

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	854
Land:	Somalia
Kilde:	BBC
Titel:	Somali concern at US troop withdrawal
Udgivet:	18. januar 2021
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	17. juni 2021

Let us know you agree to cookies

We use cookies to give you the best online experience. Please let us know if you agree to all of these cookies.

- Yes, I agree
- No, take me to settings

BBC

Home

News

Sport

More ▾

Menu

Home

Coronavirus

Video

World

UK

Business

Tech

Science

Stories

Entertainment & Arts

Health

World News TV

In Pictures

Reality Check

Newsbeat

Long Reads

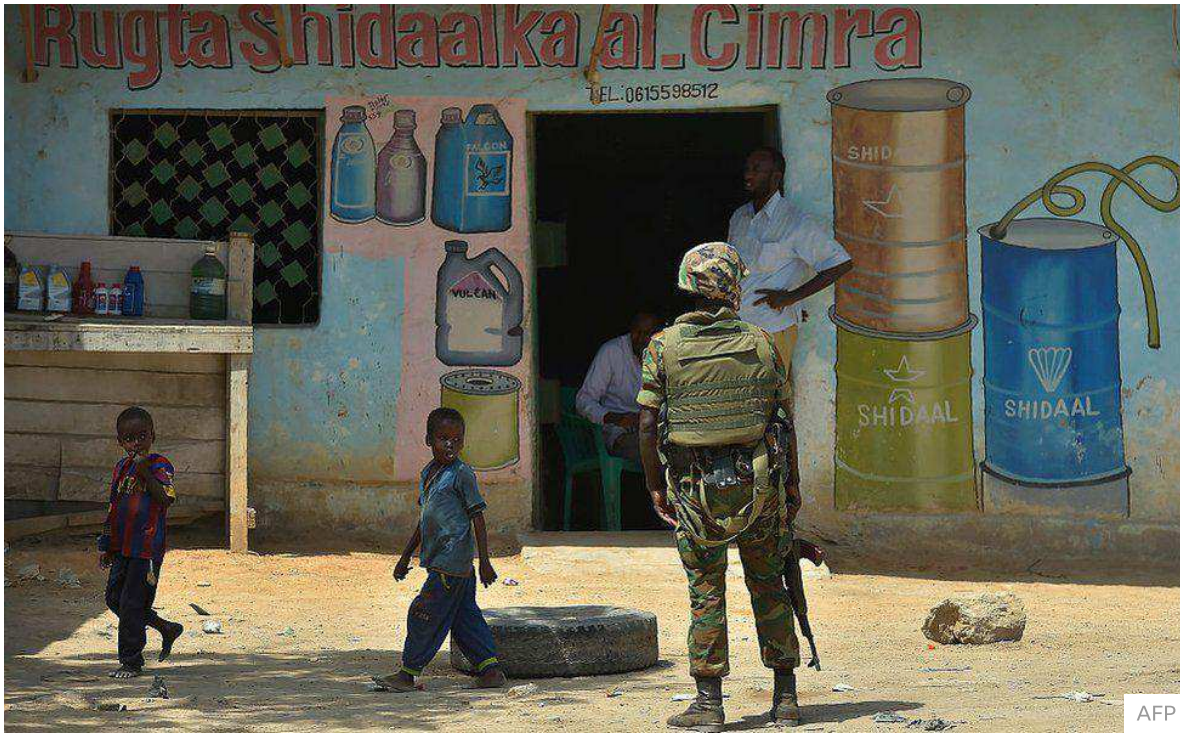
World | Africa | Asia | Australia | Europe | Latin America | Middle East | US & Canada

ADVERTISEMENT

Somali concern at US troop withdrawal

By Andrew Harding
BBC News, Mogadishu

🕒 18 January



African Union troops provide vital security in Somalia

Tensions are rising sharply in Somalia, as the country's fragile political system wrestles with a bitterly contested election process, the withdrawal of some vital US military forces, and renewed concerns about an increasingly well-resourced militant Islamist insurgency.

Diplomats and observers are warning that the country - three decades after it collapsed into anarchy - is once again at a crossroads, with recent progress on rebuilding a shattered state now at risk.

"Somalia is at an important pivotal moment," the UN Secretary General's special representative James Swan told the BBC, warning that "posturing and brinkmanship" by the country's national and regional leaders - as they argue over a delayed and watered-down parliamentary election process - could lead to violence.

A group of powerful organisations and states - including the UN, the EU and the African Union's peacekeeping mission - has issued a forceful statement urging Somalia's political elites to seek dialogue. "Any threat of use of violence is not acceptable," they wrote.





President Mohamed Abdullahi "Farmaajo" was elected by MPs in 2017

Somalia was due to hold its first "one-person-one-vote" election last year - a huge milestone for a long-fractured nation.

But clan-dominated opposition parties are boycotting the process over concerns about rigging, a carefully-brokered deal is now in tatters, and the country's President, Mohamed Abdullahi "Farmaajo", is being blamed by some for seeking to impose his will on Somalia's increasingly assertive regional leaders.

"It could turn out to be a disaster if it's not put back on the right track with these current elections. Everybody knows our democracy is in jeopardy, and we need to fix it," said Mr Farmaajo's former national security advisor, Hussein Sheikh Ali.



The Elite Hotel in Mogadishu was targeted in an attack in August 2020

Adding to a nervous mood in the capital, Mogadishu - a city once torn apart by rival clan warlords - is a growing concern about al-Shabab militants.

The Islamist group withdrew from the city, and was pushed out of most other Somali towns, by African Union and Somali troops, but it retains an overwhelming hold on the countryside.

It has also begun to operate what amounts to a shadow government within Mogadishu, where it taxes and intimidates many businesses, administers Sharia courts, carries out targeted killings, and stages suicide attacks on hotels and government offices.

"Everybody is taxed by al-Shabab, directly or indirectly, including the president - the food he eats is being taxed [by them]," Mr Farmaajo's former advisor told the BBC.

"They have been getting stronger over the last four years. A lot of people underestimate al-Shabab and say they're becoming mafia-like. But they're a well-organised and coherent organisation with a strategic vision to conquer this country."





Even after what happened we are ready to deny al-Shabab and to defend ourselves"

Abdullahi Nor

Owner, Elite Hotel, Mogadishu

Fifteen people were killed last August when al-Shabab attacked a prominent new beach-side hotel, the Elite, in Mogadishu. The owner said he thinks the hotel was targeted because he had refused to give money to the militants.

"It's like a ransom. They were aware we weren't going to make any payment to Shabab," said Abdullahi Nor, who quickly repaired the building and remains open for business.

"Even after what happened, we are ready to deny them and to defend ourselves," he said.

But Mr Nor, like many of his customers and other families enjoying the adjacent Lido beach late one afternoon, expressed deep concern about a new development - the withdrawal of some US troops from Somalia, on the orders of President Donald Trump.

"It's highly disturbing to us," the hotel owner said. "We still need the Americans, particularly for security."



REUTERS

People relaxing at the Lido beach near the Elite Hotel

Western diplomats in Mogadishu have sought to play down the significance of an abrupt White House decision to move some American special forces out of Somalia. There are thought to be around 700 US soldiers in the country.

"They've described it themselves as not a change in policy but just a change in force posture. I think the Americans are very clearly committed to help secure Somalia for the long term," British ambassador Ben Folder said.

But a former US ambassador to Somalia, Stephen Schwartz, blasted the move as "a gratuitous public relations and operational windfall to al-Shabab".





It's only the American airstrikes and special forces have been hitting al-Shabab hard and slowing it down"

Hussein Sheikh Ali

Ex-security advisor to Somalia's president

There is particular concern that - even though the US' often controversial drone attacks against al-Shabab targets will continue - the hands-on training and oversight that the Americans provided to Somalia's elite Danab special forces may suffer.

"It's only the American airstrikes and special forces have been hitting al-Shabab hard and slowing it down," said Mr Ali.

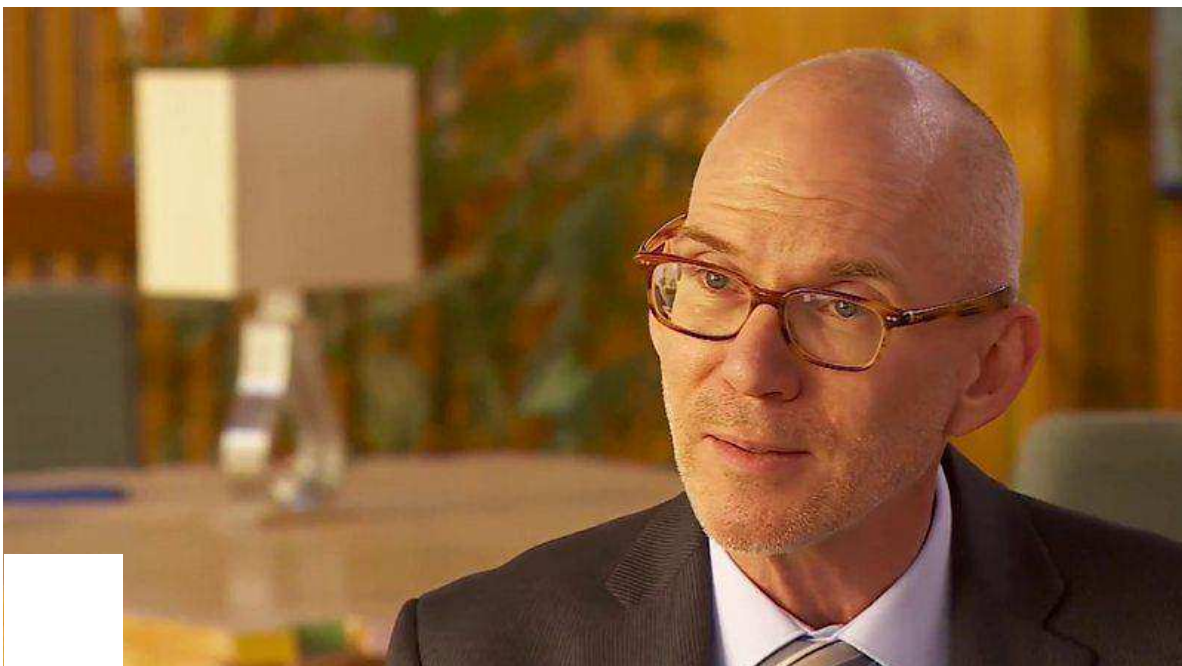
"Otherwise they could have made even more headway. This could have a serious impact on counter-terrorism efforts in Somalia. [Danab could now] be vulnerable to being used as a political tool" by rival forces within the state, he added.

Those tensions within Somalia's fragile state institutions are also being fuelled and manipulated by other countries in an increasingly unpredictable region, with rising instability in Ethiopia, the Gulf and elsewhere, and with five foreign African armies and military advisors from many other nations, now active in Somalia's internal conflicts.

Huge progress in Somalia

"The problem is that Somalia's conflicts have not entirely been resolved yet. There are different views about what sort of country it should become. Differences within Somalia are being exploited or widened, sometimes by international partners," said ambassador Fender.

Somalia has undoubtedly made huge progress in many areas in the past few years.



Ambassador James Swan: We are achieving some success against al-Shabab

The state has become more effective at revenue collection, younger Somalis

and members of the diaspora are active in civil society, Mogadishu itself is changing fast, and if politicians can overcome the current impasse and hold another election this year, it would mean the country has managed a third peaceful transition in less than a decade.

But that progress remains entirely dependent on the AU force, Amisom, made up of some 20,000 African troops, which protects the government and has, for years, taken the lead in fighting al-Shabab.

More about Somalia:

- [Somalia's 'touch and feel' e-commerce hit](#)
 - [Militants 'raise more cash than Somali government'](#)
 - [WATCH: What does the future hold for my country?](#)
-

Critics of the mission say it has become too comfortable with the status quo, and is not doing enough to wipe out the militants.

But senior Amisom officials say attempts to build a cohesive Somali national army to support their campaign against al-Shabab have largely failed.

Last line of defence

"We haven't done our job. It's a fact," said Mr Ali of efforts to build a Somali army. "But Amisom have also not been doing enough."

A decade ago, when al-Shabab still controlled more than half of Mogadishu and furious trench-warfare engulfed the city, it was widely accepted that the militants would overrun the capital within an hour if Amisom were to withdraw its troops.

Today, according to one senior military official who spoke on condition of anonymity, it would now take "just 12 hours" for al-Shabab to seize Mogadishu and most other towns if Amisom pulled out.

Related Topics

[al-Shabab](#)[Somalia](#)

More on this story

Somalia profile

4 January 2018

Trump orders US troop withdrawal from Somalia

5 December 2020

► Somalia: 'My bloody country'

2 December 2019

Somalia's frightening network of Islamist spies

27 May 2019