VMUN **2026**

Disarmament and International Security Committee

BACKGROUND GUIDE

Vancouver Model United Nations
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Jerry Chen
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∾
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∾
Daniel Fu
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Adrian Pun
USG Delegate Affairs

Cate Shumka
USG Delegate Affairs

Ryan Xu
USG Design & Media

Dear Delegates,

My name is Karissa Lin, and I am honoured to be serving as your Director for the Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) at Vancouver Model United Nations 2026! As a sophomore at Crofton House School, I have been involved in Model UN for over two years now. Along with your Chair Sin Li, and Assistant Directors Christen Chiu and Simrat Kaur Matreja, we have been working diligently to create a stimulating and fruitful experience for you all to engage in. Whether you are chasing a gavel or simply tagging along with friends, it is my sincere hope that you walk away from this experience with the same fulfillment I once felt.

Ever since stepping into my first committee room, brimming with excitement, my love for this non-spectator sport has grown tremendously. From unserious speeches consisting of sonnets about international cooperation, to the fierce rivalries between blocs to get their resolution passed, there has never been a dull moment in the walls of a conference room. For the endless memories I have collected, the speaking skills I have refined, and the friendships that have blossomed, I thank MUN.

This iteration, DISEC will be addressing the issues of *Cyberwarfare* and the *Somali Civil War*. Though this backgrounder provides a broad understanding of the topics, it is highly encouraged that delegates explore deeper into the unique stances of their delegation and the nuances of these issues beyond what this backgrounder covers.

At this time, I wish you all the best in your research and eagerly look forward to a weekend of diplomacy like no other. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at disec@vmun.com. On behalf of the dais team, welcome to DISEC!

Sincerely,
Karissa Lin
DISEC Director

Position Paper Policy

What is a Position Paper?

A position paper is a brief overview of a country's stance on the topics being discussed by a particular committee. Though there is no specific format the position paper must follow, it should include a description of your positions your country holds on the issues on the agenda, relevant actions that your country has taken, and potential solutions that your country would support.

At Vancouver Model United Nations, delegates should write a position paper for each of the committee's topics. Each position paper should not exceed one page and should all be combined into a single document per delegate.

For DISEC, position papers, although strongly recommended, are not required. However, delegates who wish to be considered for an award must submit position papers.

Formatting

Position papers should:

— Include the name of the delegate, his/her country, and the committee

— Be in a standard font (e.g. Times New Roman) with a 12-point font size and 1-inch document margins

— Not include illustrations, diagrams, decorations, national symbols, watermarks, or page borders

— Include citations and a bibliography, in any format, giving due credit to the sources used in research
(not included in the 1-page limit)

Due Dates and Submission Procedure

Position papers for this committee must be submitted by **January 12, 2026, at 23:59 PT**. Once your position paper is complete, please save the file as your last name, your first name and send it as an attachment in an email to your committee's email address, with the subject heading as "[last name] [first name] — Position Paper". Please do not add any other attachments to the email. Both your position papers should be combined into a single PDF or Word document file; position papers submitted in another format will not be accepted.

Each position paper will be manually reviewed and considered for the Best Position Paper award. The email address for this committee is disec@vmun.com.

Cyberwarfare

Overview

The rapid proliferation of modern technology since the late 20th century has established cyberspace as a new domain for crime and, more recently, warfare. Much like how countries have historically engaged in arms races to obtain a military advantage over enemies, nations have begun to compete for the best hackers and malware to deploy into cyberspace. Considering this precedent, it is imperative that DISEC thoroughly addresses this prevalent development in global warfare through comprehensive measures.

Cyberwarfare is formally recognized as a distinct category of cybercrime. By definition of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), cyberwarfare consists of "cyber acts that compromise and disrupt critical infrastructure systems, which amount to an armed attack."[1] Cyberwarfare is a specific category of cybercrime, which is broadly defined by the European Union (EU) as "criminal acts committed online by using electronic communications networks and information systems."[2] Cyberwarfare typically targets either crucial infrastructure that citizens rely on, such as power grids, transportation systems, and financial institutions, or government operations. Many aspects of physical warfare exist in cyberspace and are also an aspect of cyberwarfare. Further, some definitions may also consider cyberterrorism to be a part of cyberwarfare. However, there are many distinct differences between the two, such as the sources of funding and scope of their impact: while cyberterrorism derives funding from independent means and targets a specific entity,[3] cyberwarfare is state-sponsored and typically attacks infrastructure, like electrical grids, that has a widespread impact on civilians or military operations.

Unlike traditional warfare, cyberwarfare allows nations to attack enemies without needing to cross borders, train armies, or even expose themselves as the perpetrators of attacks, allowing more stealth and secrecy than was possible before. Due to this strategic value, countries are beginning to digitize their militaries by incorporating cyber capabilities and developing cyber operations programs. As more advancements in technology continue to emerge, cyberwarfare will become more advanced and increasingly relevant in the geopolitical landscape. In facing this challenge, delegates must carefully balance the compelling national security incentives to develop cyber capabilities against the profound and unprecedented threats these tools pose to global stability and human security.

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[1] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. n.d. "Cybercrime Module 14 Key Issues: Cyberwarfare." United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/cybercrime/module-14/key-issues/cyberwarfare.html.

[2] European Commission. n.d. "Cybercrime - European Commission." Migration and Home Affairs. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/cybercrime_en.

[3] The Council of Europe. n.d. "War and terrorism - Manual for Human Rights Education with Young people." The Council of Europe. https://www.coe.int/en/web/compass/war-and-terrorism.

Timeline

October 4, 1957 — The Cold War Space Race begins with the launch of Sputnik, a series of Soviet satellites, laying the groundwork for competition in developing innovation across technological fields.[4]

October 1969 — The Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET), the first digital information-sharing network, is developed, allowing communication between computers.[5]

1971 — The first computer virus, "Creeper," is accidentally created and spreads onto computers via the ARPANET. Though not intended to harm networks, its creation triggers crucial innovation in both malware and cybersecurity.[6]

January 1983 — Transfer Control Protocol/Internetwork Protocol (TCP/IP) becomes the standardized protocol for the ARPANET, which allows different computer networks to interconnect seamlessly, effectively contributing to the creation of the modern internet.[7]

1990s — The dramatic increase in internet accessibility and personal computer ownership coincides with the widespread use of malicious software, setting the stage for future state-sponsored cyber conflict.[8]

April 27, 2007 — Estonia faces a flood of Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, a type of cyberattack that overwhelms networks beyond usage with bots and artificial service requests.[9] The attack is widely believed to have originated from Russia in response to the removal of a Soviet war statue, marking the first ever state-sponsored cyberattack.[10]

August 2008 — Russia uses cyberattacks in coordination with traditional warfare during its invasion of Georgia, marking the first time a hybrid strategy has been used.[11]

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[4] "The Invention of the Internet - Inventor, Timeline & Facts | HISTORY." n.d. History.com. https://www.history.com/articles/invention-of-the-internet.

[5] Anderson, Dan, and Peter Kirstein. 2018. "From ARPANET to the Internet." Science Museum. https://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/arpanet-internet.

[6] "The Creeper Program" 2024. Information and Communication Technology Agency of Sri Lanka. https://www.icta.lk/media/blog/the-creeper-program.

[7] "A Brief History of the Internet." n.d. University System of Georgia. Accessed June 19, 2025. https://www.usg.edu/galileo/skills/unit07/internet07_02.phtml.

[8] Dirk Schrader, "The Largest and Most Notorious Cyber Attacks in History," *Netwrix* (blog), August 12, 2025, https://netwrix.com/en/resources/blog/biggest-cyber-attacks-in-history/.

[9] Kirichenko, David. 2024. "Bytes to battles: a short cyberwar history." Asia Times. https://asiatimes.com/2024/03/bytes-to-battles-a-short-cyberwar-history/.

[10] "Estonian denial of service incident." 2007. Council on Foreign Relations Cyber Operations Tracker. https://www.cfr.org/cyber-operations/.

[11] Kirichenko, "Bytes to battles: a short cyberwar history."

June 2010 — The United States of America and Israel launch the first-ever cyberweapon—the "Stuxnet" worm—which targets the nuclear centrifuges of an Iranian nuclear facility while concealing any warnings of breakdown on facility computers, thus damaging Iran's nuclear program significantly.[12]

December 23, 2015 — Russian cyberattacks cause power outages across Ukraine, marking the first time cyberwarfare has successfully targeted national electrical infrastructure.[13]

February 2016 — North Korean-backed cybergroup, Lazarus, steals $81 million from the Bangladesh Bank entirely digitally; this cyberattack sets a precedent in digital banking security and cybersecurity as a whole.[14]

June 2016 — Russia secretly leaks correspondence between Democratic National Convention officials, significantly impacting the result of the 2016 U.S. presidential election.[15]

February 23, 2022 — Prior to sending physical troops into Ukraine, Russia launches several cyberattacks on Ukrainian government websites and the communication system for a satellite.[16] The subsequent conflict evolves into what is widely considered the first full-scale hybrid cyberwar, with cyber operations becoming a consistent and integral component of military strategy.[17]

January 16, 2023 — The second Network and Information Security Directive (NIS2) is adopted by the EU and aims to establish a consistent, high level of cybersecurity across crucial sectors within the EU by mandating robust security measures and enhanced reporting protocols for operations.[18]

November 24, 2024 — The UN General Assembly introduces the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime, which officially renders cyberattacks an international crime and represents a major step toward a global framework for cyberspace.[19]

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[12] Kushner, David. 2013. "The Real Story of Stuxnet - IEEE Spectrum." Duke Computer Science. https://courses.cs.duke.edu/spring20/compsci342/netid/readings/cyber/stuxnet-ieee-spectrum.pdf.

[13] "Compromise of a power grid in eastern Ukraine." n.d. Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/cyber-operations/compromise-power-grid-eastern-ukraine.

[14] "The Lazarus group: North Korean scourge for +10 years." n.d. NCC Group. Accessed June 18, 2025. https://www.nccgroup.com/us/the-lazarus-group-north-korean-scourge-for-plus10-years/.

[15] "Cyber Operations Tracker" n.d. Compromise of the Democratic National Committee | CFR Interactives. https://www.cfr.org/cyber-operations/compromise-democratic-national-committee.

[16] Przetacznik, Jakub, and Simona Tarpova. 2022. "Russia's war on Ukraine: Timeline of cyber-attacks." European Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733549/EPRS_BRI(2022)733549_EN.pdf.

[17] Ibid.

[18] "What is NIS2? Get the Complete Picture." n.d. The NIS2 Directive. Accessed June 20, 2025. https://nis2directive.eu/what-is-nis2/.

[19] Felipe, Loey. 2024. "UN General Assembly adopts milestone cybercrime treaty." UN News. https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/12/1158521.

Historical Analysis

The existence of cyberwarfare is fairly recent in the historical timeline of geopolitics; however, its purpose is aligned with that of traditional warfare: to gain a strategic military advantage.

After World War II, the significant ideological differences and geopolitical tensions between the United States of America and the Soviet Union led to the Cold War.[20] Rather than employing traditional warfare strategies, the two superpowers engaged in proxy wars to establish political dominance, competed in arms races to demonstrate technological capabilities, and utilized other indirect forms of conflict.[21] Notably, both nations launched a series of satellites into space to prove technological superiority.[22] The Space Race spurred rapid technological developments that preceded modern telecommunication and the internet.

Besides a shift towards technological innovations during the Space Race, the American government also incentivized scientific advancements through government grants and education, thus shifting society as a whole.[23] Indeed, becoming a leader in the technology industry had become the metric by which nations could prove superiority. The government's incentive to proliferate technologically, along with a societal shift towards it, led to many of the innovations that preceded the existence of cyberspace, such as computers and the internet. For example, the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) was initially intended for academics to share research data among themselves for technological advancements.[24] ARPANET was a direct consequence of governments incentivizing technological development among researchers, who used the ARPANET to communicate efficiently with each other despite physical distance. Eventually, the internet was established when the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) was standardized for all networks.[25] The TCP/IP allows computers from different networks to communicate by ensuring consistency in how data is handled between computers; without the TCP/IP, computers on the ARPANET would have been incompatible with computers on other networks.[26] Without these crucial technological advancements, the internet—and by extension, cyberspace—would not exist.

As accessibility to technology and the internet grew, so did overreliance; technology has become a crucial tool for development, convenience, and outreach, thus societies with widespread access to technology have incorporated it into almost every aspect of life. With a world that was becoming increasingly digitized, cyberspace soon became inhabited by dangerous malware. Though cyberattacks had not yet been utilized by nations, computer viruses developed and spread by individuals around the world started to become more prevalent online. For example, the "ILOVEYOU" virus that was spread globally in 2000 was developed by a civilian hacker in the Philippines, yet it preceded forms of data-corrupting malware that are still used in modern cyberwarfare.[27] Soon, nations recognized the dangerous potential of cyberspace and began to capitalize on it as a strategic espionage weapon and "safer" alternative to traditional warfare.

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[20] "Cold War | Summary, Causes, History, Years, Timeline, & Facts." 2025. Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/event/Cold-War.
[21] Ibid.
[22] "Sputnik and The Dawn of the Space Age." n.d. NASA. https://www.nasa.gov/history/sputnik/index.html.
[23] HISTORY, "The Invention of the Internet".
[24] Anderson, Kirstein, "From ARPANET to the Internet."
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Griffiths, James. 2020. "How a badly-coded computer virus caused billions in damage." CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/01/tech/iloveyou-virus-computer-security-intl-hnk.

Past UN/International Involvement

United Nations Convention against Cybercrime

On December 24, 2024, the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime was officially adopted, marking the first successful international criminal justice treaty in two decades.[28] The treaty's primary objects are to harmonize the domestic criminalization of specific cyber offenses and to enhance international cooperation in investigating such crimes.[29] By requiring states to strengthen their national cybersecurity capabilities, the Convention also establishes a regulatory foundation to counter cyberwarfare.

Despite enthusiasm from the UN to ratify the treaty, it has garnered significant backlash from various groups long before it was adopted. Human rights activists and major technology companies have criticized the treaty for violating digital privacy and have warned that authoritarian regimes will take advantage of the resources provided.[30] Critics, including human rights groups and the U.S. Senate, caution that the treaty's proposed surveillance measures could extend beyond cybercrime to encompass any activity deemed criminal under domestic law.[31] Activists argue that online surveillance technology is not only a violation of privacy but also a fundamental breach of human rights, potentially endangering political dissidents, journalists, and whistleblowers by subjecting their work to government scrutiny.[32]

While risks exist, the UN Convention on Cybercrime establishes foundational frameworks for national cybersecurity, sets a precedent for international cooperation surrounding affairs in cyberspace, and builds capacity for cybersecurity in developing nations.[33] These factors are critical in addressing cyberwarfare, as they promote a baseline level of national resilience and global security.

UNODA Group of Governmental Experts

The United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) assists the General Assembly and other UN bodies in matters of disarmament.[34] As a part of General Assembly resolution 73/266, UNODA established a Group of Government Experts (GGE), consisting of experts from 25 different member nations and consults from several

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[28] Felipe, Loey. 2024. "UN General Assembly adopts milestone cybercrime treaty." UN News. https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/12/1158521.

[29] Plumb, Charlie. 2024. "Understanding the UN's new international treaty to fight cybercrime." United Nations University. https://unu.edu/cpr/blog-post/understanding-uns-new-international-treaty-fight-cybercrime.

[30] "UN General Assembly approves cybercrime treaty despite industry backlash." 2024. The Record from Recorded Future News. https://therecord.media/un-general-assembly-approves-cybercrime-treaty-despite-industry-pushback.

[31] Adams, Andrew C., and Daniel Podair. 2024. "Confusion & Contradiction in the UN 'Cybercrime' Convention." Lawfare. https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/confusion---contradiction-in-the-un--cybercrime--convention.

[32] Brown, Deborah. 2024. "New UN Cybercrime Treaty Primed for Abuse." Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/12/30/new-un-cybercrime-treaty-primed-abuse.

[33] "Basic facts about the global cybercrime treaty | United Nations." n.d. Welcome to the United Nations. https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/basic-facts-about-global-cybercrime-treaty.

[34] "About Us – UNODA." n.d. United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. https://disarmament.unoda.org/about/.

regional bodies.[35] In 2021, this GGE reported on responsible state behaviour in cyberspace and the application of international law to this domain.[36]

The GGE's purpose is to encourage diplomacy on the topic and set norms for cyberspace, rather than directly intervening in cyberwarfare. For example, the Canadian government has actively incorporated the GGE's findings in its laws surrounding state behaviour in cyberspace.[37] It has been largely successful due to its recommendations for a framework dedicated to international cooperation in cyberspace and the implementation of previously proposed norms.[38] However, despite being able to institute norms through the UN, these often hold little weight in international decision-making and are usually overshadowed by each nation's geopolitical incentives. A further limitation is the absence of clear implementation proposals or mechanisms to track efficacy.[39] Despite the practical shortcomings, the GGE has fostered essential dialogue and research that will continue to inform future resolutions.

UNODC Aid

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a branch of the UN targeting drugs, crime, terrorism, and corruption.[40] In response to the growing prevalence of cybercrime, the UNODC has initiated programs to train local authorities, provide necessary equipment, and strengthen investigation capabilities to help developing nations.[41] Notably, the UNODC has supported efforts against cybercrime in Tunisia, Libya, and Morocco: in 2020, the UNODC hosted a cybercrime workshop in Libya targeted at retrieving digital evidence for ongoing investigations into North African criminal networks,[42] and the next year, it provided Tunisia with 200,000 USD worth of equipment and software.[43] By supporting countries in developing cybersecurity measures to combat cybercrime, the UNODC builds nations' capacity to defend against cyberwarfare threats.

Despite these efforts, the impact on cybercrime in recipient nations has been limited. Tunisia continues to experience exponential levels of cybercrime and suspected cyberwarfare, and Libya's ongoing internal conflicts hinder the implementation of cybersecurity initiatives,[44, 45] while Africa faces an overall spike in cybercrime.[46] In

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[35] Group of Governmental Experts – UNODA." n.d. United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs. https://disarmament.unoda.org/group-of-governmental-experts/.

[36] Ibid.

[37] "International Law applicable in cyberspace." 2022. Global Affairs Canada. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/peace_security-paix_securite/cyberspace_law-cyberespace_droit.aspx?lang=eng.

[38] "The UN GGE Final Report: A milestone in cyber diplomacy, but where is the accountability?" 2021. CyberPeace Institute. https://cyberpeaceinstitute.org/news/the-un-gge-final-report-a-milestone-in-cyber-diplomacy-but-where-is-the-accountability/.

[39] Ibid.

[40] "About UNODC." n.d. UNODC. https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/about-unodc/index.html.

[41] "Taking action where we can to stop cybercrime." n.d. UNODC. https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/2018/May/taking-action-where-we-can-to-stop-cybercrime.html.

[42] "Libya: Utilizing digital evidence in cybercrime investigations." 2020. UNODC. https://www.unodc.org/romena/en/Stories/2020/December/libya_-utilizing-digital-evidence-in-cybercrime-investigations.html.

[43] "UNODC provides Tunisia with 200,000 USD worth of forensic equipment and software to stop cybercrimes." 2021. UNODC. https://www.unodc.org/romena/en/Stories/2021/March/unodc-provides-tunisia-with-200-000-usd-worth-of-forensic-equipment-and-software-to-stop-cybercrimes.html.

[44] "Criminality in Tunisia." n.d. The Organized Crime Index. https://ocindex.net/country/tunisia.

[45] "Criminality in Libya." n.d. The Organized Crime Index. https://ocindex.net/country/libya.

[46] "New INTERPOL report warns of sharp rise in cybercrime in Africa." 2025. INTERPOL. https://www.interpol.int/en/News-and-Events/News/2025/New-INTERPOL-report-warns-of-sharp-rise-in-cybercrime-in-Africa.

Tunisia, Decree-Law 54—purportedly enacted to combat cybercrime—has been used to target journalists, lawyers, and political dissidents, and mandates that telecommunications companies collect user data for government surveillance.[47] Similarly, Libyan authorities have enforced a deliberately vague cybercrime law to arrest individuals, such as female artists, for allegedly violating "public morals."[48] Thus, while the UNODC aims to combat cybercrime while respecting national sovereignty, its initiatives have been largely undermined by external political circumstances, including ongoing conflicts and authoritarian governance.

NATO/EU/OSCE Toolboxes

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a regional body focused on Euro-Atlantic security, has created a "toolbox" of political, military, and diplomatic strategies for respective member states to utilize in times of cyberattacks. For example, mechanisms for sharing malware intelligence to bolster collective defense.[49] Similarly, the European Union (EU) and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) have their own toolboxes. While the EU's framework emphasizes diplomatic measures such as sanctions,[50] the OSCE focuses on early-warning mechanisms and conflict prevention.[51] These tools have been deployed in the past, such as when NATO provided support to Montenegro following significant cyberattacks in 2018.[52]

However, the effectiveness of these toolboxes is frequently questioned due to the rapidly evolving nature of cyberspace. Both the EU and OSCE toolboxes are rendered largely unsuccessful due to geopolitical circumstances and misaligned views among allies. Some states are reluctant to fully utilize the OSCE toolbox due to internal political concerns, lack of consensus in the government, and resource constraints.[53] The EU toolbox has been criticized for being overly ambitious by overestimating the amount of available resources, and relying on defensive, rather than preventative measures.[54]

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[47] "Tunisia: Cybercrime Decree Used Against Critics." 2023. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/12/19/tunisia-cybercrime-decree-used-against-critics.

[48] "Libya: Revoke Repressive Anti-Cybercrime Law." 2023. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/03/libya-revoke-repressive-anti-cybercrime-law.

[49] "Cyber defence." 2024. NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_78170.htm.

[50] "The Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox." n.d. The EU Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox: An In-Depth Analysis of Cyber Diplomacy. https://www.cyber-diplomacy-toolbox.com/.

[51] Glod, Katia. 2025. "Assessing the OSCE Toolbox: Opportunities for a safer Europe." European Leadership Network. https://europeanleadershipnetwork.org/report/assessing-the-osce-toolbox-opportunities-for-a-safer-europe/.

[52] "Montenegro to Join NATO Cyber-Defence Centre." 2018. Regional Cooperation Council. https://www.rcc.int/swp/news/61/montenegro-to-join-nato-cyber-defence-centre.

[53] Ibid.

[54] "Realising the EU Hybrid Toolbox: opportunities and pitfalls." n.d. Clingendael. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Policy_brief_EU_Hybrid_Toolbox.pdf.

Current Situation

Types of Cyberwarfare

Cyberwarfare campaigns employ diverse types of malware and strategies, each tailored to specific strategic objectives.

Cyber espionage campaigns targets devices containing sensitive state data typically through botnet DDoS attacks—which use multiples compromised computers to overwhelm and disable a target's device while data is exfiltrated—or spear phishing, where hackers impersonate trusted entities to trick users into clicking malicious links or downloading harmful files. As a result, the perpetrator is able to access state files and spy on the government, ultimately supporting other cyber operations or forms of conventional warfare.[55] For example, in 2021, India targeted government officials in Pakistan and Kashmir in an espionage campaign to collect information on internal communications.[56]

Sabotage campaigns aim to render state operations futile by destroying or stealing data crucial to an operation.[57] Cyber sabotage can be a useful tool when used in conjunction with physical warfare, since it may impair the enemy from employing effective defensive or offensive measures.[58] For example, Iran targeted Saudi Arabian and Qatari gas companies in 2012 by stealing passwords and wiping data from their computers.[59]

Electrical power grid attacks disrupt vital infrastructure and communications, often serving as a distraction for deploying more destructive malware.[60] Using ransomware or supply chain attacks, perpetrators target control panels to cause widespread disruption. For example, China targeted India's power grid infrastructure in 2020 amid border tensions, which limited India's ability to defend its frontier.[61]

Economic attacks target networks that run national financial infrastructure, such as banks, to steal funds or block transactions.[62] The most common types of strategy for economic attacks are ransomware and data breaches. For example, the North Korean-backed Lazarus group stole $81 million from the Bangladesh Bank, which was then used to fund the North Korean economy and operations.[63]

Advanced Persistent Threats (APTs) are used as long-term, stealthy campaigns designed for espionage, data theft, or maintaining a foothold for future attacks. APTs are usually planted by using trojans, remote access tools, and zero-day exploits. Notably, the 2010 Stuxnet worm was an APT that took advantage of zero-days, which are bugs

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[55] Ibid.
[56] "Cyber Operations Tracker | CFR Interactives." n.d. Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/cyber-operations/.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Types of Cyberattacks." CrowdStrike. https://www.crowdstrike.com/en-us/cybersecurity-101/cyberattacks/common-cyberattacks/.
[59] "Compromise of Saudi Aramco and RasGas." n.d. CFR Interactives. https://www.cfr.org/cyber-operations/compromise-saudi-aramco-and-rasgas.
[60] Imperva, "What is Cyber Warfare".
[61] "Targeting of the Indian power grid." n.d. CFR Interactives. https://www.cfr.org/cyber-operations/targeting-indian-power-grid.
[62] Ibid.
[63] NCC Group, "The Lazarus group: North Korean scourge for +10 years."

and vulnerabilities in a specific program where cybersecurity may falter.[64] Given the significant resources required to develop them, APTs are a trademark of state-sponsored cyberwarfare,[65] and their clandestine nature suggests that a vast number likely remain undetected in state systems worldwide.

Beyond these targeted campaigns, cyber spillover presents a significant challenge. Because cyberspace transcends physical borders, self-replicating malware like NotPetya often spreads indiscriminately, affecting nations not originally targeted.[66] This phenomenon creates complex legal and diplomatic challenges in determining whether such unintended consequences constitute acts of cyberwarfare.

Cyberwarfare in Africa: A Vulnerable Frontier

Cyberwarfare is beginning to gain traction on every continent; however, the dangers of cyberwarfare for Africa are significantly more concerning due to the rapid nature of cyber development, political instability, and economic fragility. In 2024, ransomware, critical infrastructure attacks, and government database hacks spiked.[67] African nations are at especially high risk of espionage and attacks on infrastructure,[68] which can exacerbate the current geopolitical tensions that exist in various regions of the continent and the humanitarian condition of citizens. African internet access has nearly tripled in the last decade,[69] but its rapid digitization outpaces many governments' capacities. With insufficient resources to establish consistent cybersecurity standards and a lack of experts that can help facilitate healthy growth—only 20,000 cybersecurity experts compared to the 100,000 that are estimated it needed—cyberwarfare could become a major threat in Africa when compounded by other geopolitical challenges.[70]

Though digitizing African industries can increase efficiency and offer many benefits for the economy, Africa lacks sufficient legislation and resources for these benefits to outweigh the harms. For example, most African nations model their data laws after the General Data Protection Regulation law (GDPR) in the EU, but lack the resources to enforce it as effectively.[71] Due to other conflicts existing in the region, such as political instability in the Shahel region, law enforcement and government typically focus much of their efforts on physical threats, rather than digital.[72] This lack of legal and technical safeguards for banks, data centers, and internet infrastructure makes these systems vulnerable targets and hardens the prosecution of such crimes. For example, when databases of the

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[64] Knapp, Eric D., and Joel T. Langill. 2014. "Chapter 7 - Hacking Industrial Control Systems." Science Direct. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/B9780124201149000071.

[65] "What Is an Advanced Persistent Threat?" n.d. Palo Alto Networks. https://www.paloaltonetworks.co.uk/cyberpedia/what-is-advanced-persistent-threat-apt.

[66] Colling, Jackson. 2024. "Recapping "Cyber in War: Lessons from the Russia-Ukraine Conflict" - Lieber Institute West Point." Lieber Institute. https://lieber.westpoint.edu/recapping-cyber-war-lessons-russia-ukraine-conflict/.

[67] "New INTERPOL report warns of sharp rise in cybercrime in Africa." 2025. Interpol. https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2025/New-INTERPOL-report-warns-of-sharp-rise-in-cybercrime-in-Africa.

[68] Africa Center for Strategic Studies. n.d. "Understanding Africa's Emerging Cyber Threats." Africa Center for Strategic Studies. https://africacenter.org/programs/cyber/.

[69] "Africa's Rapidly Expanding Online Footprint Could Result in 'Cybergeddon' Event." 2025. Africa Defense Forum. https://adf-magazine.com/2025/02/africas-rapidly-expanding-online-footprint-could-result-in-cybergeddon-event/.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ifeanyi-Ajufo, Nnenna. n.d. "The current state of cybersecurity in Africa is the tendency towards a cyber-militarisation approach." GEG. https://www.geg.ox.ac.uk/content/nnenna-ifeanyi-ajufo-current-state-cybersecurity-africa-tendency-towards-cyber.

[72] Ibid.

Moroccan social security agency were leaked by an Algerian hacker group in 2025, thousands of Moroccans, prominent political parties, and state-owned companies had their private financial data leaked.[73]

Furthermore, Africa's cybersecurity landscape is increasingly influenced by great-power politics. Many African nations align with Russian and Chinese concepts of "digital sovereignty"—a nation's ability to have autonomy in cyberspace—and vote alongside them in international negotiations.[74] China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) extends this influence by building digital infrastructure across the continent, creating a dependency that critics argue also increases national debt, as seen with countries like Zambia, Ghana, and Ethiopia since 2021.[75] Thus, for Africa to fully benefit from digitization, building a solid and sovereign cybersecurity foundation is imperative.

Impact of Artificial Intelligence

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into cyberspace marks a significant evolution in cyberwarfare, enabling operations that can adapt in real-time to overcome defenses.[76]

AI serves as a double-edged sword: AI-powered cyber defenses can dynamically counter conventional attacks, while offenses can become more evasive and effective. In a conflict where both sides employ AI, the more sophisticated technology will likely prevail. This dynamic threatens to widen global disparities, as a significant gap in AI research and access already exists between the Global North and South.[77] The absence of comprehensive international laws regulating AI as a cyberweapon further compounds its dangers within the already ambiguous area, as seen from the 2017 US Equifax Data Breach, let alone more vulnerable states.[78] While the innovation is inevitable, its rapid proliferation risks creating a new class of digitally defenseless states, thus requiring strategic discussion and action amongst DISEC states.

Hybrid Warfare: The Russo-Ukrainian Cyberwar

When Crimea was being annexed in 2014, Russia launched DDoS cyberattacks on networks and communications, intending to destabilize and distract attention from Russian military operations in the southern region.[79] These cyberattacks were the beginning of what is now known today as the first war in cyberspace: the Russo-Ukrainian cyberwar.

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[73] Metz, Sam. 2025. "Hackers breach Morocco's social security database in an unprecedented cyberattack." AP News. https://apnews.com/article/morocco-cyberattack-security-database-breach-753ce01484ceb8d1ec02459910285235.

[74] Ifeanyi-Ajufo, "The current state of cybersecurity in Africa is the tendency towards a cyber-militarisation approach."

[75] Miriri, Duncan, Karin Strohecker, and Angus MacSwan. 2024. "China's lending to Africa rises for first time in seven years, study shows." Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/world/chinas-lending-africa-rises-first-time-seven-years-study-shows-2024-08-29/.

[76] Verma, Tatya. 2024. "AI In Cyber Warfare - TDHJ.org." The Defence Horizon Journal. https://tdhj.org/blog/post/ai-cyber-warfare/.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Przetacznik, Jakub, and Simona Tarpova. 2022. "Russia's war on Ukraine: Timeline of cyber-attacks." European Parliament. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2022/733549/EPRS_BRI(2022)733549_EN.pdf.

From 2014 to 2021, Russian cyber forces attempted to alter Ukrainian elections in favour of pro-Russia candidates, caused power outages by attacking energy companies, and deployed the data-wiping NotPetya virus, which caused chaos across Ukrainian institutions.[80] These attacks occurred alongside escalating military aggression, culminating in the full-scale invasion on February 24th, 2022. The most crucial buildup period had begun a week prior in cyberspace. The day before the invasion, government websites were targeted once again with data-wiping malware, which heavily impacted Ukrainian financial, information technologies, and aviation sectors.[81] On the day of the invasion, Russian cyber forces attacked a vital satellite, immobilized GPS systems, and degraded Ukrainian defenses, thereby enabling the physical invasion with ease.[82] This strategic coordination marked a pivotal shift from disruptive cyberattacks to fully integrated hybrid warfare.

In response, Ukraine began developing its own national cyber forces with assistance of private companies like Palo Alto Networks and Microsoft,[83] and international bodies like the EU, which deployed its PESCO's Cyber Rapid Response Team.[84] Meanwhile, citizens have taken on a vigilante role as "hacktivists" in both Russia and Ukraine.[85] Though not all hacktivist groups are state-sponsored, Ukraine has collaborated with hacktivists, like the Ukrainian Cyber Alliance, to launch counterattacks on Russia due to a lack of official government cyber forces.[86] The Russo-Ukrainian cyberwar marks the first time citizen hacktivist groups have been directly involved with the government or have been state-sponsored, hinting at the possibility of hacktivists growing more prevalent in cyberwarfare. With these resources, Ukraine has since built cybersecurity defenses and launched counterattacks, such as DDoS and data-wiping attacks on the Russian government, media, financial institutions, defence facilities, and power grids.[87]

The Russo-Ukrainian cyberwar is considered the first of its kind. Especially with recent geopolitical developments, other countries have realized the strategic value of tools, like cyber espionage, in support of conventional warfare. Undoubtedly, hybrid warfare will arise as a prevalent feature of the current geopolitical landscape.

Possible Solutions and Controversies

Development of International Law

As the fifth domain of warfare, cyberspace yields unique factors of war that have yet to be adequately addressed by international law. Currently, the laws of cyberspace are typically inferred from current international laws regarding other domains of warfare. However, this has proven to be largely insufficient, as is evident in the continued rise of state-sponsored cyberattacks against other nations. With the vague transposition of international law into cyberspace, it has become a gray zone that many nations have already taken advantage of.

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[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Tepper, Eytan. 2022. "The First Space-Cyber War and the Need for New Regimes and Policies." CIGI Online. https://www.cigionline.org/static/documents/PB_no.173_uPqYILM.pdf.

[83] Colling, "Recapping "Cyber in War: Lessons from the Russia-Ukraine Conflict"

[84] Przetacznik, "Russia's war on Ukraine: Timeline of cyber-attacks."

[85] Mihaylov, Nedelcho. n.d. "Cyber Dimensions of a Hybrid Warfare." CyberPeace Institute. https://cyberpeaceinstitute.org/news/cyber-dimensions-of-a-hybrid-warfare/.

[86] McLaughlin, Jenna. 2023. "Ukrainian hacktivists fight back against Russia as cyber conflict deepens." NPR. https://www.npr.org/2023/11/21/1214170140/ukraine-hacktivists-cyber-russia-war.

[87] Przetacznik, "Russia's war on Ukraine: Timeline of cyber-attacks."

Similarly, international humanitarian law (IHL) has also not been properly cross-applied to cyberspace, which humanitarian groups argue causes significant impacts on citizens due to reliance on infrastructure that is often targeted by cyberwarfare.[88] The widespread usage of cyberwarfare is inevitable, thus it is essential to the evolving geopolitical landscape that international law regarding cyberspace is sufficiently clarified and efficiently enforced—neither of which is currently fulfilled.

Attempts thus far to standardize specifications of international law in cyberspace have been widely futile, since they have merely been established as norms rather than legally-binding rules. Though norms can be useful in guiding policy-making, they are only effective when there is political will to do so. For example, most Western liberal democracies like Canada are willing to follow the norms proposed by the UN GGE in accordance with international law;[89] however, nations like China and Russia have proposed divergent norms due to independent political incentives.[90] The biggest obstacle to establishing a legally-binding set of international law for cyberspace is opposition from other nations, who may believe the laws stand in the way of their geopolitical strategies.

The international community must also hold countries accountable when cyberspace laws are being ignored. Though utilizing bodies such as the International Criminal Court (ICC) may prove useful for some nations, it has historically faced issues when prosecuting larger nations that can ignore consequences with support from allies. In order for cyberspace laws to be enforced effectively, nations must be willing to use various geopolitical tools, such as sanctions, as a form of accountability when necessary. There have also been past concerns of nations exploiting vague cybersecurity laws to promote inhumane incentives, such as limiting press freedom and surveilling citizens.[91] The same logic must be applied to international cyber laws—definitions of cyberwarfare must be specific and accurate in order to prevent abuse.

Though DISEC does not have the jurisdiction to establish legally-binding treaties, it can distribute detailed recommendations through resolutions to other UN bodies, such as the Security Council (UNSC) or the Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA).

Cyber Arms Control Treaties

Similar in concept to various conventional arms control agreements or the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), a cyber arms control treaty would be a legally binding agreement that requires nations to follow specific guidelines regarding how their cyberwarfare programs are conducted and the production of cyberweapons.

There currently are no international cyber arms treaties, but there is certainly precedent for one to exist. Cyberwarfare is a relatively new phenomenon in the long timeline of war, but weaponry is not. There are many cross-applicable rules from other arms treaties, such as the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), that can be used to guide

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[88] "Cyber Warfare: does International Humanitarian Law apply?" 2021. ICRC. https://www.icrc.org/en/document/cyber-warfare-and-international-humanitarian-law.

[89] Global Affairs Canada, "International Law applicable in cyberspace." https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/peace_security-paix_securite/cyberspace_law-cyberespace_droit.aspx?lang=eng.

[90] D'Incau, Fosca, and Stefan Soesanto. 2017. "The UN GGE is dead: Time to fall forward." European Council on Foreign Relations. https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_time_to_fall_forward_on_cyber_governance/.

[91] Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia: Cybercrime Decree Used Against Critics."

the creation of a cyber arms treaty. The agreement may consist of regulations regarding hacker recruitment, malware development, zero-day purchases, and transparency measures.

A cyber arms control treaty would face a few obstacles, including murky definitions of cyberweapons, difficult verification of compliance, and international agreement.[92] With the rapidly innovating technological industry, a single definition of cyberweapons and cyberattacks can be outdated in mere months. The lack of a consistent definition can leave loopholes in the agreement that may be exploited by nations, as well as inconsistencies between the cybersecurity efforts of different nations.[93] Furthermore, verifying if a nation has complied with the treaty is typically difficult, as historically demonstrated in other arms control and non-proliferation agreements. Not only can verification attempts add onto existing geopolitical tensions, but the actual process of verification is uniquely more difficult for cyberwarfare, since it is much easier to conceal malware digitally than a nuclear centrifuge. There are currently no tools that can consistently trace the source of sophisticated malware; most cyberattacks are anonymous, and there are typically no conclusive perpetrators unless there is existing geopolitical precedence or nations admit it themselves.[94] Finally, international cooperation and negotiation on the terms of a treaty may be unable to accommodate the stances of every single nation, since many governments value cyberwarfare as an innovative military strategy and have already invested in the development of a sophisticated cyberwarfare program. This conflict of interest will deter many superpower nations from ratifying the treaty at all, therefore rendering it largely ineffective.[95]

Formation of Cyber Alliances

A cyber alliance has the option to choose one of two focuses: a defensive or offensive cyberwarfare alliance. Functioning similarly to alliances like the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence (CCD COE), any successful cyber alliance should be able to either mitigate the harms of cyberwarfare in allied nations and deter much of cyberwarfare in the first place, or share research and information between allies with similar geopolitical ideologies and strengthen offensive cyber capabilities of the alliance.[96] Regardless of which type of cyber alliance is established, this solution can work towards closing the gap in cyberspace technology that currently exists, as well as leveling the geopolitical playing field for numerous countries in the case of cyberwar.

Whether these cyber alliances are built upon existing regional blocs or newly established, alliances in which countries are able to share cyber intelligence and tools are likely to mirror the current success of other geopolitical alliances. For example, while Ukraine's potential NATO membership was a factor in its invasion, the Baltic states have been shielded from a similar fate by their NATO membership. Article 5's collective defense clause deters aggression through the threat of unified military retaliation.[97]

The obstacles to this solution lie in the lack of geopolitical diversity of countries with sophisticated cyber operations programs. The reason why NATO works is because there are wealthier nations that can provide support for smaller countries at risk of war; however, NATO would fail if it were entirely consisting of smaller

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[92] Pytlak, Allison. 2024. "Reimagining Cyber Arms Control." Stimson Center. https://www.stimson.org/2024/reimagining-cyber-arms-control/.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.
[96] NATO, "NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence," CCDCOE, 2025, https://ccdcoe.org/.
[97] "Topic: Collective defence and Article 5." 2023. NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm.

countries all in need of support. This lack of diversity could be the pitfall for potential cyber alliances. In terms of cybersecurity, the top 26 countries with the best cybersecurity are all from the Global North.[98] Even disregarding specific regions within the Global North, such as Europe, Scandinavia, or North America, there is still a shocking lack of representation among the most secure countries. Meanwhile, regions like the Caribbean, Central Asia, and Africa are severely overrepresented when it comes to the worst-ranking countries for cybersecurity. In terms of cyberwarfare capabilities, alliances can be exploitative of smaller nations, rather than supportive. For example, there have been cases in which cyberwarfare superpowers like Russia and China invest in foreign cyber programs, but their incentives are more self-interested than benevolent. Specifically, cyberwarfare alliances have the potential to destabilize international safety, since cyberwarfare superpowers would be dragging smaller allies into dangerous conflicts or even utilizing proxy cyberwars. It is crucial for the success of this solution to have, at minimum, one genuine ally within each cyber alliance with strengths in cyber operations and their allies' best interests in mind—otherwise it is guaranteed to fail.

Leveraging Non-Governmental Organizations

By far, the most consistent issue with other solutions is the conflict of interest that exists between a nation's military incentives and humanitarian goals. However, with the introduction of third-party non-governmental organizations (NGOs), national biases can be mitigated significantly. International NGOs like the CyberPeace Institute can help protect local NGOs from cyberattacks, investigate the evolving landscape of cyberspace, promote international cooperation between nations, and anticipate cyberattacks before they happen.[99] Many of these NGOs emphasize the widely-ignored humanitarian impact of cyberwarfare, with specific focuses on supporting the critical infrastructure that cyberwarfare targets, preserving the fundamental right to privacy that is violated by cyber surveillance, and protecting healthcare technologies from being jeopardized.[100]

As of June 2025, the CyberPeace Builders NGO has supported 548 nonprofit organizations with free cybersecurity tools, such as orphanages, hospitals, food banks, and water distribution systems.[101] Though not directly protecting states from cyberwarfare, NGOs are able to significantly mitigate the humanitarian risks of citizens who get caught in the crossfire of cyberwar. Furthermore, governments are able to dedicate more resources to restoring damaged infrastructure and building better national cybersecurity when local NGOs are able to support citizens, rather than depending on the government.

However, there are also several issues with the usage of NGOs. Firstly, governments are unlikely to entrust state security secrets or intimate access to crucial infrastructure to anybody but themselves, thus rendering many of the NGO's potential services impossible. Secondly, NGOs are often quite underfunded despite the job they are taking on; therefore, they are unable to protect or repair countries adequately without sufficient resources. Thirdly, they are usually unable to access the most sophisticated technology due to the public use of such technologies being restricted by government agencies. Essentially, though NGOs are usually able to act as a neutral third party when dealing with cybersecurity and humanitarian impacts of cyberattacks, they are limited by their lack of international legitimacy and resources; in comparison to state-sponsored action, NGOs fall incredibly far behind in sophistication.

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[98] "NCSI :: Ranking." n.d. National Cyber Security Index. Accessed June 26, 2025. https://ncsi.ega.ee/ncsi-index/.
[99] CyberPeace Institute. n.d. "Our Work." CyberPeace Institute. https://cyberpeaceinstitute.org/our-work.
[100] Ibid.
[101] CyberPeace Builders. n.d. "CyberPeace Builders." CyberPeace Builders. https://cpb.ngo/.

Bloc Positions

Cyber Superpowers

The cyber superpowers bloc consists of countries like the United States, Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, and Israel, which have developed the most advanced cyberwarfare, are at the forefront of prominent cyberattacks, and have invested in cyberwarfare as a long-term military strategy. For example, the United States and Israel launched the first cyberweapon in 2010 and have since been actively expanding their cyber forces;[102] Russia committed the first act of cyberwarfare in 2007 and has launched some of the most dangerous malware to date like the NotPetya data-wiping ransomware;[103] China is the leading player in cyber espionage and has also launched cyberattacks on government and electrical infrastructure of adversaries like India, Japan, and South Korea;[104] North Korea utilizes their obedient cyberwarfare group to launch cyberattacks against the West and earn revenue through grand cyber theft;[105] and Iran has consistently targeted the United States and its Middle Eastern allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel with cyberattacks on influential industries—like Saudi Aramco, which makes up approximately 40% of Saudi Arabia's GDP.[106,107] As is evident from previously mentioned examples of Chinese and Iranian cyberwarfare, the countries in this bloc use cyber operations as a strategic tool against existing political and economic enemies.

The countries in this bloc wish to keep cyberwarfare prevalent in the world and ensure they are able to exert their existing cyber power in war. As a strategic military tool, cyberwarfare supports the geopolitical pursuits of these nations, such as how their traditional warfare can be enhanced by launching cyberattacks preemptively against their targets. They would advocate for solutions that keep cyberwarfare internationally acceptable and do not endanger their chance of creating a hegemony over cyberspace, such as creating cyberwarfare alliances that will spread their influence and support their current competition with enemies. However, the countries within this bloc often have significant geopolitical divergences and competing national interests. Their individual stances could hinder consensus on a resolution perceived as strengthening a strategic adversary. While these nations may share broad objectives—such as regulating the global proliferation of cyberwarfare, advancing cyber weapon technology, and securing a leading position in cyberspace—their individual pursuits of strategic advantage may ultimately impede collaboration. For the leading cyber powers, a cooperative framework may be viewed as counter to their core national security objective of maximizing their own strategic position.

Middle Powers

These nations are typically well developed, economically stable, and have a level of influence on the global stage due to strong international relations around the globe. They are interested in maintaining international stability,

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[102] Kushner, "The Real Story of Stuxnet - IEEE Spectrum."

[103] Kirichenko, "Bytes to battles: a short cyberwar history."

[104] Jensen, Benjamin, and Jose Macias. 2023. "How the Chinese Communist Party Uses Cyber Espionage to Undermine the American Economy." CSIS. https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-chinese-communist-party-uses-cyber-espionage-undermine-american-economy.

[105] "The Kid Who Outsmarted North Korea," posted September 22, 2024, by Cipher, YouTube, 19 min., 18 sec., https://youtu.be/IIIvNVGjl0k?si=FKb6Ok6fpky208d-&t=416.

[106] Fernández, Ernesto, Pham D. Phuc, John Fokker, and Srini Seethapathy. 2024. "The Iranian Cyber Capability." Trellix. https://www.trellix.com/blogs/research/the-iranian-cyber-capability/.

[107] Walt, Vivienne. 2024. "How the oil earnings of Saudi Aramco, the world's most profitable company, are helping the Saudi monarchy shake up the global economic order." Fortune. https://fortune.com/2024/04/04/saudi-arabia-aramco-oil-gas-us-construction-environment-riyadh/.

since they have invested in cybersecurity rather than cyberwarfare, are not particularly driven to use cyberspace as a groundbreaking military strategy in the future, and realize the potential economic consequences of trade partners being attacked. Middle countries, such as Canada, Japan, Australia, and South Africa, are the "peacemakers" of modern cyberwarfare, and provide military support for countries in need, which is evident in their frequent participation in and integration of UN GGE norms into domestic policy.[108] As demonstrated in Canada's stance on holding states accountable in cyberspace,[109] middle nations play a crucial role on the global stage for establishing geopolitical norms, fostering multilateral discussions, and supporting developing nations.

This bloc views the issue more holistically than the superpowers and prioritizes international cooperation as a key mechanism for the resolution. While the primary goal of these countries is typically to establish a solid foundation of national cybersecurity, they also aim to support cybersecurity-building measures around the world. For example, Australia plans to first build domestic cybersecurity among citizens and businesses, then protect their allies later on.[110] With their existing national cybersecurity plans and the geopolitical precedence of middle nations in mind, this bloc will advocate for solutions that focus on defense and prevention, rather than encouraging offensive measures, such as establishing international law, creating cyber arms control treaties, or utilizing NGOs for humanitarian aid during cyberwar. They are likely to oppose any solution that substantially increases cyber offensive capabilities for any nation, especially cyberwarfare alliances, due to its potential to destabilize the globe.

Developing Countries

Similar to many other global issues, developing countries suffer the most when facing cyberwarfare. Economic instability, political tensions, violent conflict, and lack of development hinder governments from being able to dedicate time and resources to cybersecurity. However, these countries have become easy targets for cybercriminals and cyberwarfare to steal from because of their weak cyber defenses. Some developing countries are also located close to cyber superpowers, such as Eastern European and Central Asian countries located near Russia, and are therefore more likely to experience cyber spillover or geopolitically-motivated cyberattacks. For example, in 2024, when Kazakhstan was targeted by a Russian espionage campaign, neighbouring nation Tajikistan was infected too.[111] Out of all the blocs, these countries are the most vulnerable to cyberattacks and suffer the worst consequences once they have been targeted.

Though not applicable to all developing nations, those that have authoritarian regimes may also establish purposely vague cybersecurity laws as loopholes to heavily surveil citizens and arrest those who express political dissent, as is evident in Tunisia and Libya.[112, 113] Meanwhile, Moldova is actively developing real cybersecurity laws and measures with the support of the EU.[114] Countries in this bloc may diverge in stance when choosing to prioritize either cybersecurity or cyberwarfare. Due to the lack of resources they can dedicate to cyber programs,

[108] Tepper, The First Space-Cyber War and the Need for New Regimes and Policies."

[109] "International cyber policy." 2023. Government of Canada. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/peace_security-paix_securite/cyber_policy-politique_cyberspace.aspx?lang=eng.

[110] Penn, Andrew, and Rachael Falk. 2023. "2023-2030 Australian Cyber Security Strategy." Department of Home Affairs. https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/cyber-security-subsite/files/2023-cyber-security-strategy.pdf.

[111] "CPC | Russia's Shadow War Reaches Kazakhstan: Inside Moscow's Espionage Offensive." 2025. Caspian Policy Center. https://caspianpolicy.org/research/security/russias-shadow-war-reaches-kazakhstan-inside-moscows-espionage-offensive.

[112] Human Rights Watch, "Tunisia: Cybercrime Decree Used Against Critics."

[113] Human Rights Watch, "Libya: Revoke Repressive Anti-Cybercrime Law."

[114] "Moldova enhances cybersecurity measures to protect national interests." 2025. EU4Digital. https://eufordigital.eu/moldova-enhances-cybersecurity-measures-to-protect-national-interests/.

this bloc will likely advocate for cyber alliances and the usage of NGOs in order to receive the most inexpensive benefits. Though there are concerns of falling into debt-trap diplomacy or getting dragged into larger cyberwars, many developing countries have no other choice and may believe it is a practical investment for the long term.

Neutral Nations

Most nations that have maintained neutral defense policies outside of cyberspace, such as Switzerland, the Netherlands, Austria, and Costa Rica, utilize a cyberspace-adapted version of pre-existing policies. These nations do not engage in traditional warfare, but rather contribute to neutral humanitarian support missions instead; in the context of cyberwarfare, they would not engage in building a nation's cyberwarfare capabilities, but would instead aim to minimize the international impacts of those affected by cyberwarfare. Additionally, some countries that are not typically neutral in traditional wars, like Romania, Italy, France, and the Czech Republic, have also adopted a neutral cyberdefense policy.[115] Most countries that declare cyber neutrality are high-income or have a steady economy, therefore already possessing strong cyberdefenses in the status quo or developing one since they have sufficient resources to invest in it.

Similar to neutrality in other aspects of geopolitics, neutrality in cyberspace refers to staying uninvolved in cyberwarfare. A neutral country would not send military support to a country in conflict, even if they are allies—as seen from how Switzerland did not support Ukraine in their war with Russia due to their neutral policy.[116] In translation to cyberspace, a cyber-neutral country would not assist any country in developing cyberweapons or training hackers, even if their ally is fighting a cyberwar and would only utilize force when they themselves have been victimized.[117] However, their neutral stance means that there are typically very few enemy states that would wish to use cyberwarfare against them.[118] Though these countries do not intervene in the actual cyber conflict, they are likely willing to provide humanitarian support to citizens affected by cyberwarfare, as demonstrated by France's commitment to protecting civilian populations and humanitarian workers affected by cyberattacks.[119] In essence, the solutions they advocate for are not preventative, but rather mitigatory and reparative. With this in mind, this bloc will likely advocate for neutral solutions such as using NGOs in cyberwar to provide humanitarian support. However, they would also be satisfied with any solution that does not violate their neutrality policy, such as establishing international law, cyber arms treaties, and cybersecurity alliances.

Discussion Questions

1. How can international bodies and NGOs balance the need for verifying treaty compliance, such as for cybersecurity standards, with the fundamental principle of national sovereignty?

2. Under what conditions should cyberwarfare be heavily regulated or encouraged with additional security measures? Which is more beneficial or appealing to nations?

3. What are the strategic trade-offs for a nation between pursuing digital independence and integrating into international systems of collective cyber defense?

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[115] "Neutrality - International cyber law: interactive toolkit." 2024. Cyber Law Toolkit. https://cyberlaw.ccdcoe.org/wiki/Neutrality.
[116] Nasu, Hitoshi. 2022. "The Future Law of Neutrality." Lieber Institute. https://lieber.westpoint.edu/future-law-of-neutrality/.
[117] Cyber Law Toolkit, "Neutrality - International cyber law: interactive toolkit."
[118] Woltag, Johann-Christoph. 2017. "Chapter 6 - Neutrality in Cyber Warfare." Cambridge University Press. https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/cyber-warfare/neutrality-in-cyber-warfare/9FECF3F92CCE9A295484E4A089478E76.
[119] "France's Humanitarian Strategy." 2023. Government of France. https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/strategie-humanitaire-ang-online12.08.2024_cle02bf63.pdf.

4. What are the implications and risks for state stability and international norms when governments integrate non-state "hacktivist" groups into their national cyber strategies?

5. How should the global community prioritize efforts to build universal cybersecurity resilience in all nations against the need to directly counter the most advanced state-level cyber threats?

6. How can developing nations navigate the pursuit of essential cyber infrastructure and partnerships without compromising their economic or ideological autonomy?

Additional Resources

United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, Global Cyber Policy Portal
https://cyberpolicyportal.org/

Council on Foreign Relations, State-sponsored Cyberattacks
https://www.cfr.org/cyber-operations/

United Nations Groups of Governmental Experts, Application of International Law to Cyberspace
https://front.un-arm.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/australian-international-law-case-studies-final-5-february-2020.pdf

Human Rights Watch, Humanitarian and Ethical Concerns of Cyberwarfare
https://www.hrw.org/sitesearch?search=cyber&sort_by=search_api_relevance

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Africa Center for Strategic Studies. n.d. "Understanding Africa's Emerging Cyber Threats." Africa Center for Strategic Studies. https://africacenter.org/programs/cyber/.

"Africa's Rapidly Expanding Online Footprint Could Result in 'Cybergeddon' Event." 2025. Africa Defense Forum. https://adf-magazine.com/2025/02/africas-rapidly-expanding-online-footprint-could-result-in-cybergeddon-event/.

Anderson, Dan, and Peter Kirstein. 2018. "From ARPANET to the Internet." Science Museum. https://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/objects-and-stories/arpanet-internet.

Baker, Kurt. 2024. "12 Most Common Types of Cyberattacks." CrowdStrike. https://www.crowdstrike.com/en-us/cybersecurity-101/cyberattacks/common-cyberattacks/.

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Somali Civil War

Overview

Today, Somalia's name is largely associated with the pirates that occupy its coast and the state of anarchy it has experienced for decades. It has widely been considered a failed state by international experts due to the violent political conflict, climate disasters, and dire humanitarian crisis that occupy its land. After over three decades of civil war, Somalia still suffers significantly due to the widespread instability and lack of government legitimacy among citizens. With the increasingly catastrophic nature of climate disasters, geopolitical proximity to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait—one of the most crucial trade chokepoints in the world, and ever-simmering tensions between competing groups, the Somali civil war is an urgent issue that must be resolved imminently.

Though Somalia is internationally recognized as a single state, it has historically been divided by culturally unique clans with their respective leaders, as well as unofficial independent and semi-autonomous regions. The Republic of Somaliland, located in the northwestern region of Somalia and formerly known as British Somaliland, has been a self-proclaimed independent state since 1991 and has since developed its own infrastructure and institutions.[120] Though Somaliland is the only fully independent state within Somalia, there are also five semi-autonomous regions that are considered federal member states that do not wish to secede.[121] With the mere existence of such states, political division has intensified the civil war and kept Somali unity as a distant concept.

Located in the Horn of Africa, Somalia's proximity to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait means that its safety is crucial to maintaining safe international trade. As the maritime chokepoint between Asia and Europe, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait serves as the connection between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, as well as the most efficient route to send oil from the Persian Gulf to Europe and the Americas.[122] However, this trade route has been consistently targeted by Somali pirates, thus endangering the international shipments that are being transported through the strait. Considering its geopolitical and economic importance, many countries have a significant stake in the safety of the strait, since most countries' imports or exports likely rely on the route.[123]

Timeline

1887 — Britain declares the northwestern region of modern Somalia its protectorate, British Somaliland—presently known as Somaliland.[124]

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[120] "Somaliland | Historical Region, Self-Declared State in Africa." n.d. Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/place/Somaliland.

[121] "Country and territory profiles." n.d. SNG-WOFI. https://www.sng-wofi.org/country_profiles/somalia.html.

[122] "The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is a strategic route for oil and natural gas shipments - U.S. Energy Information Administration." 2019. EIA. https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=41073.

[123] Qiao, Jun, Yitong Li, and Mingxuan Huang. n.d. "The Geopolitical Importance of Bab el-Mandeb Strait: A Strategic Gateway to Global Trade – MEPEI." Middle East Political and Economic Institute. https://mepei.com/the-geopolitical-importance-of-bab-el-mandeb-strait-a-strategic-gateway-to-global-trade/.

[124] "Somalia profile - Timeline." 2018. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094632.

1889 — Italy declares the central and southern regions of modern Somalia its protectorate, Italian Somaliland, encompassing the territory of present-day Somalia, excluding Somaliland.[125]

July 1, 1960 — Italian and British Somaliland gain independence, merge territories, and rename as the United Republic of Somalia;[126] Somalia becomes a parliamentary democracy.[127]

October 21, 1969 — After a coup, Muhammad Siad Barre becomes the dictator of Somalia. His policy is socialist and he nationalizes most industries,[128] while strengthening relations with the Soviet Union and banning clan loyalties.[129]

1974 — Somalia is hit with a severe drought, which cuts agriculture and livestock industries significantly,[130] killing roughly 25 percent of the country's domestic animals and placing approximately 270,000 Somali civilians in emergency relief camps.[131]

July 1977 — Barre orders an invasion of the Ogaden region of neighbouring country, Ethiopia, which is populated by ethnic Somalis.[132]

March 1978 — Backed by the Soviet Union and Cuba, Ethiopia defeats Somali forces in the Ogaden region.[133] As a result, 1.5 million refugees flee from Ogaden and relocate to Somalia.[134]

January 1991 — Clan militias oust Barre from power after fighting between clans and the government.[135] A power vacuum opens up, and clans fight violently for authority. In the process, thousands of civilians are harmed.[136]

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[125] Ibid.

[126] "Somalia country profile." 2024. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094503.

[127] "Constitutional History of Somalia." n.d. ConstitutionNet. https://constitutionnet.org/country/somalia.

[128] BBC, "Somalia profile - Timeline."

[129] "Mohamed Siad Barre | Born, Clan, & Death." 2025. Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mohamed-Siad-Barre.

[130] Nsouli, Saleh M. n.d. "VI Case Studies of Somalia and Mali in: Adjustment Programs in Africa." IMF eLibrary. https://www.elibrary.imf.org/display/book/9781557750563/ch06.xml.

[131] Clark, N.T. "THE EFFECT OF THE 1973/74 DROUGHT IN SOMALIA ON SUBSEQUENT EXPORTS AND REGISTERED SLAUGHTERINGS OF CAMELS, SHEEP, GOATS AND CATTLE." Nomadic Peoples, no. 17 (1985): 53–57. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43124017.

[132] BBC, "Somalia profile - Timeline."

[133] Ibid.

[134] Mohamed, Hassan A. 1994. "Refugee Exodus from Somalia: Revisiting the Causes." Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees 14, no. 1 (April). https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/download/21799/20468/0.

[135] Britannica, "Mohamed Siad Barre | Born, Clan, & Death."

[136] BBC, "Somalia profile - Timeline."

May 18, 1991 — Somaliland declares unilateral independence.[137]

August 1998 — Puntland declares autonomy to avoid clan warfare in southern Somalia; however, it does not seek independence like Somaliland does and becomes a federal state.[138]

October 2004 — The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) establishes the 14th transitional government since 1991. Notably, the 4.5 system for clan representation in government is established.[139]

2011 — Due to multiple failed rainy seasons, Somalia experiences a severe famine that leaves over 250,000 dead by 2012.[140]

February 9, 2012 — After capturing southern regions of Somalia, al-Shabaab declares alliance with al-Qaeda and moves troops to capture the Somali capital, Mogadishu.[141]

August 20, 2012 — Somalia's official parliament and government are established, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), after the transitional period ends.[142]

January 1, 2024 — Ethiopia and Somaliland sign a memorandum of understanding agreement that allows Ethiopia to use one of Somaliland's ports for trade purposes. Somalia denounces this as a threat to its sovereignty.[143]

Historical Analysis

Following the unification of British and Italian Somaliland, a parliamentary democracy was established in 1960, and Somalia was granted independence from colonial powers.[144] However, the political landscape in Somalia quickly changed in 1969 when Muhammad Siad Barre staged a nonviolent coup and assumed power as a dictator.[145] He declared Somalia a socialist state, strengthened ties with the Soviet Union, and nationalized the Somali economy.[146] His attempts at a "scientific socialist" reform in Somalia—nationalizing banks, insurance

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[137] Ibid.

[138] "Puntland profile." 2024. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14114727.

[139] ConstitutionNet, "Constitutional History of Somalia."

[140] COOPER, ASA. 2022. "Famine in Somalia: Crisis and Innovation." Fragile States Index. https://fragilestatesindex.org/2022/07/08/famine-in-somalia-crisis-and-innovation/.

[141] BBC, "Somalia profile - Timeline."

[142] BBC, "Somalia profile - Timeline."

[143] "Somalia calls Ethiopia-Somaliland agreement act of aggression." 2024. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67861390.

[144] ConstitutionNet, "Constitutional History of Somalia."

[145] Neapolitan, Jerome L. n.d. "Muhammad Siad Barre." EBSCO. https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/muhammad-siad-barre.

[146] Britannica, "Mohamed Siad Barre | Born, Clan, & Death."

firms, and industrial companies, as well as shifting control of enterprises to the state—created agricultural shortages due to inadequate state policy, lacked skilled labour for essential industries, and otherwise weakened the Somali economy.[147, 148] Despite this decline, his goals remained popular among citizens, one of which was to unite Somalis and create "greater Somalia" by taking over Ethiopia's ethnic Somali-inhabited Ogaden region. Embroiled in a civil war, Barre perceived Ethiopian defences to be weak, emboldening him to invade the Ogaden region. Using a combination of guerrilla warfare and official Somali troops, Barre was able to make significant progress in his conquest.[149] However, when the Soviet Union switched allegiance in support of Ethiopia and bolstered their defences with the Cuban military, the Somali forces were overwhelmed and compelled to retreat.[150] In the aftermath of the war, the Somali economy was bankrupt, still suffering the effects of the previous drought and famine, as well as an influx of population of roughly 1.5 million ethnic Somalis who fled Ogaden.[151] Barre began to use increasingly brutish strategies to maintain power—such as ethnic persecution of minorities and inhumane treatment of political dissidents—since public trust in his authority was beginning to slip.[152] Despite ruling with an iron fist, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) began to rebel in northwestern regions and soon forced Barre to flee in January of 1991.[153]

The power vacuum that was left in the wake of Barre's ousting set the stage for one of the longest and most violent conflicts in the last few decades—the Somali Civil War, which has been ongoing since 1991 and is estimated to have claimed a million lives.[154] Clans violently fought for power in the power vacuum—without a centralized government to maintain order or broker peace between rival factions. As fighting continued, Somalia's infrastructure continued to be bombed, basic services provided by the government ceased, and numerous Somali civilians were caught in the crossfire.[155] Without an official government, the Somali economy also suffered, leading to widespread poverty. Moreover, because the nationalized industries from Barre's socialist reign could not function without a centralized government, the ongoing drought limited agricultural production and food to feed Somalis, all while there were 1.5 million refugees displaced from Ogaden.[156] Altogether, these factors contributed to a dire humanitarian crisis for Somalis that has only been exacerbated with time.

In response to the humanitarian crisis and power struggle in Somalia, British Somaliland declared independence in 1991 from the rest of Somalia in rejection of an informal government formed by militia.[157] Though not internationally recognized, the independent state, now known as Somaliland, has since developed its own

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[147] Janzen, Jörg H. 2025. "Somalia - Economy, Livestock, Agriculture." Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/place/Somalia/Economy.

[148] Muhumed, Muhumed M. 2021. "Scientific Socialism in the Horn of Africa: Revisiting the Somali Socialist Economy." Journal of Somali Studies 8 (1).

[149] Alkebulan, Paul. n.d. "Ogaden War Between Somalia and Ethiopia." EBSCO. https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/ogaden-war-between-somalia-and-ethiopia.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Mohamed, "Refugee Exodus from Somalia: Revisiting the Causes."

[152] Compagnon, Daniel. 1992. "Political Decay in Somalia: From Personal Rule to Warlordism." Refuge 12, no. 5 (December).

[153] Neapolitan, "Muhammad Siad Barre."

[154] GlobalSecurity.org. n.d. "Somalia Civil War." GlobalSecurity.org. https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/somalia.htm.

[155] "Endless war: a brief history of the Somali conflict." 2010. Conciliation Resources. https://www.c-r.org/accord/somalia/endless-war-brief-history-somali-conflict.

[156] Neapolitan, "Muhammad Siad Barre."

[157] Ferragamo, Mariel. n.d. "Somaliland: The Horn of Africa's Breakaway State." Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/somaliland-horn-africas-breakaway-state.

government system, infrastructure, currency, and other national frameworks independent of Somalia.[158] Similarly, there are several semi-autonomous states that have established their own government system independent of Somalia, such as Puntland and Jubaland. However, these semi-autonomous states have expressed that they do not want to secede from Somalia like Somaliland, rather wishing to be federal member states instead.[159] Puntland has also been a place of refuge for many Somalis fleeing from the violence-ridden southern region, due to its comparatively better stability.[160] As foreign nations grow increasingly willing to establish trade relations with Somaliland, the perception of Somalia's fractured temporary authorities is weakened in the eyes of Somali citizens, which emboldens rebel groups to act out. Though Somalia has many more direct issues to address, the pressure from Somaliland to secede has exacerbated existing political tensions in the region.[161]

Meanwhile, various ethnic groups fought for control over resources and land in the southern regions of Somalia, which significantly disrupted agricultural production in the area, displaced local Somalis, and created an extremely dangerous living environment.[162] The two most prominent factions, the Somali National Alliance (SNA) and Somali Salvation Alliance (SSA), have been the primary warring factions, even after multiple attempts at peace agreements.[163] The rivalry between the two factions of the Hawiye clan was exacerbated in the United Somali Congress (SNC), since both struggled for power over the other. Throughout the many subsequent attempts to establish an interim government, backlash from clans and factions have spiraled into rejections of authority as a whole. For example, in 2002, warlords from different factions accused the transitional government of being illegitimate and refused to cooperate in disarmament.[164] Without a central government and constant power struggle between clans, the political landscape has been in a continuous state of instability and thus the Somali civil war has been stuck in a cycle of violence. The widespread starvation and death has also led to international intervention from various nations and international bodies.[165]

By 2004, there were 14 attempts at establishing an interim government in Somalia, most of which met the same pitfalls as its predecessors. For example, the Transitional National Government (TNG) established in 1999 failed due to three fundamental issues: incompetence and corruption of leaders, Ethiopian opposition, and a lack of Somali unity due to interclan warfare.[166] In 2001, the finance minister of the TNG was accused of embezzling donor funds for personal use, which shrouded the TNG in scandal.[167] Additionally, the TNG was dominated by a few Mogadishu sub clans, which were opposed by clans outside of Mogadishu. Notably, the Somali Reconciliation and Rehabilitation Council (SRRC) was a coalition of Ethiopia-backed clans that rejected the

[158] "Somaliland profile." 2024. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14115069.

[159] BBC, "Puntland profile."

[160] Ibid.

[161] Ferragamo, "Somaliland: The Horn of Africa's Breakaway State."

[162] "SOMALIA." 2025. ACAPS. https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20250319_ACAPS_Crisis_Impact_of_clan_conflicts_in_Somalia.pdf.

[163] "Somalia | Election, President, News, Capital, & Economy." n.d. Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/place/Somalia/Civil-war.

[164] "Warlords reject Somali intervention." 2002. BBC News World Edition. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2077659.stm.

[165] GlobalSecurity.org., "Somalia Civil War."

[166] Venugopalan, Harish. 2017. "Somalia: A failed state?" ORFonline. https://www.orfonline.org/research/somalia-a-failed-state.

[167] "Somalia: Corruption Scandal Hits Transitional Government." 2001. allAfrica. https://allafrica.com/stories/200107010054.html.

Mogadishu-based authority.[168] Eventually, in 2004 the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) arranged a new interim coalition government, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG)—headed by the very warlords that made up the opposition of previous transitional governments. This would be the longest lasting interim government in Somali history. Since the warlords that once led the rebellions against previous transitional governments were now in positions of power, the lack of Somali unity that undermined previous Somali interim governments was somewhat alleviated. Additionally, the 2004 government established a 4.5 system to determine representation in parliament, which is still used today. Prior to the 4.5 system, parliament would have been controlled by whichever clans held positions in government—excluding the clans that did not and fuelling backlash. With the introduction of the 4.5 system, the four major ethnic groups, Darood, Hawiye, Dir, and Digil-Mirifle, each received 61 seats each in parliament, while the minority clans received the remaining 31 seats.[169] However, this "representative" system is not proportionate to the actual number of minority groups in Somalia.[170] Despite the significant improvement by the TFG to hold power for longer and govern Somalia with a comparatively more stability than its predecessors, they still faced consistent issues from jihadist militia composed of ICU and the al-Shabaab group,[171] widespread corruption in government, and discrimination against minority clans through the 4.5 system. Especially since there is no precedent for corruption prevention in government— due to the state of near-anarchy Somalia was recently in—nor a political system that the unique clan-based structured Somali society has grown used to, establishing a stable grasp over Somalia will continue to be a difficult task for the TFG.

Due to the internal power struggle and instability in Somalia, the region became a hotspot for piracy and jihadist groups to establish bases. The Islamist Courts Union (ICU) formed in the 1990s and wished to make Somalia an Islamic state.[172] Later, a group within the ICU formed al-Shabaab and would later emerge after the fall of its predecessor. In 2006, the ICU and al-Shabaab took control over the Somali capital, Mogadishu, due to the weak power of the TFG and with the support of militias. In response, the TFG requested Ethiopian support to push back against the ICU.[173] Additionally, considering the United States' history of funding secular warlords in Somalia, American resources helped Ethiopian troops deliver a swift fall of the ICU from power in Mogadishu.[174] Though the ICU fell, al-Shabaab soon resumed the ICU's mission of establishing an Islamist, "Taliban-style" authority over Somalia after Ethiopian troops pulled out.[175] Al-Shabaab uses brutality to spread fear and terror among Somali civilians, which is why their grasp on the population is so strong.[176] For example, Somali civilians are taught to report any family members that express disdain with al-Shabaab. As a result, community trust has deteriorated and deterred attempts of civilian-organized rebellion against al-Shabaab. With the absence of the ICU, al-Shabaab became the dominant guerilla group in Somalia with by far the most resources and manpower.[177] In 2008, al-Shabaab was formally designated a terrorist group and became an international threat in 2010 after

[168] Venugopalan, "Somalia: A failed state?"

[169] Hanson, Stephanie, and Eben Kaplan. 2008. "Somalia's Transitional Government." Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/somalias-transitional-government.

[170] "Somalia." n.d. Minority Rights Group. https://minorityrights.org/country/somalia/.

[171] Sekhu, Lesego. 2024. "Somalia." African Transitional Justice Hub. https://atjhub.csvr.org.za/somalia/.

[172] "Islamic Courts Union (ICU)." n.d. EBSCO. https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/politics-and-government/islamic-courts-union-icu.

[173] Center for Preventive Action. 2025. "Conflict With Al-Shabaab in Somalia." Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/al-shabab-somalia.

[174] "Islamic Courts Union (ICU)."

[175] "Al Shabaab (Terrorist Group in Somalia)." 2023. EBSCO. https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/political-science/al-shabaab-terrorist-group-somalia.

[176] Horton, Michael. 2019. "How Somaliland Combats al-Shabaab." Combating Terrorism Center at West Point 12, no. 10 (November).

[177] "Timeline: Al-Shabaab in East Africa." n.d. Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/timeline/al-shabaab-east-africa.

carrying out various suicide bombings in Uganda.[178] With the addition of Kenyan forces in 2011, an African Union mission in Somalia was able to push al-Shabaab out of Mogadishu. Especially with the added support of the United States and the added troops from neighbouring nations, the African Union mission was able to liberate other port cities in 2012 that al-Shabaab had previously established as their strongholds. Despite this pushback, al-Shabaab formally declared their alliance with al-Qaeda in the same year and have continued to terrorize civilians inside and out of Somalia.[179] Their momentum in attacks has continued to this very day; in the span of a mere month in 2024, al-Shabaab attacked nearly 600 facilities in the Lower Shabelle region, while also killing over 200 in the Galgaduud and Lower Juba regions.[180] Al-Shabaab continues to be one of the biggest threats that Somalia faces and will only continue to thrive as long as there is infighting within the government.

Throughout Somalia's long history of political tensions, its economy has been unable to thrive due to the disastrous droughts that have destroyed their agricultural production. Additionally, Barre's previous attempts at establishing a socialist state by nationalizing industries was also detrimental to the agricultural industry once his government fell in 1991. Not to mention, the pure state of violence that has engulfed Somalia has also ravaged the lands once used for agriculture.[181] Due to the difficulty of raising crops, Somali farmers have adapted to circumstances and the livestock industry now makes up three fifths of the Somali foreign exchange.[182] On top of the political factors, the climate in Somalia has consistently exacerbated such economic issues due to the frequent droughts and rare rainfall.[183] Since there is very little industrialization in Somalia, they must rely on their unsteady agricultural industry. However, Somalia is still in a severe trade deficit, meaning they export goods significantly less than they import,[184] since the Somali agricultural industry is incredibly unsteady and vulnerable to other factors.

Past UN/International Involvement

UNOSOM I, UNOSOM II, and UNITAF

In April of 1992, humanitarian aid was sent to alleviate famine since Somalia was facing a severe drought and agricultural production was significantly impacted. The first United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I) was dispatched in order to surveil the ceasefire in Mogadishu and protect UN humanitarian aid personnel contributing to the distribution of said aid.[185] The UN was also supported by the Organization of African Unity, League of Arab States, and Organization of the Islamic Conference.[186] Humanitarian relief packages were

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[178] Ibid.

[179] Ibid.

[180] "Al-Shabaab targets civilians in Somalia in retaliation for installing CCTV cameras." 2024. ACLED. https://acleddata.com/report/al-shabaab-targets-civilians-somalia-retaliation-installing-cctv-cameras-november-2024.

[181] "Somalia - Economy, Livestock, Agriculture." 2025. Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/place/Somalia/Economy.

[182] Ibid.

[183] "Somalia - Climatology | Climate Change Knowledge Portal." n.d. World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal. https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/somalia/climate-data-historical.

[184] Britannica, "Somalia - Economy, Livestock, Agriculture."

[185] "UNOSOM | United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia." n.d. Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/topic/UNOSOM.

[186] "UNITED NATIONS OPERATION IN SOMALIA I (UNOSOM I) - Background (Full text)." n.d. United Nations Peacekeeping. https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unosom1backgr2.html.

provided by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations International Children's Fund, United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees, World Food Programme, World Health Organization, and over 30 non-governmental organizations (NGOs).[187] Along with humanitarian support, UNOSOM I also aimed to establish stability amid the civil war beyond the one ceasefire in Mogadishu. Despite the widespread international support, the mission was not able to yield great success due to troops refusing orders from UN commanders before confirming with their own governments, poor communication overall, and opposition from Somali warlords.[188]

Prompted by the approach of UNOSOM I's mandate expiration in 1993, an American-led peace-enforcement mission was deployed in late 1992 to succeed UNOSOM I: the Unified Task Force (UNITAF). Military forces were assembled from 14 different nations, including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Türkiye, the UAE, and the United Kingdom.[189] UNITAF was more successful than UNOSOM I in creating a secure environment for humanitarian aid to be delivered,[190] since they were able to exert military force and disarm several Somali clans— while UNOSOM's mandate prevented them from doing so. However, the force exerted by UNITAF was only as successful as it was because its mandate did not threaten the political goals of Somali warlords. While UNOSOM aimed to create stability and maintain ceasefires between clans, UNITAF only focused on securing some key areas and supporting humanitarian relief.[191] Without the pushback from Somali warlords that limited UNOSOM I's success, UNITAF was able to fulfill its mandate.

After the UN renewed UNOSOM's mandate, UNITAF transitioned into UNOSOM II, which was deployed in March of 1993. Its mandate included continued monitoring of the ceasefire, preventing violence and taking action if necessary, controlling heavy weapons, seizing light weapons, securing ports, and continuing humanitarian relief;[192] this exceeded the typical mandates of regular peacekeeping missions, which are supposed to stay neutral in conflict.[193] In comparison to UNOSOM I, humanitarian relief was no longer distributed evenly, but rather only to Somalis who supported the UNOSOM II mission.[194] Said unequal distribution of aid contributed significantly to the current distrust in the UN that many Somali citizens hold—simultaneously making them more vulnerable to the influence of local clan organizations as well.[195] The UN also underestimated the response that an increasingly aggressive mandate would yield from Somali warlords, thus leading to more casualties of UN personnel; American and European troops pulled out of the mission after violent attacks on 18 American soldiers in Mogadishu.[196] Though the UN revised UNOSOM II's mandate to remove coercive measures, the damage had already been done regarding the establishment of any political stability in Somalia. In March of 1995, UNOSOM

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[187] Ibid.

[188] Britannica, "UNOSOM | United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia."

[189] United Nations Peacekeeping, UNITED NATIONS OPERATION IN SOMALIA I (UNOSOM I) - Background (Full text)."

[190] Ibid.

[191] Britannica, "UNOSOM | United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia."

[192] "UNITED NATIONS OPERATION IN SOMALIA II (UNOSOM II) - Mandate." n.d. United Nations Peacekeeping. https://peacekeeping.un.org/mission/past/unosom2mandate.html.

[193] Britannica, "UNOSOM | United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Somalia."

[194] Ibid.

[195] Walhad, Suleiman, and Yusof Ishak. 2024. "The Horn Of Africa States: The Failures Of The UN Systems In The Region – OpEd." Eurasia Review. https://www.eurasiareview.com/14052024-the-horn-of-africa-states-the-failures-of-the-un-systems-in-the-region-oped/.

[196] Ibid.

II pulled out of Somalia after successfully distributing humanitarian support, but unsuccessfully fulfilling the rest of its mandate to restore peace in Somalia's political landscape.[197]

Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) was established in 1996 following its predecessor, the International Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) which was formed in 1986. As political issues began to consistently interfere with the IGADD's efforts to alleviate the damages of droughts and improve local development, the organization evolved into the IGAD. The alliance consists of eight member countries: Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda.[198]

Considering that Somalia is one of the founding members of IGAD and instability in Somalia was guaranteed to spill over in neighbouring countries, the alliance quickly took action on the situation in Somalia with several peace initiatives, such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in Somalia (IGADSOM).[199] Other than on-the-ground initiatives, IGAD has been a crucial player in establishing the transitional interim governments. Since 1991, they have organized several conferences, which culminated in the pivotal establishment of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004.[200] Although the TFG eventually failed due to the inability to unite all the Somali clans in support of the interim government, it was a crucial milestone of the IGAD's long-term mission to establish political peace in Somalia.[201] The 4.5 system that is still used today was also discussed during several IGAD conferences and eventually established alongside the TFG.[202] Even after establishing interim governments in 2004, politicians could not sit in Mogadishu due to endangerment. Thus, IGAD member countries allowed the TFG to remain in the nearby Djibouti until the situation became less volatile.

In 2012, the TFG transitioned into the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) with the support of the IGAD. The establishment of the FGS was a pivotal point in the Somali civil war, considering it was the first official form of government that could operate independently in Somalia since 1991.[203] However, there are still a few crucial issues that existed in the previous IGAD-supported transitional governments that still exist in the FGS today, such as a lack of transparency, a fragmented national identity, and economic instability.[204]

African Union Involvement (AMISOM, ATMIS, AUSSOM)

The African Union (AU) is a regional body that aims to uphold peace in the continent, functioning similarly to other regional bodies around the world. The body's work in Somalia has been in the form of peacekeeping

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[197] Ibid.

[198] Intergovernmental Authority on Development. n.d. "Rising with IGAD." IGAD. https://igad.int/who-is-igad-risingwithigad-understanding-the-mandate-membership-and-diversity-of-igad/.

[199] Waga, Alene A. 2024. "Navigating chaos: IGAD's efforts Amidst Somalia's Governance crisis." Heliyon 10, no. 18 (September). 10.1016.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Ibid.

[202] "The role of regional and international organizations in resolving the Somali conflict : the case of IGAD." 2024. Bibliothek der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/aethiopien/07937-book.pdf.

[203] Smith, David. 2012. "Somalia's first parliament since 1991 inaugurated in Mogadishu | Somalia." The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/20/somalia-first-parliament-inaugurated.

[204] Ibid.

missions and coordinating the deployment of individual nation's military units in support of escalating situations. For example, troops from Uganda, Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, and Ethiopia are currently deployed on military operations in Somalia with the goal of pushing back against al-Shabaab and creating a stable enough environment for political progress to take place.[205]

The first form of AU intervention was the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which succeeded IGASOM and aimed to stabilize the region by staging offensive operations against violent actors like al-Shabaab.[206] IGASOM, the IGAD peace initiative, originally had a peaceful mandate in Somalia. However, the situation in Mogadishu escalated due to the increasing prevalence of terrorism and the mandate was no longer effective in completing its goal.[207] AMISOM's mandate allowed them to exert more military force for peacekeeping operations, especially in response to violent actors that threatened the political landscape.[208] AMISOM saw significant success in comparison to previous missions supported by other international actors that preceded it, especially the efficacy in dismantling al-Shabaab's power in the region by reclaiming control over civilian towns from the group.[209]

In 2022, AMISOM was succeeded by the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), which had the mandate of supporting the Somali Transition Plan (STP). The STP aims to help transition away from regional and international support into more independent Somali leadership by coordinating the takeover of previous AMISOM initiatives by Somali security forces.[210] In the 2022 Somali election, ATMIS was able to provide security support for the democratic process and backup for Somali Security Forces (SSF). The difference from AMISOM however, is that ATMIS assumes a more peacekeeping role that allows the SSF to take on the more offensive role in missions.[211] Though the increased inaction is part of ATMIS's mandate, the SSF struggles to mobilize enough troops to sufficiently succeed previous offensive responses against more issues beyond al-Shabaab.[212] Therefore, ATMIS has so far been able to continue the success of AMISOM against al-Shabaab, but have been falling short of the STP's goal of more independent security. These issues lie in the lack of national unity among forces, underfunded initiatives, and undertrained personnel.[213]

In 2025, ATMIS was succeeded by the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM), which has a similar mandate to that of ATMIS with its goals to provide security support for other ongoing operations. AUSSOM is still ongoing, therefore it is difficult to discern what its weaknesses may be in the longterm, however, critics argue that it will experience the similar shortcomings to what ATMIS experienced,

[205] "AMISOM Military Component - AMISOM." n.d. African Union Mission In Somalia. https://amisom-au.org/mission-profile/military-component/.

[206] African Union. n.d. "AMISOM Background." AMISOM-AU. https://amisom-au.org/amisom-background/.

[207] Ibid.

[208] African Union. n.d. "AMISOM Mandate." AMISOM-AU. https://amisom-au.org/amisom-mandate/.

[209] Yaw Tchie, Andrew E. 2022. "Waging Peace, towards an Africa Union Stabilisation Strategy for Somalia." Journal of International Peacekeeping 25, no. 3 (October): 236–260. 10.1163.

[210] Blyth, Fiona. 2019. "Transitioning to National Forces in Somalia: More Than an Exit for AMISOM." International Peace Institute. https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/1904_Transitioning-in-Somalia.pdf.

[211] Yohannes, Dawit. 2023. "ATMIS is still central to protecting Somali's hard-won gains." Institute for Security Studies. https://issafrica.org/iss-today/atmis-is-still-central-to-protecting-somalis-hard-won-gains.

[212] Ibid.

[213] Ibid.

with some issues even exacerbated due to al-Shabaab's resurgence.[214] Notably, the funding for AUSSOM is even less than that of ATMIS, which already struggled financially.[215]

Current Situation

Al-Shabaab

Originating in the early 2000s as a faction of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), al-Shabaab has evolved into Somalia's most prominent jihadist group and a central force perpetuating the civil war.[216] In 2006, the ICU briefly took over the Somali capital, Mogadishu, prompting a military response from Ethiopia, which sent troops to invade Mogadishu and remove the ICU. Although the Ethiopian operation against the ICU was successful and led to their downfall, it triggered al-Shabaab into adopting a radical ideology more extreme than its predecessor in the name of vengeance for defeat. For example, al-Shabaab calls for an even stricter enforcement of Sharia law than the ICU did.

Since 2007, al-Shabaab has been the single most powerful and well-funded guerrilla group in Somalia.[217] In 2009, it took control of Mogadishu again and several port cities, such as Kismayo, which provided a lucrative revenue stream for al-Shabaab through the taxation of imports.[218] Though al-Shabaab was later ousted from both Mogadishu and Kismayo with the support of Kenyan troops, weakening their power over key economic ports and reducing the overall amount of attacks, they have continued to terrorize Mogadishu with bombings that target urban areas and infrastructure.[219] In late 2019 and early 2020, a series of attacks in Mogadishu and northern Kenya on over 200 civilians and three American military personnel marked the latest resurgence from al-Shabaab.[220] Beyond Somalia, al-Shabaab has also terrorized Kenya and Uganda, therefore posing a significant threat to other neighbouring nations as well. Its regional attacks include a 2013 raid on a Kenyan mall, a 2015 siege on a Kenyan university, a 2019 siege on a Kenyan hotel, and a continuous threat of troops on the Somali-Ethiopian border.[221] Such threats in neighbouring nations demonstrate how al-Shabaab has evolved into a regional threat that has profited significantly from the Somali civil war.

[214] "Will the latest AU mission in Somalia achieve better results? | PSC Report." 2025. ISS Africa. https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/will-the-latest-au-mission-in-somalia-achieve-better-results.

[215] Marangio, Rossella. 2025. "Dawn or doom? The new AU mission in Somalia and the fight for stability." European Union Institute for Security Studies. https://www.iss.europa.eu/publications/briefs/dawn-or-doom-new-au-mission-somalia-and-fight-stability.

[216] Council on Foreign Relations, "Timeline: Al-Shabaab in East Africa."

[217] Ibid.

[218] International Crisis Group. 2018. "Al-Shabaab's attacks in East Africa: A timeline." Crisis Group. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/al-shabaabs-attacks-east-africa-timeline.

[219] Council on Foreign Relations, "Timeline: Al-Shabaab in East Africa."

[220] Ibid.

[221] Ibid.

Figure 1: Map of Somalia.[222]

For previous transitional governments, al-Shabaab has always posed a severe risk to their authority. As long as attempts to restore democracy exist in Somalia, al-Shabaab will always fight back violently due to their objective to establish their version of sharia law in Somalia.[223] Al-Shabaab is particularly notable for its relentless recruitment tactics, including indoctrination, financial incentivization, and forced conscription.[224] Though the group has been pushed back significantly with international support, strong ideological motivations are driving its current resurgence, and it will continue to be a severe threat in Somalia until the organization can no longer function. In the past few years, al-Shabaab captured central regions of Somalia due to Somali forces directing their attention to recapturing southern regions that al-Shabaab previously controlled.[225]

Climate Crisis and Droughts

Like many nations in the Global South, Somalia experiences the brunt of climate injustice. Despite contributing a mere 0.03 percent of global emissions, the country suffers significantly from the climate crisis due to increasingly volatile weather patterns and a lack of consistent rainfall.[226] In the last three and a half decades, Somalia has

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[222] "Somalia Guide." n.d. Africa Guide. Accessed November 13, 2025. https://www.africaguide.com/country/somalia/.

[223] Campbell, John. n.d. "Al-Shabaab." Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-shabaab#chapter-title-0-4.

[224] EUAA. 2022. "2.2.1. Persons fearing forced recruitment by Al-Shabaab." Country Guidance: Somalia. https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-somalia-2022/221-persons-fearing-forced-recruitment-al-shabaab.

[225] Muibu, Daisy. 2024. "Somalia's Stalled Offensive Against al-Shabaab: Taking Stock of Obstacles - Combating Terrorism Center at West Point." Combating Terrorism Center. https://ctc.westpoint.edu/somalias-stalled-offensive-against-al-shabaab-taking-stock-of-obstacles/.

[226] Mohamed, Abdulkadir. n.d. "Somalia's climate calamity: a nation adrift | NRC." Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). https://www.nrc.no/feature/2024/somalias-climate-calamity-a-nation-adrift.

endured over 30 destructive weather events stemming from the worsening climate crisis, including 12 droughts and 19 floods.[227]

Along with the violence that plagues Somalia, the catastrophic climate situation has contributed significantly to the current humanitarian crisis. Since 1990, there have been two catastrophic famines—in 1992 and 2011—caused by severe droughts and several failed rainy seasons.[228] In 2011, the famine killed approximately 260,000 Somalis, half of whom were children under the age of five.[229] Furthermore, the torrential rains that follow periods of drought have also destroyed many agricultural crops. Approximately 70 percent of Somalis rely on farming and pastoral industries to make a living, but the volatile climate crisis continues to disrupt their livelihoods, displace them from homes, and position them in severe poverty.[230] The effects of the climate crisis are also intertwined with other issues, such as the prevalence of militia; many families are unable to make a living from their agricultural job, thus they are only presented with the option of joining their local militia group for payment.[231] Additionally, humanitarian aid cannot reach civilians in areas controlled by militia groups like al-Shabaab due to American laws that refuse to send aid that could benefit designated terrorists.[232] Most recently, a drought in 2022 has created a famine for millions of Somalis once again.[233] Despite international bodies like the UN emphasizing how urgent the issue is, funding for the annual Somali humanitarian response plan is consistently lacking every year.[234]

Clan Warfare and National Unity

Even prior to European colonial influences, Somalia has always been split into several distinct clans, each with its own sub-clans and occasional sub-sub clans.[235] The four most prominent families of clans are the Hawiye, the Dir, the Darood, and the Rahanweyn.[236] Despite these being the most prominent, there are still numerous ethnic minority groups which altogether make up an estimated third of the Somali population.[237] Clan dynamics remain very strong in Somalia and influence many major aspects of life in Somalia, such as access to resources, political influence, interpersonal relationships, and the territory one lives in.[238] For example, pastures and livestock that

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[227] Momeni, Rahman, Tuba Bircan, Robert King, and Eloy Zafra Santos. 2024. "Deciphering climate-induced displacement in Somalia: A remote sensing perspective." PLOS One, (August). 10.1371.

[228] Momeni, Bircan, King, and Zafra Santos. "Deciphering climate-induced displacement in Somalia: A remote sensing perspective."

[229] "Somalia famine 'killed 260000 people.'" 2013. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22380352.

[230] Ibid.

[231] "Climate change is turbo-charging Somalia's problems - but there's still hope." 2024. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c62rr5qe602o.

[232] "Somalia drought may have killed 43,000 last year - UN." 2023. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-65015084.

[233] "Somalia faces worsening hunger as drought, conflict and high food prices risk pushing 1 million more people into food insecurity | World Food Programme." 2025. WFP. https://www.wfp.org/news/somalia-faces-worsening-hunger-drought-conflict-and-high-food-prices-risk-pushing-1-million.

[234] OCHA Financial Tracking Service. n.d. "Somalia Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025." Financial Tracking Service. https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1221/summary.

[235] "Somalia." n.d. Minority Rights Group. https://minorityrights.org/country/somalia/.

[236] "The role of clans in Somalia | European Union Agency for Asylum." n.d. EUAA. https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-somalia-2023/role-clans-somalia.

[237] Minority Rights Group, "Somalia."

[238] EUAA, "The role of clans in Somalia | European Union Agency for Asylum."

are on the territory of one clan can only be used by members of that clan.[239] Clan militias are also prevalent, since rival clans frequently fight over said resources and territory, which are necessary for survival.[240]

Somalia lacks a unified national identity, leading governments to struggle with executing the will of the public in a way that appeases every clan and their motivations. This is evident in the lack of a nationally spoken language and the exclusion that often results from such language barriers. Additionally, various minority groups are systemically discriminated against due to the lack of political representation within the 4.5 system. Interclan warfare and rivalry have fractured Somalia significantly and were one of the key reasons why establishing a stable government with sufficient public trust was incredibly difficult, since any powerful clan could simply reject an authority with which they disagreed. In 2000, the 4.5 system was introduced at a Somali peace conference in Djibouti, which allocated one vote to 61 politicians from each of the four major clans and a 0.5 vote to the politicians from the remaining minority clans.[241] Despite the 4.5 system's intended usage being for temporary representation during the transitional government period, it still remains as the informal system of representation in the official Somali government.[242] It has been widely criticized for its exclusion of minorities and undemocratic representation, but has not been removed insofar as various political actors are able to benefit from it, thus preventing its removal.[243] This reliance on clan-based power sharing has deterred further democratic progress in Somalia, but has also been crucial for the survival of the government and the relatively increased level of political stability.

Corruption in Government

In 2024, Somalia was ranked as the second-most corrupt country in the world.[244] This is largely due to the endless conflict, yet it also cyclically exacerbates the conflict itself. The political climate of Somalia is plagued with instability, media suppression, terrorism, and a lack of free speech, all of which only foster corruption even further.[245] Corruption is prevalent across almost every government institution, including its judicial system, public services, various administrations, police department, legislation, and other essential institutions.[246] Due to the normalization of corruption among government officials, there is a lack of accountability for one another that further perpetuates this abuse of power.

Systemic corruption has also repelled agencies and other international actors from sending humanitarian aid to Somalia, with the fear that resources will be misdirected to greedy figures of authority instead of civilians. From 2020 to 2023, Somalia had a branch of government called the National Anti-Corruption Commission (NACC). However, the current president of Somalia dissolved the commission along with the Judicial Service Commission

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[239] Isse Yusuf, Mohamud, Ahmed Adan Mohamed, and Abdisamad Abdirahman Omar. 2025. "Examining clan conflict dynamics and their role in driving displacement: insights from Somalia." medRxiv, (November). 10.1101/2025.10.30.25339180.

[240] Ibid.

[241] ConstitutionNet, "Constitutional History of Somalia."

[242] Somali Dialogue Platform. 2023. "THE ROLE OF 4.5 IN DEMOCRATIZATION AND GOVERNANCE IN SOMALIA." Rift Valley Institute. https://riftvalley.net/publication/the-role-of-4-5-in-democratization-and-governance-in-somalia/.

[243] Ibid.

[244] "Somalia - Transparency.org." n.d. Transparency International. https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/somalia.

[245] Ngila, Faustine. 2023. "Somalia is the most corrupt country in the world." Quartz. https://qz.com/somalia-is-the-most-corrupt-country-in-the-world-1850063626.

[246] Ibid.

(JSC).[247] The early establishment of the NACC was likely successful, especially when compared to the statistics of corruption in Somalia.[248] However, the situation has deteriorated since the dissolution of the NACC. For example, aid theft is commonly committed by higher-ups at aid camps, which led the European Union (EU) to temporarily suspend funding for the World Food Programme's (WFP) aid in Somalia after a 2023 UN report discovered the widespread theft.[249]

Somaliland and Federal Member States

Beyond the strong clan dynamics, the existence of separatist states and semi-autonomous states also further exacerbates this decentralization of government. Within the internationally-recognized region of Somalia, there is one self-declared independent state in the northwest, Somaliland, and several semi-autonomous states that are considered Federal Member States (FMS).[250] Somaliland has been functioning independently from Somalia since the beginning of the civil war in 1991, but is not internationally recognized. It is a separatist state and frequently seeks secession, which the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) views as a threat to its sovereignty and the African Union (AU) views as a potential catalyst for secessionist movements across the continent.[251] In 2024, the Federal Member State, Puntland, announced that it would remain an FMS but would no longer recognize the Federal Government of Somalia's constitution and begin functioning independently, making it the second state within Somalia to do so.[252] Without a universally accepted constitution, centralization is becoming an increasingly distant concept in Somalia.

In 2024, tensions surrounding Somaliland were heightened after Ethiopia and Somaliland signed a memorandum of understanding that allows Ethiopia to use a Somaliland port for trade.[253] The agreement marks the first official recognition of Somaliland as a sovereign nation, since it was signed without the knowledge of Somalia; Somalia quickly declared the agreement unlawful and an "act of aggression" from the two states involved and severed ties with Ethiopia.[254] Somali-Ethiopian relations have since been restored after each government has expressed a commitment to bilateral cooperation and Ethiopia agreed that future contact with Somaliland must be under the permission of Somalia, but tensions still remain high between the historic rivals.[255] Though Ethiopian access to the port itself was not an issue for Somalia,[256] it threatened Somalia's fight for national unity because Ethiopian officials negotiated with Somaliland as if it were a recognized state outside of Somalia.

[247] Ali, Abdirahman Y. 2025. "Op-ED: Somali Government Must Commit to Fighting Corruption and Prudently Managing Natural Resources as it Signs Oil Contracts." Horn Observer. https://hornobserver.com/articles/3114/Op-ED-Somali-Government-Must-Commit-to-Fighting-Corruption-and-Prudently-Managing-Natural-Resources-as-it-Signs-Oil-Contracts.

[248] Transparency International, "Somalia - Transparency.org."

[249] Sheikh, Abdi. 2023. "Somalia aid theft - a daily reality for country's most vulnerable." Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somalia-aid-theft-daily-reality-countrys-most-vulnerable-2023-09-19/.

[250] Ferragamo, "Somaliland: The Horn of Africa's Breakaway State."

[251] "Somalia/Somaliland: the differences and issues explained." 2024. ActionAid UK. https://www.actionaid.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/somaliland/somalia-somaliland-differences-explained.

[252] "S/2024/426 Security Council." 2024. Security Council. https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/426.

[253] "Ethiopia-Somaliland deal: Can the Horn of Africa rift be healed?" 2024. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67911057.

[254] Ibid.

[255] Ali, Faisal. 2025. "Somalia and Ethiopia agree to restore diplomatic ties after year-long rift." The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jan/12/somalia-and-ethiopia-agree-to-restore-diplomatic-ties-after-year-long-rift.

[256] Ibid.

In recent years, Somaliland has also been engaged in the Las Anod conflict, a border dispute with the Dhulbahante sub-clan of the Darod family in the Sool region.[257] The Las Anod dispute is one of the most recent conflicts in the Somali civil war and is highly significant due to its close relationship with the topic of Somaliland's secession; this dispute is part of a bigger conflict between Somaliland and Puntland, considering the Sool region has historically switched between the two states and is now trying to leave Somaliland.[258] In June of 2025, Somaliland and Puntland organized a prisoner exchange that seems to fuel hope for a peaceful resolution. However, the issue of Somaliland's independence in negotiations may deter productive agreements and potentially trigger even more instability in the northern region of Somalia than there is currently.[259]

Possible Solutions and Controversies

Countering al-Shabaab

Somalia's experience with chronic poverty, conflict, unemployment, and famine is largely due to economic and politically driven factors. However, any progress to alleviate said issues has been significantly inhibited due to frequent al-Shabaab attacks. What exists today is a cycle of terrorism and economic hardship that seems to be the cause of one another. Al-Shabaab's presence in Somalia is still quite strong; therefore, a solution aimed at eradicating their influence must be Somali-led and paired with comprehensive economic development in order for it to be sustainable in the long term. There are two specific measures that are able to disrupt al-Shabaab's operations: targeting their financial means and preventing recruitment.

Al-Shabaab is estimated to make $100 million USD every year from its extortion system.[260] Somali people are threatened to pay "taxes" on local trade, real estate, and business, which further strengthens al-Shabaab's financial means, weakens the economic capacity of everyday Somali civilians, and thus exacerbates the cycles of terror. Without their financial capabilities, al-Shabaab's operations would be slowed significantly, and there would be more opportunities for the Somali government to take action against them. From 2022 to mid-2023, new military, ideological, and financial strategies were employed to freeze al-Shabaab bank accounts and mobile money channels.[261] Notably, the government used clan militia to fight against al-Shabaab's forces.[262] Despite the progress, al-Shabaab soon fought back, captured more regions in retaliation, and continued extorting Somali civilians for their own objectives.[263] In particular, they were able to capture central regions of Somalia while the government's focus was on the southern region. However, this does not mean this period of countering al-Shabaab was a

[257] Haji, Mohammed. 2023. "Conflict in disputed Las Anod dims Somaliland's diplomatic dreams." Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/5/10/conflict-in-disputed-las-anod-dims-somalilands-diplomatic-dreams.
[258] "Sool | European Union Agency for Asylum." n.d. EUAA. https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-somalia-2023/sool.
[259] Abhasakun, Tara. 2025. "After Historic Prisoner Exchange, Are Somaliland and Puntland Heading Toward Peace?" Peace News Network. https://peacenews.com/after-historic-prisoner-exchange-are-somaliland-and-puntland-heading-toward-peace/.
[260] "Disrupting al-Shabaab's hold on Mogadishu's economy." 2025. Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/disrupting-al-shabaabs-hold-on-mogadishus-economy/.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Muibu, "Somalia's Stalled Offensive Against al-Shabaab: Taking Stock of Obstacles - Combating Terrorism Center at West Point." Combating Terrorism Center.
[263] Ibid.

failure—it proves that the Somali government has the ability to make gains against al-Shabaab, but simply lacks the resources to properly consolidate its progress. The biggest obstacles to successfully debilitating al-Shabaab's financial means are twofold: al-Shabaab's ability to retaliate by harming citizens and capturing more land; and the resource strain that the Somali government experiences in the process.[264] Therefore, any operation to financially cripple al-Shabaab must also properly invest in a stronger military and law enforcement that is able to push back against al-Shabaab, the protection of civilians from terrorism, and have sufficient resources.

Another source of strength for al-Shabaab is their large number of armed forces, which mostly consist of Somali youth who are recruited unwillingly. Though most Somali civilians do not support al-Shabaab's extremist ideology, there are four key tactics that are used to recruit them to join al-Shabaab's forces.[265] Firstly, by creating a culture of fear through murder, property confiscations, abductions, forced marriages, and extremist religious practices. This gives al-Shabaab the power to enforce their strict rules without significant backlash from the community, since civilians fear for their lives.[266] Secondly, by building mistrust among communities and families, which discourages any organized attempts to rebel against al-Shabaab due to the inability to know who is an al-Shabaab supporter and who is not.[267] Thirdly, by forcibly limiting employment and education opportunities for youth by killing those who try to pursue higher education, arresting those who try to travel outside of Somalia, killing those who work for government organizations, and thus leaving them no other option than to join their forces in order to make a living for themselves and their families.[268] Fourthly, by coercing economically-struggling civilians into joining al-Shabaab forces with bribes, ransom, and taxes.[269]

In order to counter these four recruitment tactics, there must be comprehensive economic development and protection for civilians, a strong government presence to counter al-Shabaab's influence over communities, and a restored sense of community. By specifically targeting their tactics, al-Shabaab's armed forces can be significantly crippled. That being said, such a solution requires extensive resources and coordination—both of which the Somali government cannot expend without sacrificing other areas of distress. Furthermore, civilians distrust the government and international actors due to the perception that said forces are acting out of self-interest, rather than genuine support for Somali communities.[270]

International Support

Despite the deteriorating crisis in Somalia, international funding and aid have been redirected towards other global issues.[271] After decades of slow progress in Somalia, the nation has been deprioritized by the international community, especially in comparison to newer conflicts in Palestine and Ukraine.[272] Though Somalia is slowly developing more independence to deal with issues, it still relies significantly on international resources for

[264] Ibid.

[265] "Countering Al-Shabaab Propaganda and Recruitment Mechanisms in South Central Somalia." n.d. UNSOM. https://unsom.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/countering_al-shabaab_propaganda_and_recruitment_mechanisms_report_final_-_14_august_2017_0.pdf.

[266] Ibid.

[267] Ibid.

[268] Ibid.

[269] Ibid.

[270] Ibid.

[271] "Somalia: Hunger soars and funding falls." 2025. CARE. https://www.care.org/media-and-press/somalia-hunger-soars-and-funding-falls/.

[272] BBC, "Climate change is turbo-charging Somalia's problems - but there's still hope."

humanitarian aid, dealing with threats like al-Shabaab, and developing strong infrastructure. Somalia is at a crucial point in history in which momentum for progress has been built up in recent years; the international community cannot let the opportunity to solve the longstanding Somali civil war slip away.

Due to the climate crisis, internal displacement, widespread poverty, al-Shabaab, and lack of economic opportunities, there is a significant urgency for humanitarian aid in Somalia. As of July 2025, the Somalia Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2025 has only met 16 percent of what is required.[273] Since an aid theft scandal from corrupt camp personnel in 2023,[274] coupled with consistent civilian extortion by al-Shabaab, international actors have also become wary of providing aid to Somalia. Civilians also reportedly view most international actors as working selfishly, rather than for the benefit of Somali communities,[275] which can potentially hinder humanitarian support initiatives. That being said, the need for international humanitarian aid is incredibly urgent; an estimated 5.98 million Somali civilians required humanitarian aid in 2025.[276]

International military support exists in the form of African Union missions; AUSSOM is currently deployed, in succession of ATMIS and AMISOM.[277] After the first mission, the mandate of ATMIS and AUSSOM has been progressively less interventionist, aiming to develop Somali military independence and decrease reliance on African Union forces. Though AMISOM was widely successful in pushing back al-Shabaab and creating a level of change in Somalia, its succeeding missions have faced financial downfalls due to a lack of funding. The funding situation is even worse for AUSSOM than it is for ATMIS, since major international actors like the United States and the EU are experiencing donor fatigue.[278] Despite the decreasing help from the AU, their mandate of empowering Somali military forces is still not properly fulfilled—Somali military forces are currently still undertrained and underfunded for them to take significant independent action against national threats.[279]

In order to achieve long-term stability, international aid also must not neglect building Somalia's economy and essential infrastructure. Though some action has been taken to build services, education, transportation, and create jobs through international bodies and countries like the International Labour Organization (ILO),[280] World Bank,[281] Türkiye, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Iran,[282] there is still much to be developed and a shortage of resources to do so. Additionally, these hard-earned infrastructure developments must be properly protected from volatile factors, such as attacks from al-Shabaab. The economic state of Somalia is also quite dire due to the trade deficit they are in and the overreliance on international aid.[283] Though organizations like the ILO are working to

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[273] OCHA Financial Tracking Service, "Somalia Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025."

[274] Sheikh, "Somalia aid theft - a daily reality for country's most vulnerable."

[275] UNSOM, "Countering Al-Shabaab Propaganda and Recruitment Mechanisms in South Central Somalia."

[276] "Somalia." n.d. OCHA. https://www.unocha.org/somalia.

[277] "AUSSOM." n.d. African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) -. https://au-ssom.org/.

[278] Marangio, "Dawn or doom? The new AU mission in Somalia and the fight for stability."

[279] Muibu, "Somalia's Stalled Offensive Against al-Shabaab: Taking Stock of Obstacles - Combating Terrorism Center at West Point." Combating Terrorism Center.

[280] "Transforming Somalia: Infrastructure and job initiatives empower displaced people and local communities." 2025. International Labour Organization. https://www.ilo.org/resource/article/transforming-somalia-infrastructure-and-job-initiatives-empower-displaced.

[281] "Somalia Receives $58 million in World Bank Financing to Develop Regional Transport Infrastructure, a First in Decades." n.d. World Bank. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/09/29/somalia-receives-58-million-in-world-bank-financing-to-develop-regional-transport-infrastructure-a-first-in-decades.

[282] UNSOM, "Countering Al-Shabaab Propaganda and Recruitment Mechanisms in South Central Somalia."

[283] Britannica, "Somalia - Economy, Livestock, Agriculture."

improve the employment rate and economic opportunities, it will be incredibly difficult considering the climate crisis that is experienced across all sectors. Economic aid should aim to support Somalia in the long term, with initiatives to bolster industrialization and create job opportunities that are not easily strained by the volatile climate.

Somalia would not be able to survive in its current state without the support of international aid, and is making active progress to improve the situation with said support. However, international aid must be used mindfully as more than a band-aid resolution, but rather a line of support and transition for Somalia's future. Excessive international support usually creates overreliance and makes it difficult for governments to operate independently from the international community, even after threats are neutralized; therefore, any solution involving international aid should also be accompanied by a transition plan to allow the Somali government to take on more autonomy in the development of its nation.

Strengthening Institutions and Forces

Out of all the diverse issues that Somalia's local communities face—al-Shabaab, aid theft, clan warfare, and government corruption, one pattern exists among all of them: a lack of authority and accountability. Since government institutions, law enforcement, and the justice system all fell at the beginning of the civil war, there were no authorities to keep people accountable for their actions. The nation soon fell into near-anarchy and created the perfect environment for extremist groups to thrive—and even after the situation improved and humanitarian aid was sent, that aid was embezzled by corrupt personnel who received little consequences for their actions. Such crimes are only able to thrive in environments in which there is no law enforcement to catch criminals, nor any definitive repercussions for breaking the law due to the weak justice system. However, by creating stronger law enforcement and an accessible, functional justice system, such crime is much more likely to be caught and punished or even deterred from happening in the first place. Outside of local law enforcement for communities, Somali military forces should be strengthened to be mobilized in appropriate situations, especially in the face of national threats like al-Shabaab and for the sake of growing independence away from international military support.

Law enforcement and the justice system in Somalia is currently quite weak and corrupt.[284] Courts typically combine traditional law and Sharia law. However, since the government is extremely decentralized in Somalia and each clan has local rules that are incorporated into their community's laws, there is no standardized set of laws that exists in every region, making enforcement and prosecution extremely difficult.[285] The justice system is also highly inaccessible to regular civilians due to the high cost of filing a suit, but simultaneously high levels of poverty, which means civil crimes are less likely to be reported or prosecuted.[286] Furthermore, law enforcement personnel and justice system authorities are typically quite corrupt, lack professionalism, and are not particularly trusted by civilians.[287] In order to create trust among the public, law enforcement, and the justice system must be reformed through creating a standardized law across the country, thoroughly training law enforcement, and improving the quality of prisons. Additionally, opportunities for specialized education and the development of job-specific skills should be made more accessible for the public to pursue. Workers in these sectors must also be

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[284] "Somalia." 2023. Africa Organized Crime Index. https://africa.ocindex.net/2023/country/somalia.

[285] "Somalia - United States Department of State." n.d. State Department. https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/somalia/.

[286] Africa Organized Crime Index, "Somalia."

[287] Ibid.

paid adequate salaries for their work, which can incentivize higher quality of work and create accountability for corruption. By improving law enforcement and the justice system, Somali civilians are able to access more employment opportunities, increased stability in their region, and a greater sense of trust in their communities. Despite how beneficial a proper justice system could be for Somalia, factors like poverty and al-Shabaab limit opportunities for education, the decentralization of government is deeply rooted within the clan-based structure of society, and investment in law enforcement is extremely costly.

Though law enforcement and justice in local settings can minimize dangers and deter large-scale operations from happening in the first place, national-level threats like al-Shabaab must also be sufficiently dealt with by Somali military forces. At the moment, Somali forces are working in coordination with African Union forces and are also being trained to transition into a more independent approach to national security.[288] Currently, Somali forces are still severely underfunded and undertrained due to a lack of resources and funding; progress for a more independent military force is slow.[289] Allies like Türkiye,[290] the United States,[291] and the EU[292] have also been contributing to strengthening Somali forces with training programs and strategic advice for future operations. Clan militia has also been mobilized as a part of national armed forces in recent years,[293] but they often do not fully trust the government and can fail to properly coordinate operations because of mistrust.[294] The threat of al-Shabaab unites clan militia and the government, but they must put their other differences aside for productive collaboration to exist.

Anti-Corruption Campaigns

Somalia is consistently ranked as one of the most corrupt nations in the world every year.[295] Corruption is riddled in the central government, aid camps, and other essential institutions that civilians rely on for survival.[296] Citizens have also expressed severe distrust and frustration in the government due to corruption,[297] which can often hinder government initiatives to improve civilian life in the future—even if intentions are genuine. Due to corruption, civilians have been robbed of humanitarian aid,[298] denied adequate public services, and are forced to suffer without the protection or support of their government.[299] From 2020-2023, the National Anti-Corruption Committee (NACC) in Somalia operated as a branch of government responsible for keeping government officials accountable for their actions and preventing corruption. However, it was dissolved along with the Judicial

[288] Blyth, "Transitioning to National Forces in Somalia: More Than an Exit for AMISOM."

[289] Muibu, "Somalia's Stalled Offensive Against al-Shabaab: Taking Stock of Obstacles - Combating Terrorism Center at West Point." Combating Terrorism Center.

[290] Abouyoussef, Ahmed. 2024. "Turkey and Somalia: A New Rising Pact in the Horn of Africa." Al Habtoor Research Centre. https://www.habtoorresearch.com/programmes/turkey-and-somalia/.

[291] "Somali Danab forces make history at Justified Accord 2024." 2024. U.S. Army. https://www.army.mil/article/274705/somali_danab_forces_make_history_at_justified_accord_2024.

[292] "EUTM Somalia offers prospects for Somali Military." 2025. EEAS. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eutm-somalia-offers-prospects-somali-military_en.

[293] Hansen, Stig J. 2023. "Can Somalia's New Offensive Defeat al-Shabaab - Combating Terrorism Center at West Point." Combating Terrorism Center. https://ctc.westpoint.edu/can-somalias-new-offensive-defeat-al-shabaab/.

[294] Abass, Adam. 2025. "Why is Somalia losing ground to Al-Shabaab?" Centre for African Conflict and Development. https://ca-cd.com/why-is-somalia-losing-ground-to-al-shabaab/.

[295] Transparency International, "Somalia - Transparency.org."

[296] "NATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY 2020 – 2023." n.d. United Nations Development Programme.

[297] UNSOM, "Countering Al-Shabaab Propaganda and Recruitment Mechanisms in South Central Somalia."

[298] Sheikh, "Somalia aid theft - a daily reality for country's most vulnerable."

[299] United Nations Development Programme, "NATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY 2020 – 2023."

Services Commission (JSC) and never reintroduced under the new government.[300] The NACC was created after suggestions and support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),[301] but the UN had no control over its dissolution. Any anti-corruption strategy must be long-term, and its continuity must be ensured by appropriate international bodies. At the same time, successful anti-corruption campaigns can potentially infringe on a nation's sovereignty, since there typically must be an international actor to keep the government accountable. However, in keeping the government accountable, it may take away the autonomy of the government to determine what is best for its nation, and by extension, violate its sovereignty.

Bloc Positions

African Union Nations and East African Regional Bloc

As the most physically proximate to Somalia, this bloc has taken the most action so far to stabilize its neighbour, since the stability of Somalia is crucial to the stability of the entire region. This bloc often sends troops as a part of the African Union (AU) missions in Somalia,[302] partners with regional organizations like the East African Community on development projects for infrastructure like transportation,[303] and has worked with the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to establish transitional governments prior to 2012.[304] However, due to their heavy involvement against al-Shabaab, countries in the bloc like Kenya and Uganda have already been directly affected by threats from the group. In 2010, al-Shabaab became a transnational threat by raiding, sieging, and bombing nearby nations.[305] Countries in this bloc are likely to prioritize solutions that will also benefit their own nations and prevent spillover impacts of threats, such as collective economic projects and countering al-Shabaab, since they are able to bring greater benefit to the development of their own nations. The biggest obstacle this bloc faces is gathering funding and resources for its solutions, especially while other pertinent conflicts are raging on elsewhere. Especially for a multi-decade-long civil war like Somalia's, donor burnout, compounded with dubious international confidence, limits the amount of funding that external nations are willing to direct towards this conflict. Notably, the lack of funding is evident in existing funding issues with African Union missions like AUSSOM and the decreasing amount of resources the bloc has been able to dedicate to Somalia in recent years.[306]

Counter-Terrorism Nations

Al-Shabaab declared its affiliation with al-Qaeda in 2012,[307] officially connecting it to the network of jihadist groups that countries like the United States have targeted in their "war on terror."[308] As reflected in counter-terrorism-motivated nations' past involvement in Somalia, they prioritize bolstering and supporting Somalia's

[300] "Somalia president dissolves top commissions." 2022. Garowe Online.
https://garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-president-dissolves-top-commissions.
[301] United Nations Development Programme, "NATIONAL ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY 2020 – 2023."
[302] Council on Foreign Relations, "Timeline: Al-Shabaab in East Africa."
[303] "EAC and Infrastructure." n.d. East African Community. https://www.eac.int/infrastructure.
[304] Waga, "Navigating chaos: IGAD's efforts Amidst Somalia's Governance crisis."
[305] Council on Foreign Relations, "Timeline: Al-Shabaab in East Africa."
[306] Marangio, "Dawn or doom? The new AU mission in Somalia and the fight for stability."
[307] Council on Foreign Relations, "Timeline: Al-Shabaab in East Africa."
[308] Campbell, "Al-Shabaab."

forces with the specific goal of eradicating al-Shabaab.[309] Countries that are also facing terrorist threats, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the regional branch of al-Qaeda in Algeria, are likely to align with this bloc since successes against al-Shabaab can benefit their fight against terrorism as well. Countries in this bloc are likely to prioritize military intervention targeted at al-Shabaab, rather than economic or social initiatives for Somali civilians. Though there are undoubtedly many countries in similar situations as Somalia that would support this bloc, their greatest obstacle is the potential lack of wealthy nations, other than the United States, that are willing to invest significant amounts of money and resources in this single issue. Many countries that are plagued by terrorism also cannot allocate significant forces to support military initiatives against al-Shabaab, even though their views align. Additionally, the influence of al-Shabaab is connected to the deeply-rooted clan structures that exist in Somali society; therefore, dismantling it would be difficult—even if sufficient funding were present.

Developed Democracies

With some of the most economic and political power in the world, this bloc includes Western superpowers and other countries that typically align with their ideology, such as the United Kingdom, France, and Canada. These nations have historically provided aid for the situation in Somalia, especially in the form of funding or humanitarian support, but have recently begun experiencing donor fatigue.[310] After decades of funding solutions for Somalia, these developed democracies wish to see long-term change and an end to this perennial crisis. These nations are willing to dedicate resources to building infrastructure, developing trade relations, and strengthening Somali forces under the requirement of ideological alignment. This bloc would likely prioritize anti-corruption campaigns and establishing a fair democracy as a prerequisite before pursuing solutions like economic development or humanitarian aid. This is evident for nations in the EU, for example, which decided to pause funding for the World Food Programme in Somalia due to allegations of corruption in aid distribution.[311] In another example, the US also cut food rations for the Somali special forces unit, Danab, that it has been training to counter al-Shabaab, due to another corruption scandal.[312] However, pushing back against corruption faces potential pushback from the Somali government or other nations, which may view this prerequisite for support as coercive and a violation of sovereignty. If the host nation of solutions is unwilling to cooperate, progress halts to a standstill and more investments of this bloc are lost.

Muslim Countries

With the strong Islamic influences in Somalia, ideologically similar Muslim countries have begun to support the development of Somalia to establish stable relations as allies. Notably, Gulf states like Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have begun investing in East African countries, with strong incentives to establish political and economic power over the region.[313] In Somalia, civilians view these Gulf nations in a positive light, due to their investments

[309] "America's Counterterrorism Wars: The War in Somalia." n.d. New America. https://www.newamerica.org/future-security/reports/americas-counterterrorism-wars/the-war-in-somalia/.

[310] "Donor Fatigue Grows as $7B Security Investment in Somalia Faces Scrutiny." 2025. Facility for Talo and Leadership. https://www.ftlsomalia.com/donor-fatigue-grows-as-7b-security-investment-in-somalia-faces-scrutiny/.

[311] Sheikh, "Somalia aid theft - a daily reality for country's most vulnerable."

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in developing essential infrastructure.[314] Due to their relatively long-term incentives, this bloc is likely to prioritize economic development and strengthening Somali institutions, in hopes of fostering a strong alliance that can become greatly useful in the future. With more allies in various regions, these powerful Muslim countries are able to expand their global influence and advance their geopolitical goals on an international stage. These countries also work as mediating countries during agreements, such as when Türkiye mediates negotiations between Ethiopia and Somalia.[315] That being said, they are unlikely to pressure the Somali government to be transparent or undertake anti-corruption campaigns, since it could potentially push them away from alliances. The biggest obstacle for this bloc is the extensive construction required to develop proper infrastructure, and the potential strain on resources to do so. Especially without significant backing from Western developed nations due to the lack of attention towards corruption, this bloc's resources are finite and must also be allocated appropriately to various East African nations based on economic potential.

Trade-Incentivized Nations

Due to its proximity to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, Somalia's stability is geopolitically crucial for this chokepoint of trade. The strait is part of the most cost-efficient route between Asia and the Middle East to its biggest trade partners—Europe and the Americas. Therefore, its instability can significantly endanger its economy. For example, China relies on the Red Sea maritime trade route—accessed through the Bab el-Mandeb strait—for its trade with Europe, accounting for approximately 60 percent of its total exports.[316] Countries like China, Singapore, and India that have a significant economic stake in the strait are likely to align with this bloc, which would prioritize stabilizing Somalia by dealing with the biggest threats to their shipments: Somali pirates and al-Shabaab. That being said, they will usually opt for slightly more cost-effective methods of mitigating such threats. For example, addressing the root causes of al-Shabaab's insurgencies, like poverty, would be an expensive solution for protecting trade. Therefore, this bloc would try to drive al-Shabaab into the interior of Somalia, where they cannot harm maritime trade—likely by supporting Somali security forces.[317] Additionally, they may try to compromise with al-Shabaab—which controls various southern trade ports—in order to keep exports safe, despite potentially fueling a threat to the Somali government's power. The main goal of this bloc is not to solve the underlying sources of the civil war, but rather to protect their own national trade interests. That being said, this bloc must still balance cost-effective solutions with investments in long-term, genuine solvency—otherwise, the conflict becomes a perennial annual cost that bleeds money out of national budgets.

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Discussion Questions

1. Do the benefits of the 4.5 system outweigh the harms? Why or why not?

2. Does Somalia need more international support to succeed? Does this infringe on their right to state sovereignty?

3. Should the government system adapt to support clan dynamics or try to change clan dynamics as a whole? How do either of these solutions impact the political power of minority groups? Which is more likely to succeed?

4. To what extent should countries be able to establish relations with Somaliland without violating the sovereignty of Somalia?

5. Should humanitarian aid be non-negotiable?

6. Can the threat of al-Shabaab go away through indirect methods by developing the economy, strengthening law enforcement, and building infrastructure? Why or why not? Should this be prioritized over use of the military?

Additional Resources

Timeline of al-Shabaab in East Africa:

https://www.cfr.org/timeline/al-shabaab-east-africa

Causes and Impacts of Clan Warfare in Somalia:

https://www.acaps.org/fileadmin/Data_Product/Main_media/20250319_ACAPS_Crisis_Impact_of_clan_conflicts_in_Somalia.pdf

Somalia's "National Anti-Corruption Strategy" from 2020 to 2023:

https://info.undp.org/docs/pdc/Documents/SOM/Approved%20National%20Anti-corruption%20Strategy%202020-2023%20NACSEnglish%20version.pdf

Analysis on the 4.5 System:

https://riftvalley.net/publication/the-role-of-4-5-in-democratization-and-governance-in-somalia/

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