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**COI QUERY**

Country of Origin	Somalia
Question(s)	1. Information about the activities of the volunteers in Somali National Security Forces, especially related to war crimes and/or any other forms of violation of human rights, for the period of November 2017 until September 2018, in Mogadishu 2. Information about the military branch 14th of October, the 1st branch, first group, first unit 3. Information about the activities of the specific military branch, especially related to war crimes and/or any other forms of violation of human rights, for the period of November 2017 until September 2018, in Mogadishu 4. Information about the ranks of the volunteers of the Somali military, after 14 October 2017 5. Information about battles and/or security incidents in the Ministry of Defense and the involvement of soldiers or army personnel, guarding the Ministry of Defense in Mogadishu, for the period of December 2017 until September 2018
Date of completion	19 July 2019
Query Code	Q20-2019
Contributing EU+ COI units (if applicable)	

Disclaimer

This response to a COI query has been elaborated according to the [Common EU Guidelines for Processing COI](#) and [EASO COI Report Methodology](#).

The information provided in this response has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care within a limited time frame. All sources used are referenced. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive neither conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.



The information in the response does not necessarily reflect the opinion of EASO and makes no political statement whatsoever.

The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on the 19 July 2019. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.

COI QUERY RESPONSE

Background

On 14 October 2017, at K-5 junction in downtown Mogadishu, a truck bomb killed 587 people and wounded another 300, in the country's deadliest terrorist attack ever.¹ Another 225 were registered missing, while the explosion left behind 1 547 orphans under the age of 15.² The al-Shabaab militant group never claimed responsibility for the attack, allegedly for self-protecting reasons,³ but Somali courts and intelligence officials have held the group responsible.⁴

1. Information about the activities of the volunteers in Somali National Security Forces, especially related to war crimes and/or any other forms of violation of human rights, for the period of November 2017 until September 2018, in Mogadishu

Mogadishu's truck bomb incident inspired the creation of a Somali army unit named after the day of the attack: the 14th October Battalion. Formed in the aftermath of the terrorist attack, and officially inaugurated in July 2018, the battalion has been placed under the command of the Somali Defense Ministry.⁵ It is been predominantly tasked with taking over the security of the city of Mogadishu (and Merca among others). In particular, the 14th October Battalion has patrolled various security check points in Mogadishu since May 2018.⁶ Reportedly, 'the military brigade is formed by young men who volunteered for service'.⁷

Human Rights Watch (HRW), in its World Report 2018 – Somalia [events of 2017], under the heading 'Abuses by Government and Allied Forces' mentions that in general '[s]ecurity forces unlawfully killed and wounded civilians during infighting over land, control of roadblocks, disarmament operations, and aid distribution' and that '[a]ccountability for abuses by security forces was almost nonexistent'.⁸

¹ Harun, Maruf, No End in Sight for the al-Shabaab Threat to Somalia, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, Vol. 11, No. 11, December 2018, [url](#); Maruf Harun, Voice of America, Somalia Marks One Year After Deadliest Terrorist Attack, 14 October 2018, [url](#)

² Harun, Maruf, Voice of America, Somalia Marks One Year After Deadliest Terrorist Attack, 14 October 2018, [url](#)

³ Harun, Maruf, No End in Sight for the al-Shabaab Threat to Somalia, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, December 2018, Vol. 11, No. 11, [url](#)

⁴ Harun, Maruf, Voice of America, Somalia Marks One Year After Deadliest Terrorist Attack, 14 October 2018, [url](#)

⁵ Harun, Maruf, No End in Sight for the al-Shabaab Threat to Somalia, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, December 2018, Vol. 11, No. 11, [url](#)

⁶ Halbeeg, 14th October Battalion takes full charge of Mogadishu security, 24 July 2018, [url](#)

⁷ AP, Somalia marks 1 year since devastating Mogadishu bombing, 14 October 2018, [url](#)

⁸ HRW, World Report 2018, Somali Events of 2017, 2018, [url](#)

The Human Rights Watch report mentions incidents in 2017 in Baidoa, Lower Shabelle, Hiraan, and Galguduud⁹, but not Mogadishu.

Among all other [sources consulted](#) and within the timeframe allocated to respond to this query, no further information could be found concerning war crimes or human rights violations perpetrated by the volunteers of the Somali National Security Forces in the period November 2017 – September 2018 in Mogadishu.

2. Information about the military branch 14th of October, the 1st branch, first group, first unit

Although scarce, fragmented and limited, information on the setting up, the official inauguration, the control bodies and the main tasks of 14 October Battalion is available on various sources, as detailed in the section on [background](#). Among all sources consulted and within the timeframe allocated to respond to this query, no further information could be found about the '1st branch, first group, first unit' within the 14th October Battalion.

3. Information about "1st branch, first group, first unit" military branch, especially related to war crimes and/or any other forms of violation of human rights, for the period November 2017 - September 2018, in Mogadishu

Among all sources consulted and within the timeframe allocated to respond to this query, no information related to war crimes and/or human rights violations perpetrated between November 2017-September 2018, by the '1st branch, first group, first unit' of the 14th October Battalion, in Mogadishu could be found.

4. Information about the ranks of the volunteers of the Somali National Army and or the 14th of October Battalion

Among all sources consulted and within the timeframe allocated to respond to this query, no information related to the volunteers and the ranks of 14 October Battalion could be found. However, the information presented below provides general context and circumstances within which the Somali National Army (SNA) operates.

4.1 Size

Paul D. Williams, a scholar and military expert on Somalia, reports in his 2018 article Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of a failure, 2008–2018, that:

'By the time of the 2017 London conference on Somalia [11 May 2017] the SNA [Somali National Army] was estimated at approximately 2100 officers, 18,700 soldiers and NCOs, as well as nearly 3900 orphans, disabled and retirees. It was organised into 12 brigades, over 30 battalions, and had various special units including the presidential guard, military police, the Danab advanced infantry, and the health unit.'¹⁰

On another publication, Williams, quoting data from the Somali Federal Government, indicates that in May 2017 the size of the Somali Armed Forces was estimated at 24 820 members, plus 4 569 benefit recipients.¹¹

⁹ HRW, World Report 2018, Somali Events of 2017, 2018, [url](#)

¹⁰ Williams, Paul D., Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of a failure, 2008–2018, 27 February 2019, Journal of Strategic Studies, available by subscription at [url](#), p. 8, accessed 15 July 2019

¹¹ Williams, Paul D., Fighting for Peace in Somalia: A history and analysis of the African Union Mission (AMISOM), 2007–2017, 2018, p. 242

4.2 Internal problems

Various sources suggest that a number of issues affect the proper functioning of the SNA. Among those, conflicting agendas between national and regional stakeholders, clan politics, lack of resources (notably to fund salaries), widespread corruption, soldiers' poor identification system, and lack of capabilities.¹²

Based on Williams' account, already in 2011, a second security sector assessment noted within the security forces 'high levels of nepotism, corruption and poor record-keeping', and 'emphasised the urgent need for a biometric identification system across the entire Somali security sector'.¹³ Again Williams, while addressing the building of the national army in the period 2008-2018, speaks of 'anatomy of a failure' and groups the issues mentioned above under three main clusters: political challenges (interest asymmetry between national and regional SNA contributors, insufficient focus on institutions, uncoordinated partners); contextual challenges (legacies of state collapse, clan politics); and operational challenges (reforming while fighting, problems of military integration, and capability gaps). Reportedly, all these issues affect the setting up of a really national, reliable, competent, clearly commanded, and operative national army.¹⁴

4.3 Corruption

Transversally to all issues above, corruption seems to be pervasive.¹⁵ Williams indicates that 'corruption came in in two main varieties: by elites and rank-and-file soldiers'.¹⁶ He elaborates on this as follows:

'Elite corruption involved relatively wealthy and politically powerful individuals stealing large sums of money and working to oppose strong, government-led rule of law and a professional security sector in order to further their narrow economic interests. [...] At the other end of the political pyramid, SNA soldiers were asked to risk their lives often without receiving meagre salaries, equipment and rations, or medical care [see [4.4 Soldiers Salaries](#)]. This encouraged troops to find alternative sources of income and support, including extorting money or food from alternative sources, taking multiple jobs in the private sector, obtaining two or more identification cards to draw multiple salaries, or selling their equipment. During the TFG [Transitional Federal Government] years, it was not uncommon for soldiers to sell some of their limited ammunition to buy food and khat, and then abscond when they had used the rest. [...] Finally, opportunities for both elite and rank-and-file corruption were increased because salary payments to the SNA were usually made in cash.'¹⁷

¹² International Peace Institute, *Transitioning to National Forces in Somalia: More Than an Exit for AMISOM*, April 2019, [url](#); Williams, Paul D., *Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of a failure, 2008–2018*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27 February 2019, available by subscription at [url](#); Williams, Paul D., *Fighting for Peace in Somalia: A history and analysis of the African Union Mission (AMISOM), 2007–2017*, Oxford University Press, 2018

¹³ Williams, Paul D., *Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of a failure, 2008–2018*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27 February 2019, available by subscription at [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴ Williams, Paul D., *Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of a failure, 2008–2018*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27 February 2019, available by subscription at [url](#), pp. 9-23

¹⁵ Williams, Paul D., *Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of a failure, 2008–2018*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27 February 2019, available by subscription at [url](#), p. 6

¹⁶ Williams, Paul D., *Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of a failure, 2008–2018*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27 February 2019, available by subscription at [url](#), p. 11

¹⁷ Williams, Paul D., *Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of a failure, 2008–2018*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27 February 2019, available by subscription at [url](#), pp. 11-12

4.4 Soldiers' salaries

Lack of national revenues to pay for the salaries of the soldiers is one of the major impediments towards building up a real SNA.¹⁸ This may result in a number of problems, including disaffection, scarce propensity to fight, multiple identity cards, un-professional conducts, and notably difficulties in ascertaining who is a member and who is not a member of the military. Maruf notes that:

'In an October 2016 report, UN monitors said Somali military officials had withdrawn almost \$6.7 million from the country's central bank over a ten-month period to pay back salary to soldiers-but that only \$3.5 million of the money could be accounted for. Some units hadn't been paid in over a year. The monitors also found it hard to tell who was and who wasn't a soldier.'¹⁹

The 2016 UN report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea indicates that:

'Within Mogadishu many individuals on SNA payrolls are concurrently employed by private security firms or serve FGS or [local] officials, members of the parliament or the business community. Such individuals may or may not be called upon to serve in active units if needs arises. Over a quarter of the nearly 22,000 troops the FGS reports to be serving the SNA are stationed in or on the outskirts of Mogadishu, yet there are - as far as the Monitoring Group can ascertain - no permanent barracks in the city, nor regular calls besides when salary or stipend payments are being distributed.'²⁰

To partially redress the issues described so far, as of March 2019 a number of accountability measures have been implemented by the Somali government. In particular, the International Peace Institute reports that:

'March 2019 saw the conclusion of a two-year process of biometric registration of soldiers. Salaries will now be paid directly to each soldier's personal bank account, which is a vital step toward professionalizing the military. This will also remove checkpoints erected by soldiers to collect fees from civilians in transit in lieu of salaries—a practice that communities deeply resent. The federal government has also put in place accountability measures for the distribution of ammunition and weapons. Soldiers receiving stipends from international partners are now required to have undergone human rights training, and the chief of defense forces is standardizing basic military training.'²¹

5. Information about battles and/or security incidents at the Ministry of Defense involving soldiers or army personnel, in the period December 2017 - September 2018

In the reference period above, security incidents at the Ministry of Defense were reported on the following dates:

- 23 December 2017, a bomb explosion was followed by heavy fights that went on for hours.²²

¹⁸ Harun, Maruf and Dan, Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab, The Secret History of Al-Qaeda's Most Powerful Ally*, Indiana University Press, p. 271; International Peace Institute, *Transitioning to National Forces in Somalia: More Than an Exit for AMISOM*, April 2019, [url](#), p. 7; Williams Paul D., *Building the Somali National Army: Anatomy of a failure, 2008–2018*, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27 February 2019, available by subscription at [url](#), pp. 16-17

¹⁹ Harun, Maruf and Dan, Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabaab, The Secret History of Al-Qaeda's Most Powerful Ally*, 2018, p. 271

²⁰ UNSC, Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009), 2016, [url](#), p. 74

²¹ International Peace Institute, *Transitioning to National Forces in Somalia: More Than an Exit for AMISOM*, April 2019, [url](#), p. 11

²² Radio Dalsan, *Somali Ministry of Defense Attacked*, 24 December 2017, [url](#)



- 23 August 2018, Somalia's Deputy Defense Minister, Abdhullahi Olad Rooble, escaped an assassination attempt by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) planted near the fortified Somali Ministry of Defense.²³

²³ Garowe Online, Somalia: Deputy Defense minister unhurt after Mogadishu blast, 23 August 2018, [url](#)

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