



Institute for Research  
Analysis & Dialogue

# NAVIGATING SOMALIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY DYNAMICS: PERSPECTIVES FROM SOUTHWEST STATE

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## About the Research

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Security is fundamental to sustainable peace and development, serving as the foundation for progress in governance, reconciliation, justice, and service delivery. In alignment with our commitment to peacebuilding and our goal of delivering high-quality technical analysis on strategic domains such as security, IRAD partnered with Warteelka Arlaadi to host an X Space discussion on Somalia's national security dynamics on September 14, 2024. This event convened senior security experts and analysts to explore critical topics, including federal security arrangements, the ATMIS drawdown, regional security challenges, and the trust deficit between federal and regional administrations.

The dialogue was informed by extensive preparatory work, including high-profile interviews, observations during the Somali Prime Minister's visit to Baidoa, consultations with various sectors of Southwest State society, desk review data analysis, and comprehensive literature reviews. Building on these efforts, IRAD published this in-depth article analyzing Somalia's national security dynamics through the lens of Southwest State. The publication aims to support evidence-based decision-making and advance the shared goal of fostering peace, unity, and stability in Somalia.

This research underscores the understanding that addressing security is not merely a technical challenge but a foundational step toward building a resilient and inclusive future for all Somalis.



### Who We Are

The Institute for Research Analysis and Dialogue (IRAD) is an independent, nonpartisan, non-profit, think tank and research organization based in Baidoa, Somalia. IRAD is committed to conducting interdisciplinary research, policy analysis, and fostering inclusive dialogue with the aim of promoting citizen-centric participatory governance.

### Thematic Areas of IRAD



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The security landscape of Southwest State in Somalia is marked by a complex interplay of geopolitical, socio-political, and insurgency-driven challenges. The federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and federal member states, such as the Southwest State Government, face persistent threats from Al-Shabaab militants, armed clan militias, and underlying political tensions exacerbated by federal governance dynamics. With the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) entering its withdrawal phase, the region is at a critical juncture requiring a strategic recalibration of its security framework to ensure stability, effective governance, and territorial integrity.

The overreliance on ATMIS forces, particularly the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), for maintaining security is a key issue. The Southwest State's local forces, notably the Southwest Special Police Force, (SSPF) formerly known as Daraawiish, have demonstrated operational effectiveness recently but face structural, inclusivity, coordination challenges that risk undermining their legitimacy. Additionally, illegal checkpoints and militias disrupt vital supply routes and governance in strategic regions such as Lower Shabelle and Bay. The Federal Government's perceived neglect in addressing these regional issues, coupled with unilateral decision-making, has strained relations between the FGS and Southwest State, further complicating efforts to combat insurgency and foster national unity.

The planned withdrawal of ATMIS troops presents significant security risks, particularly in areas where the Somali Armed Forces (SAF) and state security institutions lack the capacity to maintain control. Coordinated efforts, such as the proposed Black Lion Operation to target Al-Shabaab strongholds, are critical but require comprehensive resource allocation, strengthened local forces, and strategic collaboration between federal and regional entities. Moreover, political discontent surrounding clan representation in federal structures and security forces adds layers of complexity that demand immediate attention to rebuild trust and address long-standing grievances.

To address these challenges, the FGS must adopt a holistic approach involving stakeholder consultations, equitable resource distribution, and targeted capacity-building initiatives for local forces. The Southwest State Government must also reform its recruitment and training processes to enhance the inclusivity and professionalism of its security forces. Additionally, robust policy frameworks that integrate security, governance, and climate resilience are essential to mitigating vulnerabilities and sustaining long-term stability in the region.

In conclusion, the security challenges in Southwest State require coordinated and inclusive efforts that balance federal and regional priorities. By addressing structural weaknesses, fostering dialogue, and ensuring strategic alignment in operations and governance, Somalia can navigate the post-ATMIS transition and build a more resilient and secure future.

## Introduction

The security dynamics in the Southwest State of Somalia present a complex landscape characterized by a multiplicity of actors, reflecting the region's geopolitical and strategic significance. The Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) is a critical player in the region, with its presence dispersed across various districts. The ENDF operates in dual capacities: as part of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) and as an independent force outside this framework. Their deployment secures key urban centers, such as Baidoa, the interim capital of the region and the seat of its presidency. Meanwhile, Barawe, the formal capital along the Indian Ocean, is under the protection of the Uganda Peoples Defense Force (UPDF) and units of the Somali National Army (SNA), highlighting the internationalized nature of the security apparatus in the state.

The state's territorial composition further complicates its security architecture. Of its eighteen districts, fourteen are controlled by the government and its allied forces, including Ethiopian contingents, while four—Tiyeglow, Rabdhuure, Sablale, and Kurtunwarey—remain under the control of Al-Shabaab militants. These militant-controlled districts exhibit a stark contrast in governance, with Al-Shabaab exercising comprehensive authority extending to both urban and rural areas. In contrast, government-controlled districts predominantly secure urban centers, with limited influence beyond the administrative boundaries of district headquarters. The lack of land control contiguity between government-held areas, compounded by Al-Shabaab's dominance over rural regions and key supply routes, undermines logistical connectivity and exposes government territories to periodic blockades.

The Lower Shabelle region exemplifies the intricate interplay of political and security actors. As a strategically vital area with major roads linking Mogadishu, Baidoa, and Kismayo, it has become a focal point for competing factions. The region's port towns, Marka and Barawe, are of considerable political and economic significance, further intensifying rivalries among stakeholders. These dynamics have fostered an environment of persistent instability, characterized by competing command structures and fragmented authority.

<sup>1</sup>AMISOM - African Union Mission In Somalia. (n.d.). AMISOM Military component - AMISOM. AMISOM. <https://amisom-au.org/mission-profile/military-component/>

<sup>2</sup>ibid



Tensions between Baidoa and Mogadishu frequently exacerbate the instability, reflecting underlying political and economic contestations over control of this critical region.

Al-Shabaab's operational dominance in rural areas and its ability to enforce blockades highlight the asymmetric nature of the conflict in Southwest State. While the government and its allied forces maintain a tenuous hold over urban areas, Al-Shabaab's influence over rural territories ensures its capacity to disrupt governance and economic activity. This dichotomy underscores the challenges faced by the Southwest State's administration in establishing effective governance and territorial control. The security landscape, marked by fragmented authority and competing interests, continues to hinder efforts to achieve stability and development in this strategically significant region.

## The State Security Architecture: A Primitive Security apparatus and with limits

The Daraawiish paramilitary forces have emerged as a critical component of the security architecture in Southwest State, Somalia, especially in the post-COVID era. These forces, numbering approximately 3,000 personnel with an annual recruitment of around 800, have been trained and equipped primarily by Ethiopian forces operating under both ATMIS and non-ATMIS mandates. Their primary roles include serving as the presidential guard for the state government and reinforcing security operations in districts under government control. The Daraawish's institutionalization reflects broader security sector reforms aimed at transforming decentralized clan militias into cohesive state-controlled entities under the oversight of the Security Ministry.

The organizational structure of the Daraawiish is dual-layered, encompassing forces directly funded and commanded from the statehouse and those supported by district-level administrations yet still indirectly controlled by the state government. This arrangement has evolved from historical clan-based militia systems, seeking to balance centralized command with localized governance. This dual framework has contributed to the Daraawiish's adaptability in addressing district-specific security needs while maintaining overall state authority. The reforms signify a move toward professionalizing security provision but also underscore challenges in ensuring cohesion and uniformity across different tiers of the Daraawiish forces.

The growing influence of the Daraawiish is particularly evident in their operational dominance over the Somali National Army (SNA) in Southwest State, notably around Baidoa. The SNA's declining effectiveness, attributed to political interference and inconsistent performance, has created a vacuum increasingly filled by the Daraawiish. Instances such as the SNA's withdrawal from key areas like Daynunay, Makudo, and Buula-guud illustrate this trend, with the Daraawiish taking over these forward operating bases (FOBs) to counter Al-Shabaab incursions. This shift reflects not only operational shortcomings within the SNA but also the Daraawiish's capacity to respond rapidly and effectively to security challenges, bolstered by state-level backing and Ethiopian support.

<sup>3</sup>Brokering Trade Routes: The political economy of checkpoints along the Baidoa Corridor', Rift Valley Institute, [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://riftvalley.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Brokering-Trade-Routes\\_Final-Reduced.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://riftvalley.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Brokering-Trade-Routes_Final-Reduced.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>Comments by Contexts Expert

<sup>5</sup>Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023). European Union Agency for Asylum. <https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/somalia-security-situation-february-2023>

The August 2024 Al-Shabaab mortar strikes on Baidoa's ATMIS-protected compound and airport further underscored the pressing security challenges in the region. These attacks prompted the UN to threaten the closure of its offices in Baidoa unless immediate action was taken. In response, the Southwest State President convened security actors, resulting in the swift deployment of joint forces—including Daraawiish, Somali Police Forces (SPF), and a small contingent of SNA personnel—to Makudo base near Baidoa Airport. The Daraawiish played a pivotal role in this deployment, showcasing their organizational readiness and ability to coordinate across different security entities. This rapid response highlighted the Daraawiish's emerging centrality in ensuring regional stability, even as it illuminated the limitations of other security forces.

Despite the Daraawiish's effectiveness, their rise has not been without controversy. Concerns persist regarding equitable clan representation within their ranks and the potential for the state government to leverage the Daraawiish for political purposes. These issues risk exacerbating existing tensions and undermining the legitimacy of the forces among local communities. Moreover, while the Daraawiish have demonstrated operational superiority in certain contexts, their success relative to the SNA raises broader questions about the sustainability of parallel security structures. The reliance on the Daraawiish underscores the challenges facing Somalia's national security apparatus, highlighting the need for comprehensive reforms that integrate local, state, and national security efforts in a more cohesive and inclusive manner.

## Consequences of the ATMIS drawdown under increasing security threats and conflicting interests of the FGS and the Southwest State

The presence of ATMIS forces, particularly the Ethiopian contingents, remains critical in Southwest State, where they support local security forces, including the Special Police Force or the Daraawiish, the Somali National Army (SNA), and local authorities. Their role encompasses countering Al-Shabaab activities and facilitating humanitarian efforts. However, a social media announcement from the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Security Advisor in early September 2024 regarding the imminent withdrawal of Ethiopian troops under the ATMIS mandate sparked significant unrest. Rumors of their replacement by Egyptian forces further exacerbated tensions, leading to widespread protests in towns such as Hudur, Wajid, Berdale, and Qansahdere. These protests reflected local fears about the Somali Armed Forces' (SAF) limited capacity to maintain security and concerns that geopolitical rivalries between Ethiopia and Egypt could lead to a military standoff due to the existing dispute over the Nile dam, hence, turn these regions into conflict zones.

The protests also revealed broader anxieties about the post-ATMIS security arrangement. Protesters voiced strong opposition to replacing Ethiopian troops, arguing that such a move could destabilize the region and leave their communities vulnerable to Al-Shabaab's advances. The prospect of a power vacuum following the Ethiopian withdrawal was met with apprehension, as locals feared for their safety and livelihoods. The protests highlighted the persistent lack of trust in the SAF's ability to secure the region and underscored the strategic importance of addressing

local security concerns in any future arrangement. The reaction of over 25 Somali Federal Parliament members from Southwest, who publicly supported the protestors, added another dimension to the unfolding crisis.

The parliamentarians' endorsement of the protests provoked intense backlash on social media, particularly from influential figures in Mogadishu. These critics accused the MPs of undermining national unity and aligning with Ethiopian interests, igniting deep-seated clan divisions and polarizing public opinion. The social media narrative painted the MPs' actions as a betrayal of national interests, reinforcing existing stereotypes and highlighting the fragility of Somalia's federal structure. This incident underscores the challenges of fostering social cohesion and managing clan-based political dynamics in a federal system, especially during periods of heightened insecurity and political disagreement.

Southwest State President Abdiiaziz Laftagaren responding to these developments criticized the FGS for its unilateral approach to decision-making, accusing it of undermining federalism and disregarding the needs and concerns of Southwest communities. His remarks resonated with many locals, who perceived the federal government's actions as dismissive of their priorities. The State's strong stance emphasized the importance of genuine federal-state collaboration and the risks of alienating regional administrations and communities through top-down governance practices.

In a bid to de-escalate the crisis, the Somali Prime Minister visited Baidoa on September 11th to engage with diverse stakeholders, including the SWS President, senators, MPs, and civil society representatives. These meetings highlighted the growing trust deficit between Southwest communities and the FGS leadership, stemming from a history of perceived injustice and marginalization. Participants stressed that the federal government's unilateral actions had exacerbated tensions, calling for more inclusive decision-making and equitable treatment of Southwest State within the federal system. The episode underscores the urgent need for the FGS to address regional grievances, rebuild trust, and develop a more inclusive and responsive approach to governance to foster stability and national unity.

### ***FGS Negligence:***

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has been criticized for concentrating its most sophisticated weapons and highly trained personnel in the central regions of the country, raising concerns about the equitable distribution of security resources. This issue has been a recurring grievance, with similar sentiments expressed by Jubaland politicians. In contrast, the Somali Armed Forces (SAF) in Southwest State—particularly in Bay and Bakool regions—have been largely neglected, receiving inadequate support in terms of weaponry, training, and logistical assistance. This disparity has heightened perceptions of marginalization among Southwest State leaders and communities, further straining relations with the FGS.

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<sup>6</sup>Expert opinion during space X debate on the matter facilitated by Arlaadi News Network, September 14, 2024



A glaring example of this neglect is the diminished capacity of the Somali National Army's (SNA) 60th Division, which is headquartered in Baidoa and responsible for operations in Southwest State. The division's effectiveness has been undermined by the reallocation of key battalions from Lower Shabelle to Mogadishu. Southwest State elites argue that this move reflects an intentional strategy to curtail the state government's control over its territories, undermining its ability to address security challenges and maintain authority in the region.

In response, Southwest State leaders have called for the restructuring and restoration of the battalions previously removed from the 60th Division. This measure is seen as critical not only for strengthening regional security but also for rebuilding confidence in the federal government's commitment to equitable governance. Addressing these concerns would not only enhance the operational capacity of the SAF in Southwest State but also contribute to a more balanced and inclusive approach to national security management.

***Political underrepresentation in the current government:***

Community leaders from Southwest State have raised serious concerns regarding the insufficient representation of their communities and clans in the key decision-making structures of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). They pointed to the underrepresentation in critical positions, such as the federal cabinet, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the civil service, as a significant oversight that undermines the principles of inclusivity and equitable governance. This disparity has fostered a sense of marginalization among the Southwest communities, particularly as such roles are instrumental in shaping national policies and advancing regional interests. The leaders underscored the urgent need to rectify this imbalance, viewing it as essential not only for fostering trust between the federal and state governments but also for promoting national unity.

Their demands reflect broader concerns about equitable power-sharing within Somalia's federal system, which is designed to accommodate the country's diverse clans and regions. The lack of adequate representation of Southwest communities in federal leadership is seen as a breach of this principle, exacerbating existing grievances and widening the trust deficit between the region and the central government. Addressing these concerns, the leaders argue, requires immediate and deliberate action to ensure fair distribution of political and administrative appointments. Such measures would not only strengthen the legitimacy of the federal government but also contribute to a more balanced and inclusive governance framework, reducing tensions and fostering collaboration between the center and periphery.

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<sup>7</sup>A review of a document on Strategic Planning for Post ATMIS Federal Government of Somalia Proposal, Dated March 2024

### ***Strong Criticism of Federal Government Inaction against Illegal Checkpoints:***

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) has faced significant criticism for its failure to address the activities of individuals under its protection who have been accused of undermining peace and stability in key districts of Southwest State. These individuals have reportedly facilitated the formation of clan-based militias, which have exacerbated existing tensions and posed direct threats to security in the region. Community leaders and political stakeholders argue that the federal government's inaction has not only enabled these destabilizing activities but has also eroded public trust in its commitment to ensuring law and order.

This criticism highlights broader concerns regarding the federal government's role in managing localized security dynamics within its federal framework. By failing to curtail such activities, the FGS risks deepening divisions and fostering an environment where conflict can escalate, particularly in regions already grappling with Al-Shabaab insurgency and fragile governance structures. Addressing these grievances requires the federal government to take decisive action against those involved in destabilizing activities while fostering collaboration with Southwest State authorities to strengthen security and promote inclusive governance.

### ***Discontent with Clan Political Maneuvering:***

During the Prime Minister's recent meeting, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) voiced critical concerns over what they perceive as deliberate plans by certain clan politicians to dominate key districts and regions in Southwest State. These plans reportedly target economically strategic corridors and resource-rich areas, such as the riverine and coastal zones, which are crucial for the region's prosperity. The CSOs alleged that these activities have been carried out with tacit or overt support from the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), which has further fueled mistrust and tensions between communities. Such perceptions, if left unaddressed, risk exacerbating existing divisions and destabilizing these economically vital areas.

Concurrently, the withdrawal of ATMIS forces from strategically significant locations in the Lower Shabelle Region, such as the Bariire Forward Operating Base (FOB), has intensified security risks. The drawdown has left a security vacuum in areas previously stabilized, with recent months witnessing a resurgence of clan conflicts and an increased threat from Al-Shabaab. The renewed violence and potential territorial gains by Al-Shabaab highlight the fragility of the security situation and underscore the critical need for coordinated governance and robust security interventions. Both the FGS and Southwest State administrations must act decisively to mitigate these risks and safeguard the progress achieved in recent years.

Failure to address these intertwined challenges could jeopardize the broader stability of Southwest State. Effective measures are needed to prevent the exploitation of resource-rich areas by political actors and militant groups, while simultaneously ensuring that ATMIS withdrawal plans are coupled with sustainable security strategies. Enhanced collaboration between the FGS, Southwest State, and local stakeholders is essential to rebuild trust, prevent further escalation of conflict, and secure the long-term stability and development of the region.

## Proposed security structure and the SW security needs

The provision of policing and basic security in newly liberated areas, as well as the enhancement of security measures in existing liberated zones, remains a critical priority for Somalia. Like other regional states, Southwest State (SWS) faces the challenge of deploying adequately trained police officers, ensuring their logistical support, and building the necessary infrastructure for their sustained operations. Effective policing in these areas is essential to consolidate gains made against Al-Shabaab, prevent a resurgence of insurgent activity, and foster local trust in governance. Addressing these needs would align with the broader Somali Transition Plan and contribute to long-term stability.

The Somali Transition Plan, however, has faced notable delays, as evidenced by repeated technical pauses requested by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) from the United Nations Security Council. Despite substantial international financial support—nearly three billion Euros from the European Union to the African Union forces in Somalia—progress remains uneven. AMISOM, launched in March 2007, played a significant role in degrading Al-Shabaab and building the capacity of Somali security forces, including the military and police. However, after more than a decade of operation, international stakeholders, including Somalia, the African Union, and the European Union, agreed on the need to transition from AMISOM to a Somali-led security model.

This transition materialized with the establishment of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) on 1 April 2022. ATMIS, designed to operate until the end of 2024, maintains a capacity of approximately 18,000 troops, 1,000 police officers, and 70 civilians, mirroring much of AMISOM's mandate and structure. Its goal is to gradually hand over all security responsibilities to Somali security forces. However, the drawdown of international forces raises concerns about Somalia's readiness to manage security independently, especially as discussions about a successor to ATMIS suggest it will likely involve reduced military strength and more limited mandates, such as guarding key infrastructure.

Further complicating the security landscape is the potential deterioration of relations between Somalia and Ethiopia. The FGS's decision to exclude Ethiopian forces from any post-ATMIS successor mission and tensions over Ethiopia's Memorandum of Understanding with Somaliland threaten to strain political relations. Such disputes have significant implications for Southwest State, as they could destabilize local governance and security dynamics. A failure to resolve these tensions could lead to social fragmentation and create openings for Al-Shabaab to exploit, undermining years of progress in the fight against insurgency.

In this context, Southwest State's Daraawiish forces could play a pivotal role in ensuring regional stability. Strengthening these forces through targeted training, enhancing their professionalisms, logistical support, and integration into national security frameworks would enhance their ability to address the immediate and long-term security needs of the region. Their involvement in both counterinsurgency



operations and community policing would be instrumental in safeguarding key infrastructure, restoring order in liberated areas, and preventing a resurgence of Al-Shabaab. By empowering local forces and fostering collaboration between federal and regional authorities, Somalia can navigate the post-ATMIS transition while laying a foundation for sustainable peace and security.

## Security Issues and Challenges

The Southwest State of Somalia is grappling with a multidimensional security crisis, compounded by the activities of armed clan militias that have emerged as a major destabilizing factor alongside the persistent threats from terrorist groups and political instability. These militias, particularly active in the Lower Shabelle and Bay regions, are notorious for operating illegal checkpoints that disrupt vital supply routes, obstruct commercial transportation, and displace civilians. In Wanlaweyn district, the Southwest Special Police Forces, (SSPF) have been engaged in continuous confrontations with these militias along the Baledogle–Yaqbiriweyne corridor. While initially portrayed as allies in combating Al-Shabaab, these groups have increasingly been seen as undermining security and governance, extorting civilians, and imposing burdens on local transporters.

The economic impact of illegal checkpoints has been profound, as illustrated by the militias' imposition of a \$300 toll per vehicle in July 2024, leading to the cessation of commercial transportation. Pacifying efforts by the state government to resolve these disruptions have repeatedly failed, forcing military intervention by the SSPF to restore order and enable the resumption of business activities. The state government's proactive measures have underscored the need for robust and sustained efforts to address the destabilizing influence of armed groups. However, the persistence of these militias reflects deeper systemic issues, including political affiliations and grievances that fuel their existence.

A similar scenario exists in Berdale district, where militias have maintained illegal checkpoints since late 2022. Despite ongoing dialogue aimed at integrating these groups into formal security structures, progress has been minimal. Reports suggest that these militias might have established connections with Al-Shabaab, engaging in intelligence-sharing and facilitating safe passage, further complicating the region's security dynamics. Such affiliations highlight the dual threat posed by the militias: undermining state authority while indirectly supporting terrorist activities. Both Wanlaweyn and Berdale illustrate the interplay between local clan grievances, political manipulation, and broader insecurity.

Compounding these security challenges is the impact of climate change, which exacerbates vulnerabilities and fuels displacement. Droughts and floods have created conditions for resource-based conflicts and have left displaced populations, particularly internally displaced persons (IDPs), susceptible to recruitment by armed groups, including Al-Shabaab. These groups exploit the humanitarian void by positioning themselves as providers of relief and services, thereby embedding themselves within vulnerable communities. The convergence of climate-induced

displacement and insecurity underscores the necessity of integrating climate resilience into security and governance strategies.

To address these interconnected challenges, a multifaceted approach is required. Both the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the Southwest State must adopt a unified stance against illegal checkpoints and armed militias. Reinforcing the rule of law, enhancing the capacity of the SSPF, and implementing security sector reforms to promote inclusivity is critical. Dialogue should take precedence over military interventions, with a focus on addressing the root causes of grievances and integrating militias into state structures through rehabilitation and reintegration programs. Additionally, security operations must emphasize impartiality to build trust among local clans and communities.

In conclusion, the security landscape in Southwest State is marked by a complex interplay of armed insurgency, clan politics, economic disruption, and environmental vulnerabilities. A comprehensive strategy that balances security enforcement with dialogue, inclusivity, and community engagement is essential. By addressing the root causes of instability and fostering collaborative governance, the state can move towards sustainable peace and stability.

## Funding Sustainability for the local Security Needs

The Southwest State Government faces mounting challenges in sustaining the Daraawiish forces amid increasing insecurity in the region. This predicament stems from two primary factors: limited domestic revenues and a lack of donor interest. The state's narrow tax base and constrained revenue collection capacity render it unable to fully cover the costs of its growing security needs, forcing reliance on fiscal transfers from the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). However, such transfers are often politically motivated and is unpredictable. On the international front, skepticism regarding the inclusivity and neutrality of the Daraawiish forces further complicates funding opportunities. Concerns persist that these forces might be utilized for political agendas or fail to represent the diversity of local clans, creating additional barriers to external support.

The reliance on external funding and unpredictable fiscal transfers exposes the fragility of the Southwest State's financial model for security. Historical fiscal trends illustrate this vulnerability, as the state's expenditures have consistently outpaced domestic revenue, with the gap filled by conditional budgetary support from the FGS. This fiscal imbalance undermines the government's ability to invest in a sustainable and responsive security apparatus. Compounding this challenge, international donors emphasize the importance of human rights and governance reforms in fragile states, requiring comprehensive restructuring of the Daraawiish forces before extending support. This includes ensuring clan inclusivity, appointing qualified military leadership, and establishing clear mandates with accountability mechanisms to build trust and ensure the forces' impartiality. The Daraawiish forces' sustainability is further questioned due to patterns of politicized recruitment and their transient nature tied to changes in political

leadership. Previous administrations in Southwest State have recruited and trained substantial numbers of Daraawiish personnel, many of whom disbanded following the departure of their respective patrons. This cycle has fostered a perception that these forces are primarily aligned with specific clans or political factions rather than serving as a neutral and enduring state security entity. For the Southwest State to maintain a stable and effective security system, successors must build on past achievements rather than dismantle them, fostering continuity and professionalism within the Daraawiish forces.

The need for a flexible, rapidly deployable security force is particularly urgent in Southwest State, where delays in responses from the Somali National Army (SNA), the Ministry of Defense (MoD), or the federal presidency undermine effective crisis management. This highlights the limitations of relying solely on the SNA, whose centralized structure often hampers timely intervention in federal member states (FMS). While the FGS encourages reliance on the SNA and restricts the formation of robust state-level forces, this policy creates operational gaps and delays in addressing urgent security threats. The FGS's hesitancy stems from fears of empowered FMS pursuing autonomy or creating rival forces, which could challenge the SNA or serve political agendas.

This dynamic raises critical questions about the Somali National Security Architecture and its adequacy in addressing contemporary threats. Should federal member states, such as Southwest State, rely exclusively on the SNA for security? Is the current limitation on state-level armed forces appropriate given the increasing threat from terrorist groups like Al-Shabaab? The case of the Daraawiish forces underscores the need to reassess the security framework, balancing federal oversight with regional autonomy to ensure that FMS have the capacity to respond effectively to localized security challenges. Acknowledging the role of state-level forces like the Daraawiish within the broader security architecture could enhance responsiveness while preserving national cohesion.

In conclusion, addressing the security challenges in Southwest State requires a multifaceted approach that considers the financial, political, and structural limitations of the current system. By ensuring inclusivity and accountability within the Daraawiish forces, improving fiscal sustainability, and reevaluating the role of state-level forces within the national security framework, both the FGS and Southwest State can work toward a more responsive and stable security environment. This approach is essential not only for addressing immediate threats but also for fostering long-term stability and governance in Somalia.

## Potential and Immediate Proposals as a Way Forward

### ***(a) Transitioning the dependency on ATMIS Troops:***

The Southwest State Government currently depends heavily on the presence of African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) troops, particularly the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), to maintain security in the region. This dependence is critical due to the persistent threat posed by Al-Shabaab, which



continues to exploit gaps in the state's security infrastructure to destabilize key areas. The reliance on external forces underscores the ongoing challenges in building a self-sufficient security apparatus within Southwest State, as well as the pressing need for the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) to take a more active role in supporting security operations in the region. Without this support, the state risks heightened vulnerability to insurgent activities, especially as ATMIS phases out its operations.

The lack of sufficient prioritization by the FGS in addressing security challenges in Southwest State further compounds the reliance on ATMIS troops. As the withdrawal of ATMIS forces approaches, it is imperative that the FGS steps up its support for the Southwest Government by providing the necessary resources to maintain control of major districts and prevent Al-Shabaab's resurgence. This includes logistical assistance, capacity-building programs for state security forces, and financial backing to sustain local operations. Effective collaboration between the FGS and Southwest State is crucial to ensuring a smooth transition post-ATMIS and to safeguarding the stability and governance gains made in the region.

***(b) Operational Strategy - Black Lion Operation:***

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) should prioritize the launch of the second phase of the military offensive, known as the Black Lion Operation, to address the persistent threat posed by Al-Shabaab in Southwest State. This operation is strategically aimed at liberating key strongholds of Al-Shabaab, including districts such as Tiye glow, Rabdhure, and Sablale, alongside securing critical supply routes and strategic areas that are vital for economic and logistical connectivity. The successful implementation of this offensive is essential to undermining Al-Shabaab's operational capabilities and reclaiming territories crucial for stability in the region. Any delays in launching the Black Lion Operation risk undermining the momentum gained from earlier military efforts and could lead to growing dissent and varied opinions among political and community stakeholders. Such delays might be perceived as a lack of commitment to addressing the security challenges in Southwest State, potentially eroding trust in the FGS's leadership. By acting decisively and ensuring adequate coordination between federal and regional forces, the FGS can strengthen its position in the fight against insurgency and reinforce national cohesion through demonstrable progress in the liberation of Al-Shabaab-controlled areas.

***(c) Support for the Federal Government's Stance on the Ethiopia MoU:***

The Ethiopian Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with Somaliland has been widely criticized as an affront to Somali sovereignty, raising serious concerns about the territorial integrity of the nation. This MoU has heightened sensitivities regarding Somalia's federal structure and the roles of its regional and federal governments in safeguarding national unity. However, the Federal Government of Somalia's (FGS) unilateral decision-making processes, particularly on critical issues such as troop withdrawals and other security matters, have exacerbated tensions between the FGS and the Southwest State Government. These unilateral actions

have been perceived as dismissive of regional voices, undermining trust and collaboration between the two levels of government.

The Southwest State Government has made it clear that it had no role in signing the MoU with Ethiopia, distancing itself from decisions that appear to compromise Somalia's sovereignty. Yet, the lack of adequate consultation with Southwest State leaders and communities on key issues, including the configuration of the security structure, remains a significant concern. The exclusion of regional stakeholders from these discussions not only undermines the legitimacy of federal decisions but also creates friction that hinders the effective implementation of security policies. A more inclusive approach, emphasizing dialogue and collaboration, is essential to ensuring that decisions reflect the interests and priorities of all Somali communities while reinforcing national sovereignty and stability.

***(d) Promote Local Peace and Stability:***

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) should recognize and commend the Southwest State Government's efforts to maintain peace and order in key areas by addressing the challenges posed by illegal checkpoints and the emergence of militias. These checkpoints and militias significantly complicate the security landscape, disrupting vital supply routes and undermining governance. The Southwest State Police Force (SSPF) has demonstrated considerable capability and effectiveness in tackling these issues, which underscores the need for their empowerment and support in broader security operations, particularly in liberation campaigns against Al-Shabaab. The FGS's perceived indifference to the proliferation of illegal checkpoints in Southwest districts could be interpreted as tacit approval of such destabilizing activities, further straining relations between federal and regional authorities. Somalia's adoption of federalism was intended to decentralize power and foster collaborative governance, reducing the likelihood of anarchy. Therefore, the FGS taking a definitive stance against illegal checkpoints and emerging militias in Southwest State would not only reinforce its commitment to federal principles but also strengthen trust and cooperation with regional authorities. Such clarity and support would send a strong message about the shared responsibility of safeguarding security and governance across Somalia.

***(e) Need for Dialogue:***

Engagement through the National Consultative Council (NCC) is critical for fostering collaboration between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the Southwest State Government, particularly on national security matters. This platform should serve as a forum for addressing regional concerns, aligning federal and state priorities, and creating a cohesive strategy to manage the evolving post-ATMIS security environment. By promoting inclusive discussions, the NCC can help bridge gaps in communication and ensure that the security needs of all regions, including Southwest State, are integrated into the national agenda.

A unified approach to combating Al-Shabaab and other security challenges is essential for sustainable peace and stability in Somalia. The NCC offers an opportunity for both the FGS and regional governments to share insights, coordinate resources, and establish clear roles and responsibilities in the fight against insurgency. Such collaboration not only strengthens the legitimacy of the federal system but also enhances the capacity of both federal and state forces to address localized threats, paving the way for a more resilient and secure Somalia.

***(f) Security Responsibility Transition to Somali Armed Forces:***

As the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) begins its withdrawal, it is imperative that the Somali Armed Forces (SAF) step in to fill the security vacuum, particularly in the Southwest State. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) must prioritize the deployment of military personnel and resources to support ongoing liberation efforts against Al-Shabaab in the region. This transition requires a robust strategy to ensure that gains made under ATMIS are sustained and that Somali-led forces are fully capable of securing and stabilizing key areas. A well-executed handover is critical for maintaining momentum in the fight against insurgency and avoiding the resurgence of destabilizing elements.

Central to this strategy is empowering the 60th Division of the Somali National Army (SNA), headquartered in Baidoa, to lead and coordinate operations across the Lower Shabelle, Bay, and Bakool regions. The 60th Division has proven its operational capacity and local knowledge, making it well-suited to spearhead counterinsurgency efforts. To enhance its effectiveness and foster national cohesion, integrating battalions from the Lower Shabelle region into the division is essential. This approach would not only strengthen the division's capacity but also align its efforts with broader national security objectives, ensuring a unified and coordinated response to security challenges. By fortifying the 60th Division, the FGS can bolster regional stability and accelerate the eradication of Al-Shabaab and other spoilers, laying a foundation for sustainable peace and development.

***(g) Reform and revisit the recruitment process of Daraawiish Forces:***

The Southwest State Government must prioritize revisiting the composition of its Daraawiish forces to ensure that recruitment processes are equitable and inclusive. Local concerns regarding the current makeup of these forces suggest perceived imbalances that could undermine trust and cooperation among various clans and communities. Addressing these grievances is essential to fostering legitimacy and ensuring that the Daraawiish represent a broad cross-section of Southwest State's population. An inclusive recruitment process would strengthen community buy-in and enhance the operational effectiveness of the forces, as they would be seen as impartial protectors of all communities rather than as instruments of specific political or clan interests. To achieve this, the government should implement transparent recruitment policies that emphasize merit and inclusivity while actively engaging with local leaders and stakeholders in the recruitment process.

Public consultations and dialogue with marginalized groups can help identify and address concerns, ensuring that the composition of the Daraawiish reflects the demographic diversity of the state. Furthermore, the government must establish clear guidelines and accountability mechanisms to prevent any form of favoritism or bias during recruitment. Such reforms would enhance public confidence in the state's security apparatus and reduce the risk of internal divisions within the forces.

Beyond recruitment, the Southwest State Government should invest in training programs that emphasize professionalism, impartiality, and respect for human rights among the Daraawiish forces. These measures would not only improve the forces' operational capabilities but also strengthen their legitimacy as a unified and representative security institution. By addressing local concerns over force composition and ensuring fair recruitment practices, the government can build a more cohesive and effective security framework that is better equipped to handle the region's complex security challenges, including the fight against Al-Shabaab.

## Policy Recommendations:

### ***(1) Enhanced Stakeholder Consultation and Coordination***

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) should establish a structured stakeholder engagement process to consult with Federal Member States (FMS) on identifying alternative or additional Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs). This initiative should prioritize diversifying international military support to reduce overreliance on Ethiopia's military. A sustainable approach must be developed that balances regional security needs with national sovereignty, ensuring that all critical decisions are inclusive and reflect the collective interests of Somalia's regions.

### ***(2) Promotion of Responsible Leadership***

Prominent figures within the FGS must adopt a restrained and diplomatic approach in public discourse to avoid hawkish or inflammatory remarks that could derail national consensus. Clear guidelines on communication and public engagement should be established, ensuring that political leaders prioritize unity and constructive dialogue when addressing sensitive national matters, particularly those affecting security and intergovernmental relations.

### ***(3) Accelerated Recruitment and Capacity Building***

The FGS should fast-track the recruitment of new troops, with state governments taking the lead in identifying and preparing personnel to fill security gaps likely to arise from ATMIS withdrawals. This recruitment process should emphasize merit, inclusivity, and regional representation to strengthen national cohesion while ensuring the forces are adequately trained and equipped to manage liberated areas effectively.

### ***(4) Decentralized and Needs-Based Liberation Efforts***

Liberation operations should be planned and executed based on strategic needs. The FGS and FMS should collaborate on identifying high-priority areas for



counterinsurgency efforts, focusing on regions most affected by Al-Shabaab activities. Regular assessments and data-driven planning should guide the allocation of resources and operations, ensuring equitable attention across all regions.

***(5) Reforming and Equipping Regional Security Forces***

A comprehensive security sector reform program should be implemented to enhance the efficiency and accountability of regional security forces, including the Southwest State forces - the Daraawiish. This should involve improving training programs, constructing formal barracks, and equipping forces with modern infrastructure and logistics. Additionally, mechanisms for climate-related conflict analysis and coordination between FGS and FMS must be developed to address emerging threats, preventing armed groups like Al-Shabaab from exploiting vulnerabilities exacerbated by climate change impacts.



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