



TSC INSIGHTS

OPERATION BLACK LION: CHALLENGES THAT LAY AHEAD OF SOMALIA'S SECOND PHASE OF THE OFFENSIVE

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Executive Summary

Following a series of clan uprisings against al-Shabaab in the central regions of the country, in August 2022 the federal government of Somalia, working alongside clan militias known collectively as the Macawiisley, launched an offensive against the group. Much of this fighting has been concentrated in the central regions of the country, particularly in the Federal Member States (FMS) of Hirshabelle and Galmudug. Partnered with clan militia and supported by foreign actors, the offensive has yielded some notable gains, including the recapture of key territories from al-Shabaab in the areas of Hirshabelle and Galmudug. However, in recent months, government and militia forces have faced significant setbacks, with al-Shabaab proving capable of conducting attacks and projecting power into the areas it has lost. More concerning is the absence of a clear strategy to hold and govern the recently recovered territories. This has been a recurring issue and has resulted in a situation where territories recently regained by government forces are then quickly recaptured by al-Shabaab.

Yet, despite these challenges, the federal government has plans to extend its offensive beyond the central territories and toward al-Shabaab's southern strongholds in the Federal Member States of South West State (SWS) and Jubbaland. Coined Operation Black Lion, this next phase of the offensive is expected to draw additional troops from Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti to bolster Somali forces. However, as the government attempts to consolidate its gains in the central regions and moves forward with the planned second phase, two challenges lay ahead that need to be addressed before Operation Black Lion can yield long-term success. First are the combustible socio-political dynamics in SWS and Jubbaland

that, without meaningful political settlement and reconciliation, will undermine the offensive. Compared to central regions of the country, clan dynamics in SWS and Jubbaland are significantly more complex and combustible, characterized by long-standing grievances, rivalries, and tensions. Al-Shabaab benefits from these dynamics, often manipulating local grievances and clan disputes to recruit, govern, and conduct its operations. Without meaningful political settlement and reconciliation, liberating territories in Jubbaland and SWS will almost certainly lead to clashes between local communities, as well as between member state forces and local clan militia over political control.

Second is the absence of a clear strategy for holding and governing territory in al-Shabaab's southern strongholds. More attention should be devoted to the role that FMS and local forces can play in holding recovered territories and delivering longer-term security. Such forces, knowledgeable of the local terrain, and that have kinship and cultural ties within the locales they operate in, can leverage a comparative advantage in delivering security to local communities and gaining local confidence. However, without a clear strategy for engaging member state and local forces as important components of a broader national security strategy, offensive efforts will be disjointed, yield short-term tactical successes, and result in the sort of political rivalries and fragmentation that al-Shabaab benefits from.

Acronyms:

ACLED: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

ATMIS: The African Union Transition Mission in Somalia

FGS: Federal Government of Somalia

FMS: Federal Member State(s)

JISA: Jubbaland Intelligence and Security Agency

JSF: Jubbaland Security Force

NSA: National Security Model and Architecture

SFA: Security Force Assistance

SSR: Security Sector Reform

SWS: South West State

SWS-SPF: South West State Special Police Force

Introduction

In August 2022, the President of the Federal Government of Somalia, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, declared a ‘total war’ on al-Shabaab and launched a new offensive against the group.¹ In contrast to previous offensives led by international forces, the current offensive is spearheaded by Somali government forces fighting alongside local clans.² The offensive followed a rebellion by clan militias in the central region (in the Federal Member States of Hirshabelle and Galmudug) of Somalia against al-Shabaab. Known collectively as the Macawiisley, these clan militias formed around 2018 in Middle Shabelle region of Hirshabelle in response to al-Shabaab’s predation, excessive violence, and financial demands.³ By late summer 2022, the federal government capitalized on renewed frustration against al-Shabaab amongst locals in the Hiraan region of Hirshabelle and deployed Somali forces to fight the militants alongside the Macawiisley.⁴ To date, the offensive has reversed some of al-Shabaab’s territorial gains, with the government recovering significant swathes of territory from the militants, including some key territories in both Hirshabelle and Galmudug.⁵

Still, significant challenges remain. Al-Shabaab continues to mount a resistance in parts of central Somalia, and even more troubling, there is no clear plan to hold and govern the territories once retaken, with growing concerns about the government’s ability to do so over the medium and long term.⁶

Despite these challenges, the federal government plans to extend its offensive to al-Shabaab’s southern strongholds in the Federal Member States (FMS) of South

¹ Mohamed Dhaysane, “Somalia’s president vows “total war” against Al-Shabab,” *Voice of America*, August 24, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-s-president-vows-total-war-against-al-shabab/6714508.html>.

² Somalis can be divided into four major clan-families, Hawiye, Darood, Digil-Mirifle, and Dir. Each of these clan-families can then be sub-divided into dozens of clans and sub-clans. In addition, a portion of Somali society are identified as minority communities and are non-ethnically Somali. This includes Bantu, Benediri, and Bajuni. The two most powerful clans are the Hawiye and Darood. See Ken Menkhaus, “Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Somalia Case Study,” *UK Stabilisation Unit* (February 2018), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/766049/Somalia_case_study.pdf.

³ International Crisis Group, “Sustaining Gains in Somalia’s Offensive against Al-Shabaab,” *Crisis Group Africa Briefing* no. 187 (March 21, 2023), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b187-sustaining-gains-somalias-offensive-against-al-shabaab>; Richard Atwood and Omar Mahmood, “Somalia’s Latest Battles Against Al-Shabaab,” March 24, 2023, in *Hold Your Fire!*, produced by International Crisis Group, podcast, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/somalias-latest-battles-against-al-shabaab>; Mohamed Mubarak and Ashley Jackson, *Playing the long game: Exploring the relationship between al-Shabaab and civilians in areas beyond state control* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2023), <https://odi.org/en/publications/playing-the-long-game-exploring-the-relationship-between-al-shabab-and-civilians-in-areas-beyond-state-control/>.

⁴ Stig Jarle Hansen, “Can Somalia’s New Offensive Defeat al-Shabaab,” *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 16, no. 1 (January 2023) <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/can-somalias-new-offensive-defeat-al-shabaab/>.

⁵ International Crisis Group, “Sustaining Gains in Somalia’s Offensive against Al-Shabaab.”

⁶ *Ibid.*

West State (SWS) and Jubbaland.⁷ Coined Operation Black Lion, this next phase of the offensive is expected to draw 20 thousand to 30 thousand additional troops from Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti to bolster Somali forces.⁸ However, as plans move forward for the second phase, two challenges lay ahead that need to be addressed before Operation Black Lion can yield long-term success. First are the combustible socio-political dynamics in SWS and Jubbaland that al-Shabaab continues to benefit from and that, without meaningful political settlement and reconciliation, will undermine the offensive. Second is the absence of a clear strategy for holding and governing territory in al-Shabaab's southern strongholds, as well as the absence of a national security strategy that prioritizes the development of appropriate Federal Member State and local level forces as much as it does federal forces.

This Insight is organized into three sections. The first provides an overview of the current offensive, as well as the successes and challenges that lay ahead of Operation Black Lion's launch. The second discusses the challenging politics and complex clan dynamics in al-Shabaab's southern strongholds and the implications these have for Black Lion. The third provides an assessment of the difficulties around holding and building recovered and liberated territory in southern regions and raises questions about the appropriate force posture and resource allocation needed to govern these liberated locales.

Section One: Somalia's Military Offensive Against al-Shabaab

At the end of March 2023, President Mohamud announced the launch of the second phase of the military offensive into the southern regions of Somalia.⁹ However, due to increased pushback from al-Shabaab in central territories, particularly in Hirshabelle, at the time of this writing (September 2023) government forces have remained focused on securing their gains in Middle Shabelle and Hiraan in the second phase rather than moving down toward SWS and Jubbaland.¹⁰

⁷ Al-Shabaab maintains the most control of Middle and Lower Juba in Jubbaland, and part of Lower Shabelle in SWS.

⁸ Ahmed Mohamed, "Al-Shabab Imposes Blockade on Baidoa Town in Somalia," *Voice of America*, July 17, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/al-shabab-imposes-blockade-on-baidoa-town-in-somalia-7185165.html>; James Barnett, "Faltering Lion: Analyzing Progress and Setbacks in Somalia's War against al-Shabaab," *Hudson Institute* (September, 2023), <https://www.hudson.org/terrorism/faltering-lion-analyzing-progress-setbacks-somalia-war-against-al-shabaab-james-barnett>.

⁹ Hiiraan Online, "Somali President Launches Second Phase of Anti-Al-Shabaab Operations," *Hiiraan Online*, March 28, 2023, https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Mar/190539/somali_president_launches_second_phase_of_anti_al_shabab_operations.aspx.

¹⁰ ACLED, "Somalia: Counter-Insurgency Operation Gains Regional Support in Phase Two as al-Shabaab Attacks and Political Differences Persist," *ACLED Situation Update*, April 2023, <https://acleddata.com/2023/04/21/somalia-situation-update-april-2023-counter-insurgency-operation-gains-regional-support-in-phase-two-as-al-shabaab-attacks-and-political-differences->

As preparations for the highly anticipated second phase of the FGS offensive Black Lion continue, there are crucial insights that can be drawn from the ongoing offensive in the central region that can inform the way forward. At its current stage, the government's offensive in Hirshabelle and Galmudug has yielded the most substantial territorial gains against al-Shabaab since the mid-2010s, marking a significant "breakthrough in a war that has raged for more than fifteen years."¹¹

A unique set of events provided the circumstances essential to the government's advance. In particular, al-Shabaab's coercive and repressive tactics in central Somalia antagonized local clans, particularly the Haber Gedir/Salebaan sub-clan (Hawiye clan family), of which President Mohamud is a member.¹² In and around the town of Baxdo in the Galmudug state, for the past several years al-Shabaab has ordered young men belonging to the Salebaan to enroll as fighters.¹³ When the community refused to comply, al-Shabaab launched a string of retaliations, including confiscating livestock, abducting elders, and launching an assault against the community in June 2022.¹⁴ This move provoked a militia from the sub-clan to organize a defense, inflicting heavy casualties among al-Shabaab militants.

Around the same period, in the Hiraan region of the Hirshabelle State, west of Galmudug, historic grievances and tensions between the Hawadle sub-clans (Hawiye clan family) and al-Shabaab reached an apex. Not only had the militant group previously taken control of a road that linked Hiraan's capital, Beledwayne, to Galmudug, but al-Shabaab also blocked a road connecting Mogadishu to Beledwayne, restricting the flow of crucial supplies to an area that was severely affected by drought for years.¹⁵ Communities in the region grew even more frustrated with al-Shabaab after the group killed a Hawadle elder in Beledwayne in May 2022.¹⁶ This move prompted the community to mobilize a pushback by militia forces against the group. In response to the community pushback, al-Shabaab doubled down on its repressive actions, which only generated more resentment among the communities.¹⁷

Beyond Hirshabelle and Galmudug, al-Shabaab also conducted an August 2022 attack against the well-known Hayat Hotel in Mogadishu, killing more than 20

persist/; Sahan Foundation, "Navigating Security in Somalia with Rashid Abdi," *Sahan Pathfinders Podcast*, August 14, 2023,

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/2PQGrqCevEvWRh0cFnkGQ0?si=033c53dd3d3748ae>.

¹¹ International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab," 1.

¹² International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab."

¹³ Alan Boswell and Omar Mahmood, "Somalia's Offensive Against Al-Shabaab," January 11, 2023, in *The Horn*, produced by International Crisis Group, podcast, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/somalias-offensive-against-al-shabaab>.

¹⁴ International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab"; Alan Boswell and Omar Mahmood, "Somalia's Offensive Against Al-Shabaab."

¹⁵ Richard Atwood and Omar Mahmood, "Somalia's Latest Battles Against Al-Shabaab."

¹⁶ International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab."

¹⁷ Mohamed Mubarak and Ashley Jackson, *Playing the long game*; Richard Atwood and Omar Mahmood, "Somalia's Latest Battles Against Al-Shabaab."

people.¹⁸ The siege on the hotel took government forces 30 hours to quell.¹⁹ These events, growing frustration against al-Shabaab among local clans in central regions, as well as a major attack in Mogadishu during a period when the president was facing criticism over the government's response to the hotel siege, created an opportunity for the government to deploy armed forces to Hiraan to fight alongside the Hawadle clan militia forces in August 2022.

By October of that year, government forces supported by the militias (Macawiisley) had recaptured much of al-Shabaab's territory in Hiraan east of the Shabelle River.²⁰ Capitalizing on these early gains, government forces and local militia expanded the offensive into Galmudug, with the government working with prominent community members to encourage other local clans in the region to mobilize fighters.²¹ As was the case in Hiiran, government forces led operations while clan militia participated in joint operations and received logistical support.²² Foreign actors also provided support to the government offensive. Notably, the United States provided military assistance in the form of weapons and ammunition and conducted airstrikes in support of Danab (lighting) forces, a special strike unit of the national army trained by US forces.²³ Türkiye also carried out drone strikes²⁴ in the areas of Lower and Middle Shabelle.²⁵

To date, the government's offensive, partnered with clan militia (Macawiisley) and supported by foreign actors, has yielded some notable successes, including the recapture of strategic territories from al-Shabaab. According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), during this first phase of the offensive Somali security forces recaptured over 215 locations previously controlled by al-Shabaab mostly located in Hirshabelle and Galmudug.²⁶ Notable examples include the December 2022 government seizure of al-Shabaab's regional center of

¹⁸ Harun Maruf, "Somali PM Vows Accountability after Deadly Hotel Attack," *Voice of America*, August 22, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-pm-vows-accountability-after-deadly-hotel-attack/6712021.html>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab."

²¹ Ibid.

²² Richard Atwood and Omar Mahmood, "Somalia's Latest Battles Against Al-Shabaab"; International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab."

²³ Stig Jarle Hansen, "Can Somalia's New Offensive Defeat al-Shabaab.," Samira Gaid, "The 2022 Somali Offensive Against al-Shabaab: Making Enduring Gains Will Require Learning from Previous Failures," *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel* 15, 11 (November/December 2022) <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-2022-somali-offensive-against-al-shabaab-making-enduring-gains-will-require-learning-from-previous-failures/>; Khadar Aweys, "Somali Government receives military support from the United States," *Sonna*, February 28, 2023, <https://sonna.so/en/somali-government-receives-military-support-from-the-united-states/>. Michael M. Phillips "America Finally Finds Some Success in the War on Terror," *Wall Street Journal*, September 27, 2023, https://www.wsj.com/world/africa/somalia-militants-war-on-terror-b633ac07?mod=world_feat8_africa_pos2; James Barnett, "Faltering Lion."

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ ATMIS, however, has avoided direct combat thus far but has provided some artillery support in areas like Hiraan, in addition to medevac among other logistical aid.

²⁶ ACLED, "Somalia: Counter-Insurgency Operation."

operations at Adan Yabaal in Middle Shabelle.²⁷ Shortly after, in January 2023, government forces successfully recaptured the strategic towns of Ceel Dheere and Xarardheere in Galgaduud,²⁸ while in August 2023 they captured the towns of Wabho and El Buur in Galgaduud, causing al-Shabaab's physical presence in the region to contract.²⁹

Moreover, the government's collaboration with local clan militias in central regions has also helped to strengthen ties between the federal government and local communities. Instead of having to mobilize local support on their own, government forces can now work through the Macawiisley who have crucial links to the local population.³⁰ These connections through local clan militia have also enabled the government to gain greater access to rural areas and fighters intimately more knowledgeable about the terrain.³¹

Notable Challenges

However, despite these successes, there are several notable challenges to the government offensive that foreshadow its next phase. For one, despite losing key territory, al-Shabaab remains capable of conducting attacks and projecting power into the areas it has lost.³² In January 2023, the group deployed at least twelve vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices in towns located in central Somalia.³³ In one of these attacks in Galcad (Galmudug state), Danab forces experienced significant losses, including the deputy commander of the unit, resulting in a setback to the offensive in central Somalia in the subsequent weeks.³⁴ Similarly, the group has been able to hit the Macawiisley in smaller settlements in the Hiraan region.³⁵ In May 2023, al-Shabaab further attacked Somali forces in Massagaweyne

²⁷ Ahmed Mohamed, "Somali Army Dislodges Al-Shabab From Key Stronghold," *Voice of America*, December 6, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-army-dislodges-al-shabab-from-key-stronghold-/6864706.html#:~:text=Somali%20army%20troops%20and%20local,in%20the%20Middle%20Shabelle%20region.&text=Somali%20President%20Hassan%20Sheikh%20Mohamud,a%2DShabab%20with%20a%20fight>.

²⁸ Al-Shabaab forces still remain present on the outskirts of the towns. See International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab."

²⁹ The Somali Digest, "ANALYSIS: SNA's battle for Wabho," *The Somali Digest*, August 21, 2023 <https://thesomalidigest.com/analysis-snas-battle-for-wabho/>; Reuters, "Somali forces capture major al Shabaab militia stronghold," *Reuters*, August 25, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somali-forces-capture-major-al-shabaab-militia-stronghold-2023-08-25/>;

Reuters, "Somali forces capture major al Shabaab militia stronghold," *Reuters*, August 25, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somali-forces-capture-major-al-shabaab-militia-stronghold-2023-08-25/>.

³⁰ Stig Jarle Hansen, "Can Somalia's New Offensive Defeat al-Shabaab."

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² For more, see James Barnett, "Faltering Lion."

³³ International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab."

³⁴ Harun Maruf, "US Military Strike in Somalia Kills 2 Militants," *Voice of America*, January 24, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-military-strike-in-somalia-kills-2-militants-/6932092.html>.

³⁵ International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab."

village, Galguduud region (Galmudug state).³⁶ The group also managed to regain lost territory in Hirshabelle as the offensive expanded to Galmudug state.³⁷ More recently, in August 2023, government forces faced a significant setback after al-Shabaab carried out a deadly attack on a recently captured village, Cowsweyne in Galgaduud, causing government forces to retreat from towns and villages it had captured in recent months.³⁸ In September 2023, al-Shabaab conducted major attacks in Hiiran, including a truck bomb attack in Beledwayne town that killed at least 20 people, and a suicide bomb attack in Bulobarde town that followed only days later, marking the highest number of suicide bombings (14) conducted by al-Shabaab in a month since 2006.³⁹

Beyond al-Shabaab's ability to conduct attacks in the territories it lost, there is a risk that clan militia pose for security and stability in the region. In areas recovered from al-Shabaab, local communities will inevitably seek to benefit from the vacuum created, which could result in broader clan conflicts over governance and control of liberated territory.⁴⁰ Moreover, in his report on the offensive earlier this year, Stig Jarle Hansen, noted that "members of some clans not involved in the current offensive have already shown some suspicions and hesitancy, for example in the southwest."⁴¹ The challenge facing the government is not only how to continue to mobilize local communities against al-Shabaab, but to do so in a way that avoids stoking clan rivalries and fragmentation that ultimately undermines security, thus benefiting al-Shabaab.⁴²

Lastly, a key challenge that lies ahead for the government offensive in central Somalia as it turns its attention towards al-Shabaab's southern stronghold is the government's strategy for "holding" and "building" recovered territory. The offensive has thus far proved capable of clearing al-Shabaab from territory in central Somalia, but it has yet to articulate a strategy that clarifies which forces will be responsible for holding recovered areas and the role that the Macawiisley is expected to play.⁴³ The government's lack of holding power is a recurring issue. Several key cities, towns, and villages spread across central and southern Somalia have exchanged hands between various armed groups including government and partner forces, al-Shabaab, and community militias. For instance, the town of Adan

³⁶ This was the second major attack in the village since the territory had been recovered in January 2023. See International Crisis Group, "Somalia," *Crisis Watch Digest*, May 2023, <https://icg-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-06/somalia-may-2023.pdf>.

³⁷ ACLED, "Somalia: Counter-Insurgency Operation."

³⁸ Harun Maruf, "Somalia Military Offensive Suffers Setback as Troops Retreat," *Voice of America*, April 29, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/7245333.html>.

³⁹ Harun Maruf, Twitter Post, September 28, 2023, 10:01am, <https://x.com/HarunMaruf/status/1707395093798256974?s=20>; Caleb Weiss, Twitter Post, September 28, 2023, https://x.com/caleb_weiss7/status/1707396789546926088?s=20.

⁴⁰ There have been reported instances of clan militia abusing civilian at ad hoc checkpoints. See International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab."

⁴¹ Stig Jarle Hansen, "Can Somalia's New Offensive Defeat al-Shabaab," 22.

⁴² Stig Jarle Hansen, "Can Somalia's New Offensive Defeat al-Shabaab."

⁴³ Sahan Foundation, "Navigating Security in Somalia with Rashid Abdi"; Richard Atwood and Omar Mahmood, "Somalia's Latest Battles Against Al-Shabaab"; Stig Jarle Hansen, "Can Somalia's New Offensive Defeat al-Shabaab"; International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab"; James Barnett, "Faltering Lion."

Yabaal in Middle Shabelle, which government forces recently recaptured in December 2022, has experienced multiple changes in control since 2016.⁴⁴ Wabho is another critical territory located in Galgaduud that has experienced multiple changes in control between Ethiopian troops and al-Shabaab since 2014.⁴⁵ More recently, government forces supported by the Ma'awisley successfully captured the strategic Ruun-Nirgood district, a major al-Shabaab hub in Middle Shabelle, in August 12, 2023, but only two weeks later al-Shabaab recaptured the territory.⁴⁶ These exchanges of control underscore a pattern of temporary victories and quick losses.

Accordingly, the government's inability to maintain a strong presence leaves locals hesitant to collaborate with government forces due to fear of facing al-Shabaab retribution once the government leaves. In rural areas of Hiraan and other regions, some sub-clans have considered it necessary to reach agreements with al-Shabaab for their safety.⁴⁷ In December 2022, clan elders from the Haber Gedir/Salebaan sub-clan in Xarardheere town in the Mudug region reached such an agreement with al-Shabaab.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, in April 2023, al-Shabaab maintained it had made a similar agreement with the Hawadle Galible Hassan Agoon sub-clan and with seven other sub-clans residing in the Bulo Burto district.⁴⁹ These agreements impact the government's ability to continue drum up local support.

These challenges are compounded by reports that Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti may not participate in the planned military operations as part of the second phase of the offensive. In August 2023, Somalia's army commander, Major General Ibrahim Sheikh Muhudin, said it did not appear to him as though troops from Djibouti, Kenya, and Ethiopia would have "immediate, direct participation," though a Kenyan defense official indicated their position had not changed and that they were still committed to the operation.⁵⁰

As the government turns its attention towards al-Shabaab's southern strongholds, these challenges, al-Shabaab's resilience, clan rivalry and fragmentation, and the government's lack of a holding strategy, will inevitably become more pronounced.

⁴⁴ In April 2016 government forces took control of the town on the 6th only for al-Shabaab to recapture the town on April 10th. The government managed to regain control in May 2016, but al-Shabaab retook the town in June 2016. See Hiraal Institute, *Governance without presence: The Somali government's liberation struggles*. *Hiraal Commentary* (April 2023) <https://hiraalinstitute.org/governance-without-presence-the-somali-governments-liberation-struggles/>.

⁴⁵ In November 2022, government forces captured Wabho, but days later al-Shabaab reclaimed the territory after the government withdrew. See The Somali Digest, "ANALYSIS: SNA's battle for Wabho," *The Somalia Digest*, August 21, 2023, <https://thesomalidigest.com/analysis-snas-battle-for-wabho/>.

⁴⁶ The Somali Digest, "Al-Shabaab recaptured Ruun-Nirgood, SNA withdrew without fight," *The Somali Digest*, August 24, 2023, <https://thesomalidigest.com/al-shabaab-recaptured-ruun-nirgood-sna-withdrew-without-fight/>.

⁴⁷ These agreements reportedly stipulate that the communities will not participate in the ongoing offensive in Hiraan, and in return, al-Shabaab offers them peace deals.

⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab."

⁴⁹ ACLED, "Somalia: Counter-Insurgency Operation."

⁵⁰ Harun Maruf, Twitter Post, August 15, 2023, 8:01pm, <https://twitter.com/HarunMaruf/status/1691600910575644737>.

Key questions lie ahead as the government moves forward with Operation Black Lion: 1) what is the government's strategy around political settlement and reconciliation among the diverse clan communities in southern states; 2) which forces will act as holding and governing forces in recovered territory and what are the broader plans for introducing longer-term security and governance mechanisms in recovered locales?

Section Two: Operation Black Lion and The Challenging Politics and Clan Dynamics in al-Shabaab's Southern Strongholds

Replicating the government's offensive in eastern Hiraaan and parts of Galmudug is difficult in SWS and Jubbaland. For one, the spontaneous and organic clan uprising against al-Shabaab that emerged in the central regions is unlikely to occur across al-Shabaab's southern strongholds, and arguably has not even occurred throughout all of the central region, either.⁵¹

Compared to central regions, clan dynamics in southern member states are significantly more complex and combustible due to the diversity of communities and their long-standing grievances. Al-Shabaab benefits from these dynamics, often manipulating local grievances and clan disputes to recruit, govern, and conduct its operations. The federal government has made efforts to address the need for reconciliation between communities in other regions, such as Middle Shabelle, and has also coordinated with the FMS through a series of National Consultative Councils to refocus efforts away from political rivalries and toward countering al-Shabaab.⁵² However, more needs to be done to facilitate the settlement of disputes and reconciliation in southern FMS if the offensive in SWS and Jubbaland is to receive broad-based support and avoid fragmenting into the clan rivalries that benefit al-Shabaab. This section briefly outlines al-Shabaab's clan strategy and influence in its strongholds in the south, followed by a discussion of the clan dynamics in SWS and Jubbaland and the need for reconciliation.

Al-Shabaab's Clan Engagement Strategy and Influence in the South

Clan engagement is an integral aspect of al-Shabaab's military and political strategy. The group professes to transcend clan rivalries, not favoring any clan over others, and placing religion above anything else. Certainly, its pan-clan identity is evident in its cross-clan membership that includes minority clans, as

⁵¹ While in some areas of central Somalia clan militia naturally rose up against al-Shabaab, in others the government had to cajole clans to join government forces. In some cases, clashes between sub-clans undermined government efforts to recruit (e.g., in Middle Shabelle). In other cases, particularly in the Mudug region, perceptions of the government's earlier failure to assist local clans against al-Shabaab created tensions. See International Crisis Group, "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab."

⁵² In November 2022, President Hassan Sheikh brokered a peace agreement between warring communities in Middle Shabelle. See Samira Gaid, "The 2022 Somali Offensive Against al-Shabaab."

well as its multi-clan leadership.⁵³ Yet, in reality, clan dynamics are more important for its members than the group often acknowledges, and play a role in how it governs, recruits members, and conducts its military operations.⁵⁴

In an effort to further its local legitimacy, the group has made deliberate efforts to engage clan elders. This includes the formation of a Council of Clan Elders in 2016 to gain the popular support of communities by extending respect and legitimacy to clan elders within its organization.⁵⁵ Clan elders have gone on to play key roles in negotiations over humanitarian access, ceasefires with the government, and the release of hostages and detainees, among other things.⁵⁶ Elders have also been involved in al-Shabaab's governance structures, operating as recognized local representatives with the authority to petition for infrastructure projects, collect taxes, request aid for their communities, settle disputes, among other activities.⁵⁷ Al-Shabaab has also appointed governors and commanders from certain local clans as a means to gain greater access to the clan's territory.⁵⁸ In other cases, the group has appointed clan members who are non-residents to govern areas it controls in an effort to undermine local clan dynamics.⁵⁹ Additionally, al-Shabaab has also provided support to certain clans as they battle rival clans.⁶⁰

⁵³ Al-Shabaab's current and previous emirs are from a clan, Dir/Bajimal, that is not dominant in the southern regions of Somalia. Meanwhile, the clan composition of the group's executive council includes individuals from all four major Somali clans, as well as other smaller clans. See Tricia Bacon, *Inside The Minds of Somalia's Ascendant Insurgents: An Identity, Mind, Emotions and Perceptions Analysis of Al-Shabaab* (Washington D.C.: Program on Extremism at George Washington University, 2022) https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/Al-Shabaab-IMEP_Bacon_March-2022.pdf.

⁵⁴ Tricia Bacon, *Inside The Minds of Somalia's Ascendant Insurgents*.

⁵⁵ Mohammed Ibrahim Shire, "Dialoguing and negotiating with Al-Shabaab: the role of clan elders as insider-partial mediators," *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 15, 1, (2021): 1-22; Mohamed Mubarak and Ashley Jackson, *Playing the long game*.

⁵⁶ Mohammed Ibrahim Shire, "Now is the time to engage Al-Shabaab. Religious leaders and clan elders can help," *War on The Rocks*, October 19, 2021 <https://warontherocks.com/2021/10/now-is-the-time-to-engage-al-shabaab-religious-leaders-and-clan-elders-can-help/>; Mohamed Mubarak and Ashley Jackson, "Playing the long game"; Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph, *Inside Al-Shabab: the secret history of Al-Qaeda's most powerful ally* (Bloomfield: Indiana University Press, 2018).

⁵⁷ Hiraal Institute, *Taming the Clans: Al-Shabab's Clan Politics* (Mogadishu: Hiraal Institute, 2018), <https://hiraalinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/AS-Clan-Politics.pdf>; Mohamed Mubarak and Ashley Jackson, *Playing the long game*.

⁵⁸ Tricia Bacon, *Inside The Minds of Somalia's Ascendant Insurgents*.

⁵⁹ Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁶⁰ For instance, prior to 2010 the group fought for the Murusade sub clan (Hawiye clan family) against the clan's rivals. For more information see Stig Jarle Hansen, "An In-Depth Look at Al-Shabab's Internal Divisions," *Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel*, Africa Special Issue 7, no. 2 (February 2014): 9-12, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/an-in-depth-look-at-al-shababs-internal-divisions/>; Roland Marchal, "The Rise of a Jihadi Movement in a Country at War: Harakat al-Shabaab al Mujaheddin in Somalia," *SciencesPo/CERI*, (March 2011)

The group has also been successful at taking advantage of community grievances with the state, especially among minority and disenfranchised clans.⁶¹ Some communities have been motivated to support, tolerate, or collude with the group as a result of their frustrations with the government's abuses and corruption, as well as the government's failure to provide good governance and deliver social services.⁶² Presenting itself as a capable alternative to the state, al-Shabaab's regional administrations,⁶³ particularly those within its territorial control, can be perceived to provide a harsh but stable environment that attracts some Somalis.⁶⁴ The group provides justice that is seen to be more efficient, transparent, and enforceable than state alternatives, a dynamic that has played out in other conflict-ridden states, including Afghanistan.⁶⁵ Moreover, al-Shabaab provides security, allowing businesses to function with greater predictability and stability. The group also provides social services, including education and health care,⁶⁶ with reports suggesting that the tax revenue collected by the group in certain regions, such as Adan Yabaal in Middle Shabelle, has been used to purchase foodstuffs.⁶⁷ Studies have also suggested that some communities believe that though harsh, al-Shabaab's taxes are relatively predictable and fair to an extent.⁶⁸

The territories in SWS and Jubbaland, which are considered al-Shabaab's strongholds, have a more mixed clan composition compared to territories in central, such as Middle Shabelle, Hiiraan, and Galmudug.⁶⁹ A variety of clans, spanning the Hawiye, Darod, Digil-Mirifle, and Dir, as well as minority communities such as the Bantu,⁷⁰ inhabit the southern FMS. For its part, al-Shabaab has skillfully managed these complicated and often volatile dynamics. Where longstanding grievances and tensions exist between clans and sub-clans, al-Shabaab has made a strategy of aligning with marginalized communities.⁷¹ For example, al-Shabaab is credited with halting violent attacks against the minority

⁶¹ Ilya Gridneff, "Al-Shabaab Strategy Shifts Toward Clans as Presidential Election Looms," *IPI Global Observatory*, January 27, 2017, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/01/al-shabaab-strategy-shifts-toward-clans-as-election-looms/>.

⁶² Tricia Bacon, *Inside The Minds of Somalia's Ascendant Insurgents*.

⁶³ Al-Shabaab has nine regional administrations that cover 11 regions in southern Somalia, including those that the group does not physically control. See Mohamed Mubarak and Ashley Jackson, *Playing the long game*.

⁶⁴ For marginalized or minority clans, political subjugation or disenfranchisement at the community level have been a strong motivation for joining al-Shabaab. See Tricia Bacon, *Inside The Minds of Somalia's Ascendant Insurgents*.

⁶⁵ Nicholas Haas and Prabin B. Khadka, *Provision of Justice and Militant Governance: Experimental Evidence from South Central Somalia*, *Working Paper* (2023).

⁶⁶ However, the education the group provides is more akin to indoctrination centers, while it is unclear the extent to which the group delivers much health care at all.

⁶⁷ Mohamed Mubarak and Ashley Jackson, *Playing the long game*.

⁶⁸ Hiraal Institute, *A losing game: countering Al-Shabab's financial system* (Mogadishu: Hiraal Institute, 2020).

⁶⁹ Mohamed Mubarak and Ashley Jackson, *Playing the long game*.

⁷⁰ Ethnic Somali Bantu are also referred to locally as Jareer or Jareer Weyne.

⁷¹ Ilya Gridneff, "Al-Shabaab Strategy Shifts Toward Clans."

Bantu community living in Jilib district in the Middle Jubba region of Jubbaland.⁷² The group also mediates conflict between different clans, and by engaging with all clans and addressing grievances, the group has positioned itself as a stabilizing force in these territories.

Al-Shabaab has also not shied away from using force and intimidation against clans reluctant to accept its policies. Relying on violence and negotiations, al-Shabaab has threatened forced displacement, killed community members, kidnapped clan members, and confiscated livestock as a means of bringing communities to the negotiating table.⁷³ In Lower Jubba, al-Shabaab killed clansmen and livestock belonging to the Awramale sub-clan (Darod clan family) in December 2016 because they refused to pay *Zakat*.⁷⁴ Al-Shabaab has also had a conflict with the Biyomaal in Lower Shabelle, impounding thousands of livestock belonging to the clan between 2016-2018.⁷⁵

Accordingly, as Mubarak and Jackson report, “Al-Shabab is deeply entrenched in local politics and customary governance within the areas it controls. Local elites actively participate in the group’s governance project for personal and communal gains, and clans compete for Al-Shabab’s favour and resources.”⁷⁶ This is especially true in group’s southern strongholds. In areas like Jilib, where communities have lived under al-Shabaab control for almost 15 years,⁷⁷ al-Shabaab has not only established deep roots within the community but has also been able to enforce strict control over the population via its surveillance and harsh enforcement of punishment. Consequently, within its southern strongholds, a combination of combustible clan dynamics that benefit al-Shabaab, as well as the group’s ability to elicit strict community compliance not possible elsewhere, make it difficult for an organic and coordinated uprising by local communities to occur as did in Hiiraan and Galmudug.

⁷² Mohamed Mubarak and Ashley Jackson, *Playing the long game*.

⁷³ Illya Gridneff, “Al-Shabaab Strategy Shifts Toward Clans”; Stig Jarle Hansen, “Can Somalia’s New Offensive Defeat al-Shabaab.”

⁷⁴ Zakat refers to the annual religious obligation to pay alms or a tax. However, al-Shabaab’s demand for Zakat is more akin to extortion than obligatory religious alms. See Hiraal Institute, *Taming the Clans: Al-Shabab’s Clan Politics*.

⁷⁵ The Biyomaal had been at odds with the Haber Gedir since the 1990s over land and had defied al-Shabaab’s directives to cease fighting. Ultimately, al-Shabaab forced the clan to accept a truce. See Hiraal Institute, *Taming the Clans*.

⁷⁶ Mohamed Mubarak and Ashley Jackson, *Playing the long game*, 24.

⁷⁷ Jilib came under the control of the Islamic Court Union, al-Shabaab’s predecessor organization, in 2006. During the Ethiopian intervention, the group lost control of the territory but managed to retake Jilib in mid-2008. See Mohamed Mubarak and Ashley Jackson, *Playing the long game*.

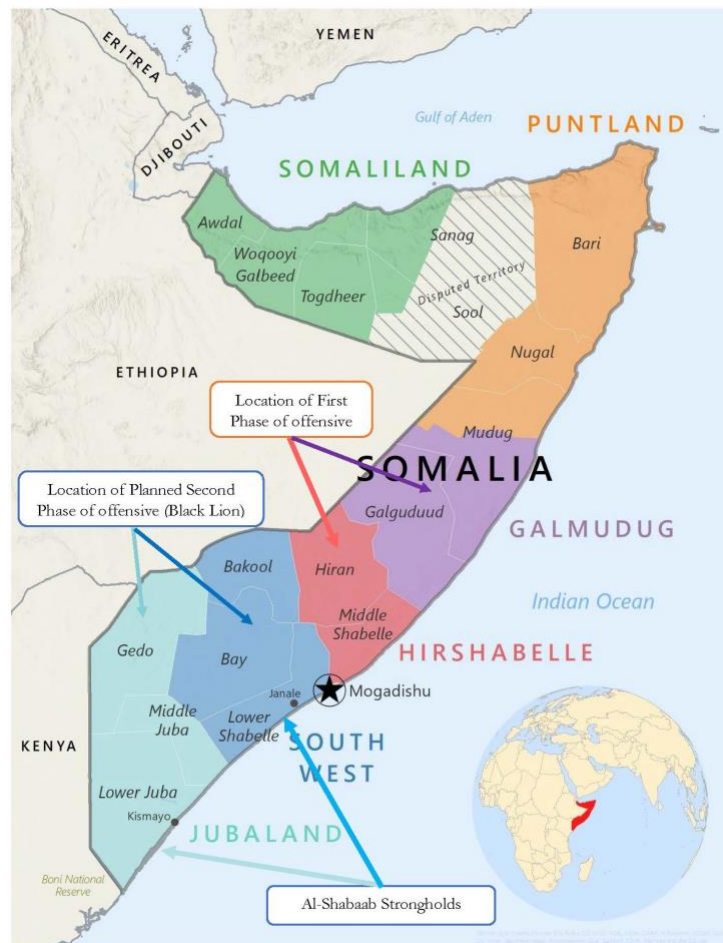


Figure: Map of Somalia (Source: Combating Terrorism Center Sentinel, Brandon Mohr)

Note: Map displays the Federal Member States of Somalia (Jubbaland, South West State, Hirshabelle, Galmudug, and Puntland) as well self-declared independent territory of Somaliland and the administrative region surrounding the capital of Mogadishu.

Jubbaland – What About Political Settlement and Local Reconciliation?

In July 2022, the regional administration in Jubbaland announced that it was, in collaboration with the federal government, launching its anti-al-Shabaab offensive.⁷⁸ In November of the same year, the Somali defense minister visited Kismayo city in Jubbaland and met with the President of Jubbaland, Ahmed “Madobe” Mohamed Islam, to observe Jubbaland’s military forces.⁷⁹ A month later,

⁷⁸ The Heritage Institute, State of Somalia 2022 Report (Mogadishu: Heritage Institute, 2023), <https://8v90f1.p3cdn1.secureserver.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/SOS-REPORT-2022-The-Year-in-Review.pdf>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Kenya's defense minister also visited Kismayo and met with the regional president Madobe to discuss border security as well as the fight against al-Shabaab.⁸⁰

However, clashes between communities living in Jubbaland, and al-Shabaab's lasting presence in the region have historically undermined efforts to counter the group. The clan composition across Jubbaland's Gedo, Middle Jubba, and Lower Jubba regions is incredibly diverse. Gedo, located at the southwest corner of Somalia bordering Ethiopia and Kenya, is populated by the Marehan (Darod clan family) which is the largest and most politically and militarily powerful community in the region.⁸¹ Other communities include the Garre and Rahanweyn (both Digil-Mirifle clan family) and Hawiye.⁸² Clashes between communities are endemic in this region, with the Marehaan often clashing with Garre and Rahanweyn clans over power and control of resources. Meanwhile, sub-clan divisions also exist among the Marehaan, leading to frequent clashes.⁸³ The region is also of strategic importance to al-Shabaab due to its shared border with Kenya and Ethiopia. The group draws recruits from this region, especially among the Marehaan which creates divisions among the clan.⁸⁴

Middle Jubba – located in the south of Somalia right between Gedo and Lower Jubba – almost exclusively falls under al-Shabaab control, with the town of Jilib functioning as the group's regional headquarters. The Somali Bantu community is the most populous ethnic community, while the Aulihan (Darood) and the Mohamed Zubier/Ogaden (Darood) clans, residing in the west bank, wield the strongest political and military influence in the region.⁸⁵ Other clans include the Rahanweyn and several Hawiye sub-clans, while the east bank of the region is the most ethnically diverse and complex.⁸⁶ Interclan conflict does occur in Middle Jubba, but al-Shabaab reportedly operates as a stabilizing element, suppressing clashes.⁸⁷

Lower Jubba – located in the southernmost region of Somalia, and its capital, Kismayo – is the de facto seat for the Jubbaland administration. Communities that inhabit the region include the Somali Bantu, Biyomaal (Dir), Tunni (Digil-Mirifle), Mohamed Zubier/Ogaden (Darood), the Gaaljaal, the Harti (Darood), the Somali

⁸⁰ The Somali Dispatch, "Kenyan minister of defense visiting KDF in Kismayo," *The Somali Dispatch*, December 25, 2022, <https://www.somalidispatch.com/latest-news/kenyan-minister-of-defense-visiting-kdf-in-kismayo/>.

⁸¹ European Union Agency for Asylum, Somalia: Security Situation. (Luxembourg: European Union Agency for Asylum, 2023), <https://euaa.europa.eu/publications/somalia-security-situation-february-2023>.

⁸² For more details see European Asylum Support Office, Somalia Security Situation: Country of Origin Information Report. (Luxembourg: European Asylum Support Office, 2021), https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2021_09_EASO_COI_Report_Somalia_Security_situation.pdf.

⁸³ European Union Asylum Agency, "Gedo," *European Union Agency for Asylum*, August 2023, <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-somalia-2023/gedo>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ European Union Agency for Asylum, Somalia: Security Situation.

⁸⁶ European Asylum Support Office, Somalia Security Situation.

⁸⁷ Mohamed Mubarak and Ashley Jackson, *Playing the long game*.

Bajuni ethnic group, among other Darood clans and small numbers of other clans.⁸⁸ Kismayo has a complex community composition and is very diverse in its clan makeup. The Mohamed Zubier/Ogaden clan has political, economic, and military dominance in the capital.⁸⁹ The Jubbaland state regional government maintains control over Kismayo and territories in its immediate surrounding territories, as well as several towns in Lower Jubba, while al-Shabaab controls most of the remote areas.⁹⁰

Long-standing political disputes between the Jubbaland administration, led by President Madobe from the Ogaden, based in Kismayo, and politicians and government officials (predominantly Marehan) based in Gedo, have also undermined efforts to counter al-Shabaab. The Marehan and Ogaden sub-clans have been fighting over control of the strategic port city of Kismayo, and ultimately political control over the region, since the 1990s.⁹¹ Tensions between Gedo politicians and the Jubbaland authorities escalated in 2020 when the federal government, then led by Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmajo,” deployed federal forces in Gedo.⁹² Backed by Marehaan pro-federal local militia, these federal forces clashed with forces allied to Jubbaland authorities displacing over 50,000 people in the region of Gedo.⁹³

Though the recent federal administration of Somali President Mohamud has made greater efforts than his predecessor to build more collaborative relations with regional administrations like Jubbaland, tensions between Marehaan politicians in Gedo and the regional authority of Jubbaland located in Kismayo persist. Amid these ongoing tensions, politicians in Gedo, notably Senator Abdullahi Ismail Fartang and Abdirashid Hassan Abdinur “Janan,” unilaterally announced in March of 2023 their efforts to mobilize local clan militia in Bardhere district of Gedo to participate in the offensive against al-Shabaab in Gedo and Middle Jubba.⁹⁴ Jubbaland’s security minister, General Yusuf Dhumaal, rejected such plans to recruit local militia in the fight against al-Shabaab.⁹⁵ The concern among the regional administration in Jubbaland is that arming local Marehaan militia in Gedo would “tip the balance of power” in favor of the Marehan sub-clan.

As it stands now, the offensive in Jubbaland against al-Shabaab remains disjointed. On the one hand, Jubbaland security forces have continued to conduct military operations against al-Shabaab, at times in collaboration with federal forces,

⁸⁸ European Union Agency for Asylum, “Lower Juba,” *European Union Agency for Asylum*, July 2023, <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-somalia-2023/lower-juba>.

⁸⁹ European Union Agency for Asylum, *Somalia: Security Situation*.

⁹⁰ European Union Agency for Asylum, “Lower Juba.”

⁹¹ ACLED, “Somalia: Counter-Insurgency.”

⁹² International Crisis Group, “Ending the Dangerous Standoff in Southern Somalia,” *International Crisis Group Briefing* 158 (July 2020), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b158-ending-dangerous-standoff-southern-somalia>.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ BBC, “What are the forces being trained in Bardhere that caused controversy in Jubbaland?” *BBC News Somali*, March 13, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/somali/articles/c720leem433o>.

⁹⁵ Garowe Online, “Somalia: Jubaland rejects use of clan militia in Al-Shabaab war,” *Garowe Online*, March 21, 2023, <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-jubaland-rejects-use-of-clan-militia-in-al-shabaab-war>.

without support from local communities in areas of Lower Jubba. Earlier in the year, Jubbaland authorities announced that federal and regional forces had captured an al-Shabaab base in Jana Cabdalle, roughly 52 kilometers northwest of Kismayo.⁹⁶ Later in July 2023, Jubbaland and federal forces managed to enter the al-Shabaab-controlled town of Xagar (Hagar) in the Lower Jubba region.⁹⁷ These are major steps in the offensive as control of Jana Cabdalle base and the potential recapture of Xagar would provide government forces with an advantageous position to attack and push al-Shabaab out of Jilib, an al-Shabaab stronghold, and Buale, the official capital of the Jubbaland state and also the regional capital of Middle Jubba⁹⁸ that has been under al-Shabaab control for over 15 years.⁹⁹

However, without coordinating with local clans in both Gedo and Middle Jubba, questions remain about whether Jubbaland government forces will be able to hold such strategic locales if and when they manage to push al-Shabaab out. Without any meaningful effort to address outstanding regional tensions between the local communities in the region, liberating territories will almost certainly lead to clashes between Jubbaland forces and clan militia in Middle Jubba and Gedo over political control of the territories. As was the case with the clashes that occurred in 2020, this political turmoil will only create avenues for al-Shabaab to benefit from and exploit. Some sort of political settlement and reconciliation is needed for the region before any meaningful discussion can be had about which forces will be involved in holding the territory, and which actors will deliver public safety and governance alternatives to what al-Shabaab has been providing thus far.

South West State – What About Political Settlement and Local Reconciliation?

Offensive operations against al-Shabaab in SWS have been difficult. Al-Shabaab controls wide swathes of rural areas and is able to exert its influence in territories not fully under its immediate control.¹⁰⁰ The African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), Ethiopian forces, and state and federal forces maintain control of main towns in the Bay region (e.g., Baidoa), Bakool region (e.g., Xudur) and Lower Shabelle (e.g., Marka).¹⁰¹ However, frequent attacks by al-Shabaab and the inability of government forces to hold territory has meant that territory often exchanges

⁹⁶ Garowe Online, “Al-Shabaab launches morning raid in Somalia’s Jubbaland,” *Garowe Online*, March 7, 2023, <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/al-shabaab-launches-morning-raid-in-somalia-s-jubaland>.

⁹⁷ Harun Maruf, “New US Airstrikes Kill Al-Shabab Militants,” *Voice of America*, July 09, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/new-us-airstrikes-kill-al-shabab-militants/7173275.html>.

⁹⁸ Middle Jubba is the only region entirely controlled by al-Shabaab.

⁹⁹ Harun Maruf, “Somali Government Forces ‘Repulse’ Al-Shabab Attack, Official Says,” *Voice of America*, March 07, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-government-forces-repulse-al-shabab-attack-official-says/6994090.html>; Harun Maruf, Twitter Post, August 15, 2023, 4:46am, <https://twitter.com/HarunMaruf/status/1677962302492909569>.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Shabaab exerts its influence most notably through its taxation and its attacks on forward operating bases and government-controlled territories.

¹⁰¹ European Union Agency for Asylum, “Somalia: Security Situation.”

hands between al-Shabaab and the government. The group not only controls main supply routes in Bakool and across the FMS, but has also been the main, though not sole, source of armed violence in the region, frequently hitting military bases and territory under government control.¹⁰² Lower Shabelle is the most affected region in terms of violent events and is characterized by the presence of multiple armed groups including al-Shabaab, clan militia (Macawiisley), state and federal forces, ATMIS, and US forces.

Beyond al-Shabaab's influence in the region, offensive operations have also struggled due to inter-clan tensions. Significant clan diversity exists across SWS's three main regions: Bakool, Bay, and Lower Shabelle. Bakool is in the southwest of Somalia and borders Ethiopia. The region is mainly inhabited by the Rahanweyn (Mirifle clan family), while the territory bordering Ethiopia is mainly composed of the Jajele (Hawiye clan family) and the Aulihan (Darod clan family).¹⁰³

Bay region is in the southwest of Somalia and hosts the de-facto capital of SWS, Baidoa.¹⁰⁴ The region is of strategic importance because its roads link Mogadishu, Baidoa, the Gedo region in Jubbaland, as well as the Kenyan border.¹⁰⁵ The Rahanweyn mainly inhabit the northern part of the region, while sub-clans of the Digil occupy the southern areas.¹⁰⁶ Baidoa is mainly inhabited by Mirifle sub-clans, while some Hawiye communities also exist in smaller numbers in the region.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, the region has internal displacement settlements located in and around Baidoa bringing in a large number of displaced persons of clan identities not indigenous to Baidoa.¹⁰⁸

Lastly, Lower Shabelle is along the coast in south Somalia. In addition to its diverse clan make-up, the region is of significant strategic value because it links Mogadishu, Baidoa, and Kismayo in the south of Jubbaland. The region consists of indigenous populations that have pre-colonial roots in the region. This includes communities from the Digil, Hawiye, and smaller numbers of the Biyomaal (a sub-clan of the Dir).¹⁰⁹ The region also includes historic migrants from all clans that gravitated to the region in the colonial period and after independence.¹¹⁰

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ European Union Agency for Asylum, "Bakool," *European Union Agency for Asylum*, August 2023, <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-somalia-2023/bakool>.

¹⁰⁴ The actual capital of South West State is Baraawe in Lower Shabelle, but Baidoa operates as the de-facto.

¹⁰⁵ European Union Agency for Asylum, "Bay," *European Union Agency for Asylum* August 2023, <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-somalia-2023/bay>.

¹⁰⁶ European Union Agency for Asylum, "Somalia: Security Situation."

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ European Union Agency for Asylum, "Bay."

¹⁰⁹ European Union Agency for Asylum, "Lower Shabelle," *European Union Agency for Asylum*, August 2023, <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-somalia-2023/lower-shabelle>.

¹¹⁰ European Union Agency for Asylum, "Lower Shabelle"; European Union Agency for Asylum, Somalia: Security Situation.

This clan diversity, the legacy of state collapse in 1991, and civil war have meant that historical grievances between local communities in the region have endured in the absence of political settlement. In Bakool, Bay, and Lower Shabelle, violent inter-clan clashes have occurred over the use of farmland and natural resources, land tenure, and business competition.¹¹¹ Rivalries between communities have created opportunities for al-Shabaab to exploit for its own benefit — for instance, the rivalry between communities from the Hawiye, Digil, and Dir (particularly the Biyomaal) in Lower Shabelle.¹¹² Recently, state elections have been a major source of political violence, the most controversial occurring in December 2018, when the federal government interfered with the regional elections in SWS,¹¹³ then again in December 2022 when state security forces attacked political opposition clan militia following tensions over the extension of the regional president’s term.¹¹⁴ Tensions also exist between the SWS administration and elites in Lower Shabelle.¹¹⁵

A political agreement in February 2023 managed to cool tensions somewhat in the aftermath of December 2022; however, concerns remain over the procedures and management of the upcoming elections.¹¹⁶ Moreover, economic, political, and security inequality that favor some groups and not others remain in Lower Shabelle, resulting in clan-based cleavages that hinder efforts to mobilize clans against al-Shabaab.¹¹⁷ Meanwhile, distrust exists between the South West State President

¹¹¹ European Union Agency for Asylum, “Bakool,”; EUAA, “Bay”; EUAA, “Lower Shabelle.”

¹¹² European Union Agency for Asylum, “Lower Shabelle.”

¹¹³ Rashid Abdi, “Somalia’s South West State: A New President Installed, a Crisis Inflamed,” *International Crisis Group Commentary*, December 24, 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/somalias-south-west-state-new-president-installed-crisis-inflamed>.

¹¹⁴ Puntland Post, “Tension in the city of Baidoa,” *Puntland Post*, December 23, 2022, <https://puntlandpost.net/2022/12/23/xiisad-ka-taagan-magaalada-baydhabo/>; Garowe Online, “Somalia: South West parliament extends Lafta-Gareen’s term by one year,” *Garowe Online*, April 20, 2022, <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-southwest-parliament-extends-lafta-gareens-term-by-one-more-year>; Somali Security Brief, “Gulf of Aden Security Review,” *Critical Threats*, December 23, 2022, https://www.criticalthreats.org/briefs/gulf-of-aden-security-review/gulf-of-aden-security-review-december-23-2022#_ednc7252e874ac65a5a70f70c93896c432411.

¹¹⁵ Somali Dialogue Platform, “Establishing an inclusive and sustainable political settlement in South West State: Opportunities for re-establishing dialogue” (Rift Valley Institute, Somali Dialogue Platform, 2023), <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/establishing-inclusive-and-sustainable-political-settlement-south-west-state-opportunities-re-establishing-dialogue>.

¹¹⁶ The tenure of SWS President Abdiasis Laftagareen came to an end in 2022 but was then extended to November 2023. Political dialogue is still ongoing about the timing and conduct of the elections, but a recent communique from potential presidential candidates from SWS made clear that come November 1, 2023, the administration of Laftagareen would no longer be recognized as in control. Somali Dialogue Platform, “Establishing an inclusive and sustainable political settlement in South West State”; Somali Dispatch, “Somalia: South-West Presidential Candidates demand start of election process,” *Somali Dispatch*, September 13, 2023, <https://www.somalidispach.com/latest-news/somalia-south-west-presidential-candidates-demand-start-of-election-process/>

¹¹⁷ Stig Jarle Hansen, “Can Somalia’s New Offensive Defeat al-Shabaab.”

Abdiaziz Hassan Mohamed (Laftagareen)¹¹⁸ and the federal President Mohamud. Laftagareen was allied with Mohamud's opposition during the 2022 election for Somalia's presidency, while Mohamud's local allies in SWS have been opposed to Laftagareen's extension of his presidential term.¹¹⁹ These political rivalries undermine efforts to mount a coordinated offensive against al-Shabaab in the region.

For Operation Black Lion to have any long-term meaningful success in SWS, inclusive, sustainable political settlement is needed. This will take time to achieve and is unlikely to occur within the ambitious timeline the government has set for the offensive.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, such a settlement should address political tensions around the election, as well as longstanding grievances, particularly in Lower Shabelle. As it stands now, without meaningful reconciliation and settlement, offensive operations will continue to be hampered by inter-clan disputes that al-Shabaab capitalizes on, tensions over territorial control over liberated territory, and long-term concerns over competition for political control.

Section Three: Operation Black Lion – Who Holds? Who Builds?

On August 17, 2023, the President of Somalia, Hassan Mohamud, proclaimed that his government would eliminate al-Shabaab or diminish its influence down to only small pockets within 5 months.¹²¹ This bold statement highlights the resolve of the federal government to move forward with its offensive in SWS and Jubbaland.

However, for the offensive to yield long-term success, the government needs a clear strategy that addresses the role of FMS forces as well as local militia in not only fighting al-Shabaab but also holding and governing recovered territories. As Samira Gaid explains, "Without such a strategy, there is a high risk the current effort will eventually falter. Arguably, it is only by creating community ownership of

¹¹⁸ Laftagareen came to power after the former federal administration led by Farmajo (2017-2022) interfered in the regional elections in 2018. The front runner at the time was a former leader in the al-Shabaab insurgency, Mukhtar Robow "Abu Mansur." Robow was arrested by the federal government, and Laftagareen was installed as president. Today, Robow is the current minister of religious affairs for the federal government and was placed in the role by the current federal President Mohamud.

¹¹⁹ Somali Dialogue Platform, Establishing an inclusive and sustainable political settlement in South West State.

¹²⁰ The government's plan is to defeat al-Shabaab from its strongholds by the end of 2024. Moreover, in August 2023 Somalia's government claimed that it would diminish al-Shabaab's influence or completely eradicate the group within 5 months. See James Barnett, "Faltering Lion"; Harun Maruf, Twitter Post, August 17, 2023, 5:46pm, <https://twitter.com/HarunMaruf/status/1692306866573852795?s=20>.

¹²¹ Harun Maruf, Twitter Post, August 17, 2023, 5:46pm, <https://twitter.com/HarunMaruf/status/1692306866573852795?s=20>.

security in federal states with a significant al-Shabaab presence that lasting progress can be made.”¹²²

A national security pact agreed to in 2017, adopted in London, provided for, albeit vaguely, the development of a national security model and architecture (NSA) for Somalia that involved the FMS.¹²³ The architecture envisaged two layers of security, one at the federal level and another at the Federal Member State level. The federal level strategy calls for the national army to be spread across different sectors of the state and with some input from the FMS reporting to the Danab, as well as federal police.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, the member states were to have their own state-level police forces, with elements of the police known as Darwish¹²⁵ operating as a standby force that could be activated during crises.¹²⁶ However, political tensions between the previous federal administration led by Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmajo”, and the governments of the FMS undermined the further development and implementation of the national security architecture. The current administration of President Mohamud has made efforts to revamp the NSA, with multiple iterations, and that process remains ongoing.¹²⁷ The challenge that remains now is the continued focus on developing the national army and less attention paid to forces operating at the member state and local level.

This is a common challenge for security sector reform (SSR) and security force assistance (SFA) efforts in conflict-affected African states more broadly.¹²⁸ SSR and SFA have almost invariably been directed toward state capitals, with much of that

¹²² Samira Gaid, “The 2022 Somali Offensive Against al-Shabaab,” 35.

¹²³ “London Somalia Conference 2017: Security Pact,” May 11, 2017, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82170d40f0b62305b926d4/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact.pdf>.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ The term Darawish or Daraawiish is drawn from the pre-1991 rural police mobile force in Somalia. See Colin Robinson, “State-Level Military Forces Can Potentially Turn Tide in War Against al-Shabaab,” *IPI Global Observatory*, November 7, 2019, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2019/11/state-level-military-forces-potentially-turn-tide-war-al-shabaab/>.

¹²⁶ “London Somalia Conference 2017: Security Pact.”

¹²⁷ Sahan Foundation, “Navigating Security in Somalia with Rashid Abdi.”

¹²⁸ SFA refers to efforts designed to reform, construct or reconstruct security institutions, and their oversight and management bodies. Other terms have been used to describe these efforts, including: security sector reform; train, advise, assist; defense sector reform, military/security assistance, among others. Despite some distinctions, at their core, the terms refer to efforts designed to reform, construct or reconstruct security institutions, and their oversight and management bodies. For more discussion on SFA and related terms see Jahara Matisek and Michael W. Fowler “The Paradox of Security Force Assistance after the Rise and Fall of the Islamic State in Syria–Iraq.” *Special Operations Journal* 6 no. 2 (2020): 118–138; Nadine Ansorg and Eleanor Gordon “Co-operation, Contestation and Complexity in Post-Conflict Security Sector Reform,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 13 no. 1 (2019): 2–24; Stephen Biddle, Julia Macdonald and Ryan Baker, “Small Footprint, Small Payoff: The Military Effectiveness of Security Force Assistance,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41 nos. 1–2 (2018): 89–142; Paul Jackson, “Security Sector Reform and State Building,” *Third World Quarterly* 32 no. 10 (2011): 1803–1822.

assistance going towards the buildup of central military forces.¹²⁹ However, after more than a decade of SFA/SSR efforts on the continent, there have been few success stories¹³⁰ and publicized failures in other theaters such as Afghanistan and Iraq.¹³¹ Accordingly, critics have cautioned against state-centered approaches that only engage the center as the sovereign state and prioritize national military reform at the expense of (re)building regional and local governance and security capabilities.¹³² Recognizing that governance, public authority, and security tend to be contested, with the central government rarely able to win the loyalty and support of most of the population due to deep social-political cleavages, empirical attention has in recent years moved beyond the center towards regions at the periphery, further away from the capital and its influence and into areas of limited statehood.¹³³ Evidence suggests that local forces (including police forces), that are garrisoned where they are recruited, are representative of the communities they serve, are easily accessible, are procedurally fair in their interactions with the public; and/or are effective at securing the territory, enjoy public confidence, cooperation (particularly information sharing) and compliance due to their kinship

¹²⁹ Colin D. Robinson and Jahara Matisek, "Military advising and assistance in Somalia: fragmented interveners, fragmented Somali military forces," *Defence Studies* 21, no. 2 (2021): 181-203; Nadine Ansorg, "Security sector reform in Africa: Donor approaches versus local needs," *Contemporary Security Policy* 38, no. 1 (2017): 129-144.

¹³⁰ Paul Jackson, "Introduction: Second-Generation Security Sector Reform," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 12, no. 1 (2018): 1-10.

¹³¹ Colin D. Robinson, "What Explains the Failure of U.S. Army Reconstruction in Afghanistan?" *Defense and Security Analysis* 34, no. 3 (2018): 249-266; Øystein H. Rolandsen, Maggie Dwyer and William Reno, "Security Force Assistance to Fragile States: A Framework of Analysis," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 15, no. 5 (2021): 563-579; Emily Knowles and Jahara Matisek, "Western Security Force Assistance in Weak States," *The RUSI Journal* 164, no. 3 (2019): 10-21; Colin D. Robinson, "Rebuilding armies in southern Somalia: What currently should donors realistically aim for?," *Conflict, Security & Development* 21, no. 3 (2021): 313-336.

¹³² Colin D. Robinson, "Rebuilding armies in southern Somalia"; Colin D. Robinson and Jahara Matisek, "Assistance to Locally Appropriate Military Forces in Southern Somalia"; Emily Knowles and Jahara Matisek, "Western Security Force Assistance in Weak States"; Nadine Ansorg, "Security sector reform in Africa."

¹³³ Antonio Giustozzi, 'Auxiliary Irregular Forces in Afghanistan: 1978–2008', in Michael A Innes (ed.), *Making Sense of Proxy Wars: States, Surrogates and the Use of Force* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012), pp. 89–108; Sabrina Karim, "Relational State Building in Areas of Limited Statehood: Experimental Evidence on the Attitudes of the Police," *American Political Science Review* 114, no. 2 (2020): 536-551; Sam Wilkins, "From Security to Reconciliation: How Nigeria Can Win Its Bloody War with Boko Haram," *War on the Rocks*, December 8, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/12/from-security-to-reconciliation-how-nigeria-can-win-its-bloody-war-with-boko-haram/>; Sabrina Karim, "Restoring Confidence in Post-Conflict Security Sectors: Survey Evidence from Liberia on Female Ratio Balancing Reforms," *British Journal of Political Science* 49 (2019): 799–821; Robert Blair, Sabrina Karim and Benjamin S. Morse, "Establishing the Rule of Law in Weak and War-torn States: Evidence from a Field Experiment with the Liberian National Police." *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 3 (2019): 641-657; Joel S. Migdal, "The State in Society: An Approach to Struggles for Domination." in *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World*, eds. Joel S. Migdal, Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 7–36. Peter Albrecht and Paul Jackson, "State-Building Through Security Sector Reform: The UK Intervention in Sierra Leone," *Peacebuilding* 2, no. 1 (2014): 83–99; Seth G Jones, *The Strategic Logic of Militia* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2012).

and cultural ties.¹³⁴ Moreover, due to their knowledge of the terrain, these local forces can have a comparative advantage over federal forces operating in their immediate vicinity. Accordingly, appropriate local forces can play a consequential role in the offensive against al-Shabaab, and in the long-term stability of territories recovered from the group.

However, at this current juncture, the federal government lacks a strategy to collectively leverage regional and local forces operating in Jubbaland and SWS to hold territory and deliver security and justice in the long term. Across both FMS, security forces are fragmented. In Jubbaland, the ruling administration led by President Ahmed “Madobe” Mohamed Islam has three forces: the Jubbaland Security Force (JSF), also known as Daarawiish (Darwish) that was originally part of President Madobe’s Ras Kamboni militia; a regional police force; and an armed intelligence force known as the Jubbaland Intelligence and Security Agency (JISA), also formerly part of Ras Kamboni. These forces have enjoyed some demonstrable successes. JISA is credited with securing Kismayo after al-Shabaab was pushed out in 2013 and the regional administration consolidated its control over the city.¹³⁵ The JSF has also been engaged in a stop-start offensive against al-Shabaab in Middle Jubba and has successfully repulsed several al-Shabaab attacks in recent years.¹³⁶ The regional police for their part have provided a visible presence within Kismayo that meets the public’s expectations.¹³⁷ In fact, various reports suggest that the local populace in Kismayo sees the force as fair and effective.¹³⁸

However, these forces’ sphere of influence is limited to Kismayo city and territories in its vicinity. Moreover, there is concern among local communities that these forces are part of the Ogaden clan’s dominance in the region.¹³⁹ Coupled with political tensions between Jubbaland officials in Kismayo and those in Gedo, as well as the latter mobilizing their own clan militia for the offensive against al-Shabaab,

¹³⁴ Alice Hills, “The Dynamics of Prototypical Police Forces: Lessons from Two Somali Cities,” *International Affairs* 96, no. 6 (2020): 1527–1546; Colin D. Robinson and Jahara Matisek, “Assistance to Locally Appropriate Military Forces in Southern Somalia.”; Daisy Muibu, “Normative and instrumental judgements of policing and their relative impacts on police empowerment during protracted conflict,” *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 16, no. 2 (2023): 124-147; Daisy Muibu and Ifeoluwa Olawole, “Does representation matter: examining officer inclusion, citizen cooperation and police empowerment in a divided society,” *Conflict, Security & Development* 22, no. 2 (2022): 191-220; Colin D. Robinson and Jahara Matisek, “Assistance to Locally Appropriate Military Forces in Southern Somalia.”

¹³⁵ Ken Menkhaus, *Dadaab Returnee Conflict Assessment* (København: Danish Demining, 2017), <https://regionaldss.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/dadaab-returnee-conflict-assessment-ddg-2017.pdf>; Daisy Muibu, “Police Officer Experiences with Community Policing and Views on Counterterrorism in Somalia,” *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 13, no. 4 (2022): 407-434.

¹³⁶ Colin D. Robinson and Jahara Matisek, “Assistance to Locally Appropriate Military Forces in Southern Somalia.”

¹³⁷ Alice Hills, “The Dynamics of Prototypical Police Forces.”

¹³⁸ Daisy Muibu and Ifeoluwa Olawole, “Does representation matter.”; Daisy Muibu, “Normative and instrumental judgements of policing.”

¹³⁹ Daisy Muibu, “Police empowerment and police militarisation in times of protracted conflict: Examining public perceptions in southern Somalia,” *South African Journal of International Affairs* 28, no. 2, (2021): 233-261.

it is unclear which forces in the region will be used to hold and build recovered territories in Middle Jubba and Gedo.

Similarly, South West State has its version of a rural clan guard, but on a larger scale, known as the Daraawiish but later renamed the SWS-Special Police Force (SWS-SPF). Initially intended to draw recruits from each of the nine districts that make up Bay and Bokool, resource shortages, salary deductions, political tensions with the federal government, and the tumultuous 2018 state election saw the force begin to disintegrate.¹⁴⁰ SWS President Abdiaziz Laftagareen, who took office in 2019, also began to send many fighters to join units belonging to federal government forces in Mogadishu and Lower Shabelle, where their effectiveness was minimal largely due to a lack of stabilization activities, limited support, and al-Shabaab's ability to hit forward operating bases in semi-isolated regions of Lower Shabelle.¹⁴¹ A smaller number of SWS-SPF still remain in areas of Bay, however without a clear strategy for mobilizing these forces to hold recovered territory it is unclear how much of an impact they can have.

For the second phase of the offensive to be successful, territory needs to be held sustainably. Forces like the JSF and SWS-SPF may be useful in supporting the government's offensive operations in the absence of a clan uprising. However, at a minimum, for the offensive to be successful, there is a need for basic provision of policing services in recovered territories. For this to be possible, appropriate local forces need to be trained to perform policing duties. Relying solely on the SNA, Danab forces, and ATMIS, who lack appropriate community ties, local terrain knowledge, and a policing mandate, to hold territory is not enough, and arguably makes them "sitting ducks" for al-Shabaab retaliatory attacks. Previous operations, such as the joint SNA and AMISOM Operation Badbaado in Lower Shabelle (2019-2020) suffered similar challenges due to the lack of a comprehensive strategy that addressed the issue of appropriate holding forces. The operation managed to establish a string of forward operating bases in semi-isolated villages that were ill-supported, resulting in several SNA brigades "being badly battered in the process."¹⁴² Moreover, though FMS forces in SWS (SWS Special Police) and Jubbaland (JSF) have the potential to counter al-Shabaab, these forces operate more as paramilitary forces, lacking the policing mandate needed to promote the rule of law and deliver day-to-day security to the public. Accordingly, even if these forces are used to recover and hold territory, they are unequipped to deliver the policing duties needed to legitimize the state in the eyes of communities that have lived in al-Shabaab-governed areas for long periods.

¹⁴⁰ Colin D. Robinson and Jahara Matisek, "Assistance to Locally Appropriate Military Forces in Southern Somalia."

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Colin Robinson, "New Name, but Little Sign of Change: The Revised Agreement on the African Union Mission in Somalia," *IPI Global Observatory*, January 27, 2022, <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/01/revised-agreement-on-african-union-mission-in-somalia/>.

As the national security architecture is being re-negotiated, efforts should be made to not only exploit the significant potential FMS forces like the JSF and SWS Special Police have in degrading al-Shabaab, but also refocus efforts to build local police forces within each FMS. Programs such as the Reestablishing Basic Policing Programme (2014-2017) and later the Joint Police Programme (2019 to present) exist and have resulted in the development of local police forces in cities like Kismayo (Jubbaland) and Baidoa (SWS), and to a lesser extent Jowhar and Beledwayne (Hirshabelle). Such programs have had meaningful impacts in their locales, particularly Kismayo and Baidoa, meeting the milestones identified by donors (e.g., the United Kingdom) and addressing the concerns raised by community members.¹⁴³ Such efforts should be prioritized and expanded moving forward.

Conclusion

As the government continues to consolidate its gains in central Somalia and executes its plans to move forward with Operation Black Lion, greater attention needs to be paid to two key concerns. First are the political implications the community dynamics in southern member states will have on the prospects of long-term success in the offensive. Without meaningful political settlement and reconciliation of the long-standing tensions between communities living in Jubbaland and SWS, liberating territories will almost certainly lead to clashes between local communities, as well as between member state forces and local clan militia, over political control of the territories.

The second key concern is the lack of a clear strategy for holding and governing liberated territories. As the national security architecture continues to be revamped, more attention should be devoted to the role that FMS and local forces can play in holding recovered territories and delivering longer-term security. Such forces, knowledgeable of the local terrain, and that have kinship and cultural ties within the locales they operate in, can leverage a comparative advantage in delivering security to local communities and gaining local confidence. However, without a clear strategy for engaging member state and local forces as important components of a broader national security strategy, offensive efforts will be disjointed, yield short-term tactical successes, and result in the sort of political rivalries and fragmentation that al-Shabaab benefits from.

Addressing the need for political settlement or reconciliation and a national strategy for holding and governing recovered territory highlights the importance of identifying what success means for the current offensive. At this current juncture, the federal government is measuring its success in terms of settlements liberated and the number of al-Shabaab fighters eliminated. However, liberating territory

¹⁴³ Alice Hills, "The Dynamics of Prototypical Police Forces."

does not automatically earn public confidence in the government offensive, particularly due to fear of al-Shabaab reprisals and historic poor governance alternatives provided by the state. Al-Shabaab on its part is fighting to establish control over the population, clan by clan, without necessarily attempting to establish control of more towns and settlements. Indeed, the group is able to exercise authority in major urban centers, including Dhuusamareeb (Galmudug state) and Mogadishu, without a visible presence in those territories. Accordingly, addressing the local clan tensions that benefit al-Shabaab and establishing a clear strategy to not only clear, but also effectively hold and govern territory more clearly counters al-Shabaab's population-focused efforts.

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