia and the wider region, the effectiveness of these interventions is often undermined by a lack of alignment between multilateral and bilateral actors. Additionally, the Somali government's limited capacity to absorb and implement external assistance significantly hampers these efforts.

As stakeholders prepare for this critical transition, prioritizing measures to enhance coordination, strengthen Somalia's

institutional capacity, and address financial challenges will be key to ensuring a sustainable and secure future for the country.

### **Toward Restoring Trust and Sovereignty**

Somalia's path to stability and sovereignty is riddled with complex challenges. However, through strategic internal reforms and meaningful engagement with regional and international partners, the country can surmount these obstacles and lay the foundation for a resilient, modern state. Restoring trust in governance and rebuilding state sovereignty require a multifaceted approach that addresses both internal governance and external relations.

#### **Rebuilding Trust in Governance**

Restoring trust in state institutions begins with their establishment and operationalization to deliver basic goods and services in a manner that is transparent, accountable, and aligned with the rule of law. The ability of these institutions to effectively meet societal needs is crucial for fostering public confidence in the government. While this principle is widely recognized, its application varies across societies. Communities with extensive experience in centralized governance may find it difficult to detach from their reliance on state institutions, whereas those with limited engagement may gravitate toward informal mechanisms better suited to their immediate needs.

In Somalia, the establishment of core state institutions must prioritize functionality, inclusivity, and resilience. Addressing governance deficits requires a robust institutional framework underpinned by strong legal and governance structures. Such structures should promote equitable power-sharing, ensure fair resource

allocation, and maintain accountability mechanisms that align with Somalia's social and political realities. By delivering essential services and fostering inclusivity, these institutions can bridge the gap between the state and society, enhancing public trust and strengthening state-society relations.

#### **Strengthening Sovereignty through Institutional Capacity**

A functioning state is integral to addressing governance challenges and interstate relations. Strengthened institutions not only provide a platform for resolving domestic disputes but also allow the state to assert its sovereignty in a manner that commands legitimacy both internally and externally. Somalia's journey to self-reliance requires reducing dependency on external actors and bolstering domestic economic capabilities. This process involves building the internal cohesion necessary for political unity while nurturing the skills and resources essential for sustainable development.

By addressing institutional weaknesses, Somalia can enhance its security architecture, effectively combating threats like al-Shabaab while gradually reducing reliance on external security interventions. This internal stabilization allows the state to focus on fostering economic growth and political inclusivity, which are key pillars of a resilient and sovereign nation.

#### **Regional and International Collaboration**

Equally important to Somalia's stability is fostering regional cooperation and cultivating trust with neighboring countries. Open dialogue is essential for resolving longstanding disputes over borders, resource allocation, and shared security concerns. Establishing mutual understanding with regional actors creates opportunities for joint solutions to common challenges, reducing tensions and promoting collective

progress.

Moreover, enhanced coordination with multilateral stakeholders such as IGAD, the African Union, and the United Nations is vital. These entities play a crucial role in aligning international support for Somalia's stabilization and development. Improved synchronization of their efforts ensures more cohesive and impactful interventions, whether in addressing security threats, facilitating political dialogue, or supporting capacity-building initiatives.

### **A Holistic Path Forward**

The interplay between internal reforms, regional cooperation, and international support creates a holistic framework for Somalia's path toward stability and sovereignty. Transparent governance, resilient institutions, and collaborative diplomacy are the cornerstones of this approach. By addressing the root causes of instability and reinforcing trust between the state and its citizens, Somalia can emerge as a self-reliant and robust nation capable of shaping its destiny and contributing meaningfully to regional stability.

Somalia's recovery from decades of state collapse requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both internal and external challenges. Rebuilding formal state institutions, fostering inclusive political settlements, and balancing the role of informal governance mechanisms are key to stabilizing the country. At the same time, coordinated regional and international efforts must prioritize Somalia's sovereignty and long-term development, rather than pursuing narrow interests. Ultimately, the path to stability in Somalia hinges on its ability to reconcile competing internal interests, restore governance, and build the institutional capacities necessary to meet the needs of its people. Without a comprehensive and inclusive approach,

efforts to rebuild Somalia risk being undermined, perpetuating the cycle of instability that has plagued the nation for decades.