

CONTEXTUALIZING TURKEY'S ACTIONS IN SOMALIA: INSIGHTS FROM SOMALILAND

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I. Introduction

The Republic of Turkey's involvement in sub-Saharan Africa, in general, and Somalia, in particular, marks one of the most exciting and widely misunderstood geopolitical and strategic events of the twenty-first century. Turkey is now considered a resident power in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea region. By resident power, we mean states that do not possess territory outside a particular region, but nonetheless must be taken into consideration in terms of that region's security and politics. Turkey, a state that geographically straddles Europe and the Middle East, possesses no territory in the Horn of Africa but nonetheless is a relevant state actor vis-à-vis the Horn's politics and security. In short, the actions Turkey takes in Somalia have a direct impact on the region.

From its humble beginnings as a humanitarian relief actor in 2011, Turkey has become a political and economic heavyweight in the region, with trade topping \$650 million with Ethiopia, flights operating daily from Istanbul to Djibouti, Addis Ababa and Mogadishu, and Turkish officers training the largest contingent of Somalia's armed forces in Mogadishu.¹ Its largest foreign embassy in the world is in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, and Turkish companies operate Somalia's most critical and lucrative infrastructure: Mogadishu's international airport and port. The Turks have built hospitals, paved roads and thousands of Somalis are educated in Turkey each year. A marvelous tactility surrounds Turkey's actions in Somalia. This separates it from other external states that have participated in high-profile (and high profit) ventures in Somalia for years with little to nothing to show for it.²

Turkey's presence is welcomed by many in the Horn—its president (and former prime minister), Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, is so popular that many Somali baby boys are named after him; girls are named Istanbul. While Ethiopia has been the quiet epicenter of Turkish investment, and Sudan has been integral to Turkish diplomacy in Africa, it is in Somalia that Turkey has made the biggest international splash. This has generated fears about Turkey's power projection to the region. The rulers of some Arab Gulf states see a neo-Ottoman grand strategy at work in Ankara's attempts to restore an Ottoman port town in Sudan and Turkish control of critical dual-use infrastructure in Somalia. Accordingly, they have taken measures to rollback what they see as undue Turkish influence in their backyard.³ In the Horn itself, however, Turkey's image remains generally positive.⁴

Given its precipitous rise as an important factor in the region's political economy, many scholars have attempted to explain Turkey's sudden interests and actions in the region and, more particularly, Somalia.⁵ What is clear is that Turkey's humanitarian impulses were quickly superseded by economic motivations.⁶ These, in turn, were complemented with an increasingly robust Turkish political presence in Mogadishu. In fact, writing about Turkey in Somalia really means writing about Turkey in the capital.⁷ This is entirely in line with nearly all external state actors operating in Somalia, but it also means the peripheries of this vast country are frequently ignored. As such, little attention has been paid to Turkey's actions outside Mogadishu, in the country's federal states and autonomous or independent regions.⁸

To fill this gap, the article offers a (re)appraisal of Turkey's engagement with Somalia from the vantage point of the Republic of Somaliland, a *de facto* independent, but *de jure* internationally unrecognized political entity. Using a qualitative methodology supported by interviews and observations from Somaliland, the author critically reassesses Turkey's posture, actions and interests, contextualizing them with Somaliland's core national interests. The findings demonstrate that Turkey is negatively perceived in Somaliland on account of Ankara's "One Somalia" policy, its training and arming of the Somali National Army (SNA) and its ongoing support of Mogadishu's political elite who wish to see a return to the pre-civil war Somali Union. Thus, both the underpinnings and combination of Turkey's actions, while certainly not directed against Somaliland *per se*, have the poten-

tial to negatively affect Somaliland's national interests, cherished independence and sovereignty of action.

II. Somaliland: From Voluntary Union to Independence

Somaliland occupies a strategic location at the southern entrance to the Red Sea (see Map 1). It has been de facto independent from the Somali Union since 1991, but remains internationally unrecognized, and is claimed by Somalia's government. Mogadishu believes it has strong claims to Somaliland, and the international community of states tacitly agrees. It is Somalia, not Somaliland, that occupies seats at the United Nation (UN) and the African Union (AU); Mogadishu hosts international embassies, Hargeisa, Somaliland's capital, does not (with limited exceptions). This, despite the fact that Somaliland—previously British Somaliland, a British Protectorate for over three-quarters of a century—achieved its first independence on June 26, 1960, and was duly recognized by 35 states and the UN (see Map 2).⁹ Nevertheless, caught up in the wave of Somali nationalism sweeping across the region, the newly independent Somaliland opted to enter a voluntary union with what was formerly Italian Somalia, an Italian colony and, subsequently, an Italian Trust Territory.¹⁰ On July 1, 1960, the two states formed the Somali Republic or Somalia.

Figure 1: The Republic of Somaliland. Source: By Petercorless - This vector image includes elements that have been taken or adapted from this file: [Us-attack-in-somalia-01082007-2134.svg](#) (by Petercorless~commons/wiki), CC BY 2.5, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=105638490>

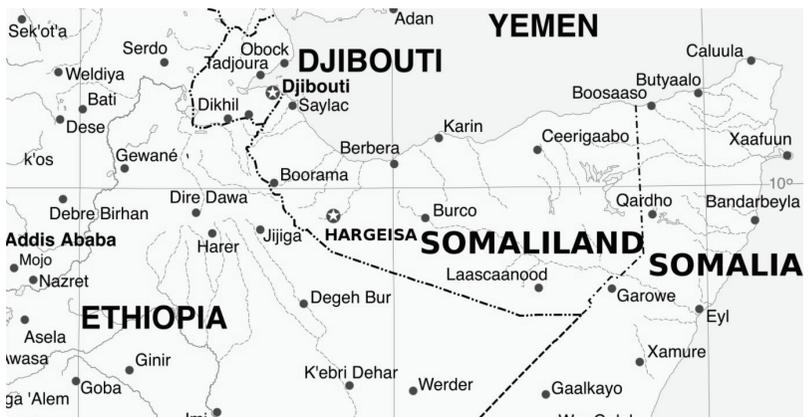


Figure 2: Colonial British Somaliland and Italian Somalia map (in Italian). Source: By MacMoreno at Italian Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=65233852>



The promise of the union quickly faded as Somalilanders found themselves sidelined from key political posts in the union's new capital, Mogadishu, by their more numerous cousins who were, after all, on their home turf. Just one year after its promulgation, Somalilanders voted against the Union Constitution and, in December 1961, military units revolted in Hargeisa in a failed bid to restore Somaliland's independence. The union's initial attempts at democracy, already seeing the first signs of rot by 1961, were binned in 1969 when the army's commander, Mohamed Siad Barre, led a successful coup d'état. Somalia became a "top-down developmental dictatorship" where Siad elevated his own Darod clan and consolidated his power.¹¹ Somalia experimented with Marxism and curried favor with the Soviet Union, fielding one of the largest and best-equipped armies on the continent, only to cozy-up to the United States just prior to Barre's disastrous invasion of Ethiopia.¹² The Ogaden War sowed the seeds for an eventual Somali civil war (actually, multiple wars), the results of which continue to reverberate. The death knell of the Somali Republic finally

came in 1991, the same year Somaliland declared its exit from the union and reestablished its independent statehood.¹³

III. Turkey in Somalia: Undercutting Somaliland's Viability

In 2011, when Turkey's then prime minister, Erdoğan, visited Mogadishu, the Republic of Somaliland was already two decades old. Given the intransigence of the Somaliland issue, and the instability its undecided status brings to the Horn region, the ingress of a new and hands-on external state such as Turkey offered the opportunity to shake things up. Indeed, the humanitarian nature of Turkey's initial foray into Somalia looked benign, even promising to Somalilanders. Turkey's economic, political and military power as well as its Ottoman history in Somaliland made it a desirable partner.¹⁴ Yet Mogadishu is the locus of Turkey's energy and outreach, not Somaliland. Despite this, Somalilanders visit Turkey for medical treatment or for higher education. As such, if Turkey's actions in Somalia are removed from the equation, its reputation holds up quite well in Somaliland.

Ten years on, its reputation in Somaliland is in tatters. Somaliland's unique legal and political limbo have conspired to translate Turkey's support of the Somali government into a zero-sum game, one where the accrual of more power by the Somali state—the political elite comprising successive Federal Governments of Somalia (FGS)—equals a corresponding decrease in power for Somaliland. In this reductionist scenario, Somalia's political leaders will eventually amass enough force to exercise a monopoly on violence over the length and breadth of the historical Somali Union. That Somaliland considers itself legally and politically separate—based on current and historical precedence—is immaterial to Mogadishu's leaders; to them, Somaliland forms an integral part of Somalia. This situation turns the ostensibly well-meaning policies of Turkey and other external states—and, by extension, their official support for “One Somalia”—into a loaded gun aimed directly at Somaliland.¹⁵

Given their history, Somalilanders understandably pay great attention to and cherish their sovereignty and territorial integrity. These, along with international recognition for Somaliland's independence, form their core national interests. Somaliland fulfills the criteria for legal independent statehood as understood by both the AU and the

UN. Its independence therefore sets no new legal precedents. Yet its successes—its democratically elected government prints its own money, issues passports and monopolizes the legitimate use of force across the majority of its territory—performed over the course of three decades with little to no outside assistance, have not resulted in its official recognition.¹⁶ This fact, one for which successive Somaliland governments bear partial blame, only adds insult to injury for the three generations of Somalilanders who have grown up outside the broken union.¹⁷ Bashir Goth, Head of the Somaliland Mission in the US, stated: “when you’re fighting for recognition [of Somaliland’s independence], everything else becomes secondary.” Somalilanders largely agree, and 97 percent supported their independence from the Somalia Union in a 2001 referendum.¹⁸

Because Somaliland’s primary national interest have everything to do with its *de facto* independent status and the maintenance thereof, Turkey’s actions in Mogadishu have arguably done more than any other external state to empower Somalia’s government and military. By way of explanation, a state’s primary national interests revolve around territory, sovereignty and security. As such, primary security threats generally emanate from a state’s near abroad. States also have secondary and tertiary national interests that are less concrete and thus prone to change. These can include various objectives of foreign policy such as increased influence and prestige.¹⁹ It is safe to say that Turkey’s primary national interests have nothing to do with Somalia and Somaliland. Turkey’s actions in Somalia form part of its secondary or tertiary interests. Somaliland’s primary national interests, on the other hand, are severely threatened by Turkey’s actions in Somalia.

This raises the stakes exponentially for Somaliland and offers a great deal of explanatory power when it comes to the exasperation expressed by Somalilanders about Turkey. As such, Turkey’s empowerment of the FGS and the SNA—very much in line with the primary national interests of Somalia and directly threatening those of Somaliland—has the potential, more than any other development over the past three decades, to snuff out Somaliland’s independence. This is therefore a highly emotive issue, one that Dr. M. Nasir Ali, Director of the Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Hargeisa, voiced when he stated: “Turkey is seen as an actor that is not impartial when it comes to Somalia-Somaliland issues. We see Turkey

as an actor which is not neutral but one that backs Mogadishu's rulers." Ali opined, "Why do we see millions of dollars going to Somalia [from Turkey]?... Turkey is a state that is allying with Somaliland's counterpart [Somalia] that is adversarial."

For his part, Suleiman Elmi, a management consultant for Somaliland's Ministry of Finance, opined Turkey's "One Somalia" policy was informed by its own national interests, namely its domestic political problems associated with the Kurdish issue. According to Elmi, Turkey's "Kurdish problem" meant that Ankara shrunk away from any talk of separatism. He argued, however, that the background of Turkey's conflict and the ongoing political issues bedeviling Somalia-Somaliland are "totally different," because Somaliland was a separate entity—as a British Protectorate, and subsequently an independent state—prior to voluntarily forming a union with the Italian Trust Territory of Southern Somalia. Elmi's reference to the ongoing armed struggle for an independent state or autonomy in Turkey's southeast by ethnic Kurds was echoed by Ali, who highlighted that Somaliland's intellectuals and government both understand Turkey's government links the issue of Somaliland's independence with Turkey's own Kurdish problem. "This is why Turkey is antagonistic toward Somaliland's independence," Ali explained. "[Turkish leaders think] If we show sympathy for Somaliland's independence, then this will be picked up on by [Turkey's] Kurds and used against the [Turkish] state."

Even as Somaliland and Somalia held talks circa 2012 to 2016, as described below, the policies and actions of Turkey and other external states operating in Somalia continued to support "One Somalia."²⁰ This brazenly ignored on-the-ground realities, such as Somaliland's strong legal case for independent statehood and recognition; its decades of sovereignty as well as its history; and lastly, the fact Somalia's FGS does not hold a monopoly on the use of force—legitimate or illegitimate—in Mogadishu, let alone in regions outside the capital.²¹ In other words, the FGS is legitimate in the eyes of the international community, but illegitimate in much of the country it claims to govern. How then does the international support for "One Somalia" make sense? Elmi vented his frustrations: "Honestly, I don't know what the international community wants as a whole. There is not one [Somali] nation. The reality is very different. Demanding 'One Somalia' over and over again will not lead to a settlement."

Despite its firm stance against recognizing Somaliland's independence, has Turkey's involvement in Somalia led to any positive spinoffs in Somaliland? When the interviewees were asked about Turkey in Somaliland, they only mentioned education and medical care, both occurring in Turkey. Ali, for instance, highlighted that Turkey now accepts Somaliland higher education, primary and secondary school certificates without condition. He added, however, Turkey continues to deny visas to Somaliland passport holders with the exception of Somaliland government officials. As such, Somalilanders who wish to study in Turkey must travel to Mogadishu to procure a Republic of Somalia passport. Only then will their Turkish visa be issued. Giving voice to the frustration many Somalilanders feel about Turkey's inaction in their own country, Goth boldly states, "I didn't see any [positive actions taken by Turkey in Somaliland]. There have been no development projects, not even humanitarian assistance."

IV. Turkey's Role in Somaliland-Somalia Talks

The first talks aimed at addressing the political chasm between Somaliland and Somalia began in London in 2012, 20 years after the break-up of the Somali Union. Prior to the London talks, Somaliland's leaders had adopted a strict policy of non-negotiation with Somalia. This was instituted for three main reasons.²² First, the Somali regions to Somaliland's south lacked a functioning government with which to negotiate given the ongoing civil wars. Second, when a series of transitional and then federal governments were created, they continued to ignore Somaliland's independence, instead claiming it had violently seceded. Third, Somalia's successive governments have all refused to acknowledge the atrocities committed in Somaliland by the Somali armed forces in 1988.²³

After London and a brief turn in Dubai, Turkey's turn to host talks came in 2013 and 2014, with negotiations held in Istanbul as well as president-level talks in Ankara. Talks planned for 2015 in Istanbul fell through and were followed, in 2016, by a final round of talks between intellectuals in Ankara.²⁴ The talks hosted in Turkey did yield some ephemeral successes. Agreements were signed, for instance, by government officials from both states related to their sharing of humanitarian aid, the controlling and monitoring of joint air space, cooperating in the security sector, and combating illegal fishing.

Somalilanders left Turkey with promissory notes. They were already frustrated with the negotiation process, in general, seeing it as a venue for international grandstanding by host states rather than a useful platform for resolving long-standing issues and grievances. More specifically, the refusal of Somali officials to sit in the same room ranked Somalilanders, and again underscored Mogadishu's refusal to recognize Somaliland's independent status. Nevertheless, FGS officials were in Turkey, signing agreements with government officials from Somaliland. This, in and of itself, was indicative of a grudging acceptance of Somaliland's status by both the FGS and the talks' hosts, Turkey. That the results of the talks proved costly to Somaliland was what really turned Somalilanders against Turkey.

Somalilanders have a history of checkered deal making with their southern cousins. Perhaps because of this, they were not completely surprised when the agreements signed publicly and officially in Turkey were neither honored nor fulfilled by Somalia. Indeed, every point agreed to in Turkey was rejected or never enacted by FGS President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, also known as Farmajo, soon after he took office in 2017. In 2018, for example, the FGS abrogated the previous agreement it made with Somaliland that allowed direct international assistance to Somaliland instead of through Mogadishu. When Mogadishu assumed airspace control from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in 2019, it was a complete rejection of its shared airspace plan with Hargeisa.²⁵ According to one report, "This move reversed a previously negotiated plan that would have established a joint regulatory body in Somaliland's capital, with Hargeisa and Mogadishu sharing the revenues accruing from overflights."²⁶

The perfidy of Mogadishu's political elites was on full display for Edna Adan Ismail, current Presidential Envoy of the Republic of Somaliland, former Foreign Minister and founder of the Edna Adan Hospital and Edna Adan University. Adan highlighted that not only did Somalia assume control, but "[President] Farmajo's rejection of the airspace agreement has jeopardized Somaliland's airspace and airports. Farmajo has forbidden the ICAO to provide technical support to Somaliland. This is criminal and endangers air safety and aircraft... [Hargeisa Airport] is an airport with medical evacuations as well as civilian and commercial aircraft. Airport operations should be well-coordinated, and the airport should be well-serviced in order to assure safety."

The retraction of agreements signed in Turkey—and Ankara’s subsequent silence—were viewed as ominous signs in Hargeisa. Turkey had clearly sided with Mogadishu, from Hargeisa’s perspective, and thus could no longer be considered a neutral host for any future Somaliland-Somalia talks. Speaking in a private capacity, Dr. Osman Sheikh Ahmed, Economic Advisor to the current Somaliland Government, believes that Turkey should only be included in future negotiations alongside other major states.²⁷ “We know where Turkey stands [on the issue of Somaliland-Somalia] so we cannot trust them completely.” Osman also pointed out that negotiations—unless they involve the topic of mutual divorce or new relationship agreement—are now moot. He opined that Somaliland had moved ahead in its governance and democratic processes as evidenced by the parliamentary and local election held in May 2021.²⁸ Somalia, on the other hand remains mired in conflict, instability and an absence of a democratic process. “The international community is not likely to push for negotiations as they did before,” added Osman, “and Turkey must realize the facts on the ground, its heavy investment in Somalia notwithstanding.”

V. Flying the Flag in Hargeisa

Turkey took a step many other external states have not: it opened a consulate in Hargeisa in 2014. Unlike its Ethiopian and Djiboutian counterparts which maintain a discreet presence, Turkey’s consulate is official and flies the Turkish flag. Yet Ethiopia’s and Djibouti’s low-key presence belies the fact that their offices act as *de facto* embassies, not satellite locations of their embassies in Mogadishu. Turkey’s consular presence in Hargeisa has, therefore, done little to improve its image.

When queried about Turkey’s consular presence in Somaliland, most interviewees saw it in a negatively nuanced light. For Goth, the consulate issues visas to Somalilanders who require medical treatment and students who wish to study in Turkey. Osman opined that he was not even sure if the Turkish consulate directly issues visas at all, perhaps indicating that Turkey uses its consulate as a vector for “One Somalia.” Elmi saw a more sinister motive: “I suspect that maybe their role [at the Turkish consulate] is to gather intelligence and give their relations [with Somaliland] a veneer of respectability.” Ali also saw Turkey’s consulate in Hargeisa in a negative political light. “Mostly we [Somalilanders] see the consulate is serving as an actor pushing

an integrationist agenda for Somalia-Somaliland. It facilitates these activities.” Ali added that Turkish consular officials have attempted to normalize travel between Somaliland and Somalia, preferring, for example, to issue Turkish visas from their embassy in Mogadishu rather than the consulate in Hargeisa. In this, Ali argued, Turkey was conducting “business that is contrary to the well-being of Somaliland. They are doing what is in the interest of Turkey, and that is the unification of Somalia-Somaliland.” He added that Turkish officials were isolated in Hargeisa as there was no political engagement by Somaliland government officials. Ali contrasted this with British officials who frequently liaised with their Somaliland counterparts or visited universities or other public venues to offer speeches or participate in discussions.

VI. Training an Army, Militarizing a Conflict

Turkey’s inaction in Somaliland contrasts sharply with its highly visible role in Mogadishu, which Ankara has made a veritable beehive of activity. And it is Turkey’s military and security support for Somalia that elicited the strongest language from Somalilanders. Their ire was specifically directed against what they see as an existential threat posed by Turkey’s military presence in Mogadishu and its training of the SNA. Certainly, Somaliland’s precarious political position coupled with its historical trauma mean that the specter of a well-trained and equipped SNA is horrific for Somalilanders to contemplate. It signals, for many, the possibility of a violent, forced return to an unwanted union; a union that sidelined Somaliland for decades and eventually attempted to erase it. Yet, how does Turkey’s military training facility contribute to such doomsday predictions?

Turkey opened its TURKSOM military training facility (Somali: *Xerada TURKSOM*; Turkish: *Somali Türk Görev Kuvveti Komutanlığı*) in 2017, with the stated goal of training and preparing the officers and NCOs of the SNA. By October 2020, Turkish military trainers had performed so well that they were training the sixth group of SNA infantry, totaling 450 soldiers, and providing them with basic military training, Anti-Terrorism Training and Exercise Center Command.²⁹ They were part of a 5,000-strong battalion that Turkey hopes to train in order to bring total SNA troop numbers closer to the 15,000-16,000 promised in 2017.³⁰

Troops coming out of TURKSOM now form the “backbone” of the SNA and are among the best-trained and capable of troops, particularly the Special Operations Command Battalion known as the Cheetah Unit (Somali: *Ciidanka Haramcad*) and the Eagles (Somali: *Gorgor*). Turkey’s training mission of the SNA is meant to provide the FGS with a professional, cohesive and truly national military force—including the country’s coastguard and navy—that can claw back the state’s monopoly on violence throughout the length and breadth of what the FGS considers to be Somalia. The mission’s success or failure are a critical factor in Somalia’s current security environment: the country has not possessed a viable military force since its breakup in 1991. In fact, the FGS continues to rely on foreign-backed security forces, particularly those functioning under the UN-approved and AU-operated African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) mandate. This not only means that soldiers from Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia and other African states prosecute armed action in Somalia against the al-Shabaab terrorist group, but also provide security for critical facilities such as Mogadishu’s international airport and airport zone, home to a plethora of UN offices, foreign contractors and embassies. AMISOM troops, for example, are called on when security breaks down in Mogadishu, as it frequently does. Yet, SNA soldiers—trained and equipped by Turkey—are increasingly called upon to take the fight to al-Shabaab and assume many of the roles and functions of AMISOM troops. Indeed, the major impetus for Turkey’s training efforts come directly from AMISOM’s imminent end of mission and, thus, their departure from Somalia.³¹

There is increasing evidence of a more insidious angle to the activities of an increasingly powerful and capable SNA. The Cheetah Unit and Eagles have reportedly begun to perform operations informed by the politics of clannism, a particularly combustible prospect in Somalia.³² Yet al-Shabaab—the destruction of which is the primary motivator driving the training efforts of external states and international organizations—remains in control of large swathes of territory in southern and western Somalia despite over a decade of AMISOM operations and US drones strikes.³³ The sum of these developments, involving a capable and increasingly politicized SNA, but one that appears to ignore the threat of al-Shabaab, are viewed with deep suspicion and concern in Somaliland, and may become increasingly problematic for Turkey. Despite its best efforts to remain above the fray of Somalia’s squabbles, often informed by Byzantine clan and sub-clan politics,

Turkey's role in training effective fighting units is fraught. "There is little doubt that one of the pitfalls of [Turkey] training the SNA means that Turkey may get pulled by Somali politicians in directions it wishes to avoid. These include clan favoritism, regionalism, factionalism and, above all issues involving territorial integrity. Turkey may find this increasingly hard to avoid as the SNA, and therefore Somalia, become increasingly reliant on Turkey for the expertise, skillsets and matériel required to maintain the SNA."³⁴ Should Turkey get sucked into this maelstrom, it may find itself accused of being in collusion with the SNA in violent actions taking place across Somalia.

Despite drawbacks, Somalia's rulers have access to steady security sector assistance from external patrons. Somaliland, in contrast, has no benefactor like Turkey willing to train and equip its armed forces. While some police and coast guard training has occurred under the auspices of the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU), respectively, the UN arms embargo leveled against Somalia in 1992 is still in place.³⁵ Despite making do with very little, Somalilanders can see the proverbial writing on the wall vis-à-vis Turkish-trained SNA troops supplied with weaponry, including armored vehicles and assault rifles.³⁶ After all, they followed the successes of Turkish-armed proxy forces in Libya and the Caucasus with an interest bordering on dread, taking stock of the incredible firepower and effectiveness of Turkish-made armed drones. Somalilanders are also aware of the increasingly large sales of Turkish-made weapons to other states in sub-Saharan Africa, but not to Somaliland.³⁷ It is little wonder, then, that many see the Turkish-trained and armed SNA as an existential threat to Somaliland. Elmi, for instance, asked, "What would stop Turkey from giving drones to [Somali President] Farmajo, eventually tipping the balance [of power]? Somaliland does not have an air force; it has no new military equipment. We are isolated..." Seconding Elmi, Ali noted the skepticism many Somalilanders have about the motives of both Turkey *and* Somalia. He opined,

“Turkey wants to show their military presence in the strategic Horn of Africa region. Somalia wants the SNA trained [by Turkey] to get military armaments [supplied by Turkey]. Because of the [UN arms] embargo, Turkey can use the training as cover to bring equipment and arms to Somalia. Under the cover of training, Turkey brings this [military] hardware to Somalia... If Somalia builds its military capacity, they will try and invade Somaliland, which they believe is part and parcel of Somalia.”

For Goth, who remembered the carnage wrought by the SNA in Somaliland in 1988, it was simply a matter of time before Somalia attempted to forcibly bring Somaliland back to the union.

If you look at how [Turkey is] building Somalia’s military capabilities... and how [President] Farmajo is using them [Turkish-trained troops] in Gedo and Galmadug, and to destabilize Jubaland to empower his own political loyalists, Somaliland watches and is worried.³⁸ We see it as a driver of what Somalia may do to Somaliland. Imagine if Turkey gives Farmajo drones and military helicopters. This is a threat to us. We are getting neither military training nor assistance from the outside world... When the day comes and Somalia resolves its issues [of chronic instability], they will attack Somaliland.

It was Adan’s response to questions about Turkey’s role in training the SNA that best demonstrated the burning anger some Somalilanders reserve for Turkey and its arming and training of the SNA. Her words deserve to be printed verbatim:

We [Somaliland] are the enemy that the SNA is being trained for. We are to be defeated... We are the target, the supposed enemy. And once Somalia thinks it has the capability to launch an attack from Somalia, it will do so, as it did many times between 1982-1990. The real problem for Somalia seems to be that we [Somalilanders] forgot to die when they [Somalia’s army] left us to die [in 1988]. Instead, we have recovered, we have businesses, we have democracy. We are alive and refuse to die and that seems to be too much for Somalia. Rather than [Somalia] rebuilding themselves and bringing their refugees home, they are only focused on destroying the peace and stability Somaliland has secured. Our

blood will be on the hands of those who armed the criminals and allowed this to happen.

VII. Turkey's Rejoinder

Somalia has a political significance for Turkey, one that pays dividends, albeit minor, at the ballot box. That is, after a mere decade of building infrastructure, providing humanitarian aid and offering education to thousands of Somalis in Turkey, Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development party (Turkish: *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*)—increasingly under siege at home and abroad—can point to a veritable success story in Somalia, replete with all the trappings of Erdoğan's "Ankara consensus."³⁹ This Turkish triumph, nevertheless, largely ignores areas outside the purview of the FGS, which limits its impact and efficacy across most of the former Somali Republic. For Somaliland, Turkey has been an absent partner or unwanted meddler, at best. At worst, it is actively colluding with Somalia to erase Somaliland. What is Turkey's response?

When contacted for an interview, Turkish official sources confirmed that Turkey recognizes Somalia's FGS as the only legitimate government and, in line with other states and international organizations, does not recognize Somaliland's independence. Nevertheless, Turkish official sources noted the important role Turkey plays in Somaliland, pointing to Ankara's building-up of a dialogue mechanism to facilitate Somalia-Somaliland talks. In this, Turkey is ready and willing to "continue our contribution... should both parties wish so." They added, "In all of our endeavors, we have been working closely with both sides, and [have] received [the] greenlight to continue our engagements." The source of the "green light" was not written, but one could be safe in assuming it came from Mogadishu and not Hargeisa, given the disappointments of Somalilanders over the previous talks' outcomes, as described above.

Turkish official sources, contrary to information provided by Somaliland interviewees, highlighted Turkey provision of humanitarian and development assistance to Somaliland since 2013. When queried about the specifics of their work, they listed the over 120 scholarships offered to Somaliland students between 2018-2019, the humanitarian aid provided by the Turkish Disaster and Emergency

Management Authority (AFAD) to Somalilanders affected by Cyclone Sagar in 2018, and the donation of \$100,000 worth of medical equipment to the Hargeisa Group Hospital in January 2019 by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), among others. Turkish official sources also pointed to training performed by the Turkish Immigration Department for six Somaliland Immigration and Border Control Department officials in November 2018.⁴⁰ These efforts form part of what Turkish official sources call “in kind” assistance to Somaliland given that Turkey does not provide any direct financial support to the de facto independent country.

When asked about the Hargeisa consulate’s functional role, Turkish official sources noted it “mainly deals with the issues of our citizens in its mission area.” This is certainly a function of consulates around the world, but they often provide outreach and visa services, too. Turkey’s consular presence in Hargeisa is thus understandably mystifying to Somalilanders, and the answers of Turkish official sources largely confirmed that its consulate does not issue visas in Hargeisa.

In terms of its training of the SNA, it is worth underscoring that Turkey is not acting alone in Somalia in this capacity. There are a host of state and non-state actors doing the same, albeit on a smaller scale.⁴¹ As such, should Turkey discontinue its training mission there is little doubt that another set of actors would partially fill the void. Turkey is certainly on sound legal footing vis-à-vis its military training efforts—they are in Somalia based on legal agreements with the FGS—and Turkey actively and directly contributes to the destruction of al-Shabaab. Turkish official sources also highlighted that their military training and equipment are not intended for a specific political actor or time period. Instead, as the political leaders of a sovereign state, the FGS is responsible for how and when it uses Somali security forces. Turkish official sources were adamant that Turkey played no part in the SNA’s chain of command. Indeed, when questioned as to whether certain FGS-ordered operations by the SNA would make Turkey reconsider its training mission, they responded: “There is no need to speculate on a non-existent/hypothetical scenario.”

VIII. Conclusion

Turkey's popularity in Somalia remains mostly undimmed.⁴² While opposition candidates in Mogadishu have decried Turkey's supply of weaponry and the actions of Turkish-trained army units, there is little doubt that they would utilize such resources to affect outcomes in their favor should they become the next denizens of Villa Somalia.⁴³ In other words, the tactile nature of Turkey's engagement of Somalia—building roads, training soldiers, contributing to the government's budget—are favored by Somalia's "lumpen elite" as a way of making Somalia great again, a country that was once one of Africa's most successful states with a powerful and well-regarded military and bureaucracy.

There is little doubt that Turkey is a useful and increasingly important external state partner for Somalia's government. Despite the rosy glow suffusing Turkey's efforts, however, Somalia remains deeply fragmented, a shadow of its former self. Turkey's policies are sound for functioning states, where money and support are provided to the central government which then distributes them to the periphery based on political, economic or strategic needs. The FGS is not a fully sovereign government, however, and maintains difficult relations with multiple member states. For these reasons, stacking more power in the hands of Mogadishu's political elites is unlikely to significantly heal these fractures. Rather, a more likely scenario is one involving extreme violence engendered by the security environment, one that is characterized by "personalized or neopatrimonial relationships and inter-agency rivalries conducted amongst and between political elites and security actors such as police, militaries, intelligence agencies, special units, warlords, militia and commercial security companies."⁴⁴ Turkey's efforts, despite their worthiness, are potentially lighting another fuse that leads to a steadily growing and combustible heap of clan and regional rivalries, historical grievances and a nihilism brought on by three decades of violence, corruption and misgovernment, and the concomitant frustration and exhaustion associated therewith.

Somalilanders are cognizant of the top-down approach being taken in Mogadishu by the FGS's external state patron, Turkey. Faisal Ali Warabe,⁴⁵ Chairman of the For Justice and Development (UCID) political party, scoffed, "Somalia does not need a strong navy. They haven't yet reconciled their own internal problems. There's not even a united

Italian Somalia yet. The whole concept and approach [by Turkey], is really not going to benefit anyone in Somalia. What is Turkey doing? It is putting the cart before the horse." Despite the grim forecasts, some welcomed greater Turkish political and security assistance in Somaliland despite the vitriol they directed at Turkey for its role in empowering Somalia at the possible expense of Somaliland's independence and sovereignty. Elmi admitted Somaliland's poverty and added that international assistance, from Turkey or others, is welcome. Warabe wished to see security sector assistance from Turkey. "We need to rebuild our military force, our naval force, our air force. We have a coast guard, but our coastline is huge. We need a navy, not a coast guard." In other words, parity in Turkish security assistance to Somaliland and Somalia was desired, not one-sided actions in favor of Mogadishu. Adan concurred, arguing for "friendly relations, a partnership, collaboration as friends. Not just band aids."

The concerns expressed by Somalilanders toward Turkey could be dispelled if Ankara chose to engage more with the other federal member states and regions of Somalia. The disparity between Turkey's actions in Somalia, where it has invested millions and bilateral trade topped \$250 million in 2019, and Somaliland is stark. Somalilanders view Turkey's motives suspiciously given this disparity. The one-sided nature of Ankara's engagement simply cannot be denied. Turkish aid organizations have set a small precedent in Somaliland by their presence, but official Turkish government support and funding remain tied up in Mogadishu.

Somaliland, despite its strategic geography, successful democratic experience and secure environment has not risen to the level of a strategic partner, one that other internationally recognized states would stick their necks out for. In truth, Turkey would benefit little from its recognition of Somaliland's independence. Turkish entities would likely be ejected from Somalia with a blanket ban like the one leveled against the United Arab Emirates (UAE) after Dubai's DP World, a mega ports operator, refused to stop work on Somaliland's Berbera port. Turkish companies would likely forfeit their lucrative contracts at the port and airport, and Turkey's training facility in Mogadishu would likely be shuttered. It is surely Turkey's ongoing, custodial role of these Somali infrastructure assets—its port and airport operations, its training camp and its direct funding of the FGS—that give Ankara

the power to pressure Somalia's political elites should it choose to do so. To pretend Ankara does not have leverage over the FGS is a straw-man argument. Yet, Turkish official sources bristled at the suggestion of using "pressure" on the FGS, noting that "Turkey's role as a facilitator does not envisage putting pressure on either party."

Turkey has the latitude of movement to shift its one-sided relationship with Somalia to a more balanced one with Somaliland. Neither the impetus nor the rationale for such a move is yet there. This may change, however, according to the inimitable Edna Adan. "Somalia has a habit of never thanking those who help her... I don't know how long that friendship can continue." For Adan and the other Somalilanders interviewed, Somaliland's position vis-à-vis Somalia and Turkey is clear: "We would rather remain unrecognized and stable as we have been for the past 30 years, than be recognized and become a complete mess like Somalia. We've conquered our obstacles. We're closer than the moon is and certainly closer than Mars, the world is welcome to come and visit and try Somaliland."

Acknowledgements

The genesis of this article came from a conference paper written for and presented at the Africa Foundation's (*Afrika Vakfi*) "Revisiting Turkey-Somalia Relations" international symposium held in Ankara, Turkey, August 19-21, 2021.

I would like to thank the citizens of the Republic of Somaliland and Turkish official sources for their interviews. My findings are best encapsulated in their quotations.

Notes

1. Turkey began to prioritize sub-Saharan Africa in 2005, which it declared "the year of Africa." In 2008, the first Turkey-Africa Cooperation Summit was held in Istanbul and attended by the representatives of 50 African states.
2. Cannon. "Deconstructing Turkey's efforts", 114-115.
3. See, for example, Donelli, F., & Gonzalez-Levaggi, A. (2021). Crossing Roads: The Middle East's Security Engagement in the Horn of Africa. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 33(1), 45-60; and Cannon, B. J., & Donelli, F. (2020). Asymmetric alliances and high polarity: evaluating regional security complexes in the Middle East and Horn of Africa. *Third World Quarterly*, 41(3), 505-524.

4. Schipani, A., & Pitel, L. (2021, January 18). Erdogan's great game: Turkey pushes into Africa with aid, trade and soaps. *Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/0e3ce-c2a-bd80-499c-a6ab-e5d1a1e768cf>. See also, Samatar, A. I. (2021, April 11). Horn of Africa: Turkey's cosy relationship with Somalia may have an underbelly. *Daily Maverick*. Accessed, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2021-04-11-horn-of-africa-turkeys-cosy-relationship-with-somalia-may-have-an-underbelly/>
5. See, for example, Ozkan, M., & Orakci, S. (2015). Turkey as a "political" actor in Africa—an assessment of Turkish involvement in Somalia. *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 9(2), 343-352; Cannon, B. J. (2016). Deconstructing Turkey's efforts in Somalia. *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, 16, 98-123; Langan, M. (2017). Virtuous power Turkey in sub-Saharan Africa: the 'Neo-Ottoman' challenge to the European Union. *Third World Quarterly*, 38(6), 1399-1414; Dal, E. P., & Dipama, S. (2020). Assessing the Turkish "Trading State" in Sub-Saharan Africa. In *Turkey's Political Economy in the 21st Century* (pp. 239-270). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham; and Donelli, F. (2021). *Turkey in Africa: Turkey's Strategic Involvement in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
6. Cannon. "Deconstructing Turkey's efforts", 106-107
7. Thiessen, C., & Özerdem, A. (2019). Turkey in Somalia: Challenging North/Western Interventionism?. *Third World Quarterly*, 40(11), 1976-1995; 1985-1986.
8. Somaliland has been referenced in relation to Turkey's role in Somaliland-Somalia talks. See, for example Uchegara, K. E. (2016). The Impact of Ahmet Davutoğlu's New Diplomacy on Africa: The Case of Mali and Somalia-Somaliland. *Global Advanced Research Journal of Management and Business Studies*, 5(2): 043-050.
9. Ali, N. M. (2017). Somaliland—Negotiating with Somalia: Is it an Option or a Foreign Imposition?. In Bereketeab, R. (Ed.). *State Building and National Identity Reconstruction in the Horn of Africa* (pp. 49-68: 53). Palgrave Macmillan.
10. See Carroll, A. J., & Rajagopal, B. (1992). The case for the independent statehood of Somaliland. *American University International Law Review*, 2(8), 653-681: 654-655.
11. Adam, H. M. (1992). Somalia: militarism, warlordism or democracy?. *Review of African Political Economy*, 19(54), 11-26.
12. For an excellent, contemporary overview of the 1977-1978 Ogaden War, see Mayall, J. (1978). The battle for the Horn: Somali Irredentism and international diplomacy. *The World Today*, 34(9), 336-345.
13. A decision about Somaliland's withdrawal from the "unlawful merger" with Southern Somalia was taken by the Grand Conference of Clan Elders held in Burao from 27 April to 15 May 1991. See Bradbury, M., Abokor, A. Y., & Yusuf, H. A. (2003). Somaliland: Choosing politics over violence. *Review of African Political Economy*, 30(97), 455-478; see also Somaliland Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2021). Republic of Somaliland Country Profile. <https://www.docdroid.net/tl6XmYN/somaliland-country-profile-march-2021-pdf>
14. Turkey's presence in Mogadishu is distinctly at odds with historical Ottoman projections of power, which were centered in Berbera and Zeila (Somali: Saylac) in the late sixteenth century and, briefly, in the late nineteenth century. Berbera and Zeila are both in the Republic of Somaliland, not Somalia. See d'Alòs-Moner, A. M. (2012). Conquistadores, mercenaries, and missionaries: the failed Portuguese dominion of the Red Sea. *Northeast African Studies*, 1-28. See also, Akalın, D. (2014). Somalide Berbera

Limanı ve Osmanlı Devleti'nin Bölge Üzerindeki İddiaları (1839-1894). *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 29(1), 1-35.

15. "One Somalia" holds that Somaliland is an integral part of Somalia, and that Somaliland cannot, therefore, become an independent state.

16. Hargeisa does not have firm control over the disputed Sool and Sanaag provinces of eastern Somaliland, parts of which are claimed by Puntland, an autonomous region of Somalia. Puntland's claims, unlike Somaliland's, contradict the borders agreed to by the British and Italian colonial governments in the early 20th century. The dispute has resulted in violent clashes in 2007, 2010 and 2016. See Mahmood, O. S. (2019). Overlapping claims by Somaliland and Puntland: the case of Sool and Sanaag. *ISS East Africa Report*, 2019(27), 1-32.

17. Ali, 59-62.

18. For voting details, including the judgement of international election observers that the referendum was conducted "openly, fairly, honestly, and largely in accordance with internationally recognized election procedures," see Shinn, D. (2002). *Somaliland: The Little Country that Could*. Center for Strategic and International Studies: Africa Notes 9, 1-7: 2.

19. For a nuanced realist perspective that puts states' understanding of their national interests at the heart of their strategies for action, see Glaser, C. L. (2010). *Rational theory of international politics*. Princeton University Press.

20. Turkish actions are not highly divergent from other actors operating in Somalia. The US, the UK and Italy, for instance, all maintain official "One Somalia" stances and policies. These have, nonetheless, baldly ignored Somaliland's "inconvenient" desire for independence recognition and its firm stance against any type of re-union with Somalia.

21. Monopoly on the use of force is a distinguishing characteristic of state sovereignty. In political science literature, a monopoly on the use of force, or the monopoly on violence, refers to the German *Gewaltmonopol*. *Gewalt* has a combined meaning of violence, power, force, authority, etc., and is a central notion of public law. States may possess the legitimate monopoly on violence occurs when a state's security forces operate lawfully under a legitimate authority. Somalia's federal government does not currently exercise the legitimate monopoly on violence even within the capital, Mogadishu. Instead, it is a government that exercises legal sovereignty (it is recognized by the UN and other states) only. It is unable to either protect Somalia's borders from intrusion or enforce the rule of law within its borders. See Grimm, D. (2003). The state monopoly of force. In *International Handbook of Violence Research* (pp. 1043-1056). Springer, Dordrecht. See also, Miklaucic, M. (Ed.). (2011). *Monopoly of force: the nexus of DDR and SSR*. NDU Press, xviii.

22. There was a fourth important reason: Prior to the 2012 revocation of this law, citizens and independent politicians were forbidden to engage with Somalia in order to avoid claims that they represented the Republic of Somaliland. Prior to this, the government, as a political entity, could attend conference related to the future of Somalia-Somaliland. See Ali, 'Somaliland—Negotiating with Somalia', 52.

23. When Somalilanders signaled their desire to withdraw from the union, Somalia's rulers ordered Somaliland's capital bombed. The carnage that accompanied the union's dissolution forms one of the cornerstones of current Somalilander identity. Described

by many as one of the world's forgotten genocides, tens of thousands of Somalilanders were uprooted and fled to neighboring countries—Ethiopia, Kenya, Yemen—or further afield to Britain, Canada and Sweden. The almost one million who returned had no illusions about the Somali Union. Somaliland restored its sovereignty on 18 May 1991 after Somalilanders brokered ceasefires between rebel factions and with midwifed a transition to civilian government. Ingiriis, M. H. (2016). "We Swallowed the State as the State Swallowed Us": The Genesis, Genealogies, and Geographies of Genocides in Somalia. *African Security*, 9(3), 237-258.

24. For full details, locations and an analysis of the various rounds of Somaliland-Somalia talks, see Muhumed, M. M. (2019). The Somaliland-Somalia Talks in 2012-2015: A Critical Appraisal. *Somali Studies: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Journal for Somali Studies*, 4(2019), 11-38.

25. ICAO is the UN agency that had previously managed the airspace of both Somalia and Somaliland.

26. International Crisis Group. (2020, August 6). Somalia-Somaliland: A Halting Embrace of Dialogue [Commentary]. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/somalia-somaliland-halting-embrace-dialogue>

27. Osman pointed to the June 2020 conference in Djibouti as an example. It included the participation of the US, UK, Italy, France, the AU, the EU and the UN, but not Turkey.

28. Somaliland held elections on 31 May 2021 that were deemed by international election observers to be competitive, free and fair. See Mills, G., Githongo, J., Steenhuisen, J., Haji, A., Mwanawasa, C., & Biti, T. (2021, June 4). Somaliland: The Power of Democracy [Commentary]. RUSI. <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/somaliland-power-democracy>

29. Dalsan Radio. (2020, October 19). Somalia: Turkey Kicks Off Training for Sixth SNA Infantry. VOA News. Accessed, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202010190971.html>

30. As of August 2020, Turkey had reportedly trained 2,500 SNA troops, including 71 officers and 88 NCOs who graduated from TURKSOM training in July 2020. It plans to ultimately train one-third of the SNA, according to Mehmet Yılmaz, Turkey's Ambassador to Somalia. The recruits receive basic training at the Turksom training facility and then are sent to the Isparta Commando Centre in Turkey to receive another three months of training. See Herschelman, K. (2020, August 6). Turkey to train a third of Somali army. Janes. Accessed, <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/turkey-to-train-a-third-of-somali-army>. See also Millî Savunma Bakanlığı. (2020, July 24). Somali Türk Görev Kuvveti Komutanlığında Mezun Olan Askerler İçin Tören Düzenlendi [Press Bulletin]. <https://www.msb.gov.tr/SlaytHaber/2472020-20750>

31. AMISOM's departure has been repeatedly delayed (and therefore reauthorized by the UN) on account of the volatile security situation in Somalia. At the time of writing, AMISOM troops were scheduled to hand over their responsibilities to the SNA on December 31, 2021.

32. The Turkish-trained Cheetah Unit, reportedly deployed at the behest of Somalia's President Farmajo, fired live rounds against protesters in Mogadishu killing some and wounding others. It should be noted, however, that Turkish-trained SNA units have reportedly remained cohesive during the violence that accompanied the run-up and aftermath of Somalia's failed February 2020 presidential elections. This was in contrast to

other units that reportedly fractured along clan lines. (Interview with Mogadishu-based businessperson, June 10, 2021).

33. Cannon, B. J. (2020). What's in it for us? Armed drone strikes and the security of Somalia's Federal Government. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 31(4), 773-800.

34. Rossiter, A., & Cannon, B. J. (2019). Re-examining the "Base". *Insight Turkey*, 21(1), 167-188: 179.

35. Horton, M. (2019). How Somaliland Combats Al-Shabaab. *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, 12(10), 20-26: 22.

36. Turkey, despite denunciations from opposition parties and federal member state (FMS) officials, reportedly delivered 12 unidentified armored vehicles in August 2020 and 1,000 G3 assault rifles in December 2020. Dhaysane, M. (2020, August 27). Turkey donates 12 military vehicles to Somalia. AA. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkey/turkey-donates-12-military-vehicles-to-somalia/1955609>. See also Sheikh, A. (2020, December 16). Somalia's opposition urges Turkey not to send arms to police unit. Reuters. Accessed, <https://www.reuters.com/article/somalia-politics-int-idUSKBN28Q29B>

37. Cannon, B. J. (2021). Turkey's military strategy in Africa. In Eyryce, E. & Tepeciklioğlu, A. (eds). *Turkey in Africa: A New Emerging Power?*. Routledge (2021) pp 127-143.

38. Galmudug and Jubaland are Somali Federal Members States. Gedo is an administrative region in Jubaland.

39. "The Ankara consensus can be conceived of as a new model for economic, political and social development of the African countries, alternative to both the so-called Washington consensus—US and European dominated neo-liberal economic and developmental discourse—and the most recent Beijing consensus as state-led economic growth and prioritization of stability over democracy." Donelli, F. (2018). The Ankara consensus: the significance of Turkey's engagement in sub-Saharan Africa. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 30(1), 57-76: 64-65.

40. The training was reportedly done in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration's Somaliland Office.

41. "... [O]ver the past decade, Somali troops have been trained in different countries, including Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and by different countries and international organizations, including the U.S. and the European Union." See Rossiter & Cannon, "Re-examining the 'Base'", 176.

42. Ingiriis, M. H. (2020). Profiting from the failed state of Somalia: the violent political marketplace and insecurity in contemporary Mogadishu. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 38(3), 437-458. See also, Samatar, "Horn of Africa."

43. Villa Somalia is the name of the official residence of the President of Somalia.

44. Hills, A. (2014). Security sector or security arena? The evidence from Somalia. *International Peacekeeping*, 21(2), 165-180: 166.

45. Faisal Ali Warabe is also the former Director of Planning and Building as well as Regional Director of Somalia's Ministry of Public Works