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The Shaping of the Somali National Security Architecture

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Abbreviations

ATMIS	African Union Transition Mission in Somalia
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
FMS	Federal Member State
FMSs	Federal Member States
<i>Macawisley</i>	<i>(Language)</i> informal local clan militias; lit. those who wear <i>macawis</i> , a Somali sarong
NCC	National Consultative Council
NISA	National Intelligence and Security Agency
NSArch	National Security Architecture
NSC	National Security Council
SNA	Somali National Army
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
TNG	Transitional National Government

Executive summary

This policy paper assesses the revised National Security Architecture (NSArch) in Somalia, pinpointing critical deficiencies and presenting policy recommendations to fortify the national security framework. Central to this analysis are questions surrounding the effectiveness of the NSArch, its reception among Federal Member States (FMSs) and the evolving role of the *Macawisley* (informal local clan militias; lit. those who wear *macawis*, a Somali sarong), which play a central role in the fight against al-Shabaab in some Federal Member States (FMSs).

Introduced in May 2017, the NSArch aims to manage the complex security dynamics in Somalia strategically. However, internal discord between former president Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo and the FMS overshadowed its implementation. This culminated in the 2017 Kismayo summit when FMS leaders formed a united front against the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). These political complexities persisted until President Farmaajo's departure in May 2022. Subsequent leadership under President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has sought to revitalize the dialogue through the National Consultative Council (NCC), an intra-FGS–FMS platform, leading to the revision of the NSArch¹.

A central finding highlights the varied reception of the NSArch among FMS, reflecting political alignments, historical clan rivalries and economic dependencies. This diversity underscores the delicate interplay between national security objectives and regional interests, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach and uncovering the challenges of inclusivity. In March 2023, for example, Puntland withdrew from the NCC.

This policy paper also underscores the challenge posed by the practical utilization of entities such as the NCC, National Security Council (NSC) and the *Macawisley*, which are not explicitly outlined in the provisional constitution. This finding raises concerns about the constitutional adherence to FGS security strategies, emphasizing the intricate balance required to maintain legitimacy. The introduction of *Macawisley* as a response to the al-Shabaab threat has emerged as a central force in the Somali security landscape. However, their temporary integration into FGS armed forces is not in alignment with the NSArch and lacks clear strategy, causing operational and political challenges for the Somali National Army (SNA). This is even more pertinent when, at the end of this year, the UN-mandated AU forces in Somalia – ATMIS – are, in their entirety, scheduled to depart.

Beyond these key findings, the policy paper offers several recommendations that address the varied reception of the NSArch, emphasize constitutional adherence and extend to fostering cooperative frameworks between the FGS and FMSs, navigating clan dynamics within the SNA, and ensuring a balance between centralized security structures and regional autonomy.

This policy paper advocates for a nuanced, cooperative, adaptive approach to national security. By addressing the identified challenges and considering the pointed recommendations, policy makers will be better positioned to advance the emergence of a more cohesive, effective, and resilient security framework, which is essential for national stability and responding to evolving security threats.

¹ See page eight for in-depth explanation of legal standing of and role of NSArch not to mention the challenges surrounding this non-constitutional yet omnipresent FGS-FMSs decision making platform .

Findings

- **Varied reception of NSArch exists:** The reception of the NSArch varies among different FMS, primarily influenced by their political alignment or misalignments with the FGS, historical clan rivalries and economic dependencies.
- **Constitution vs. improvised national security vision:** While the Somali provisional constitution envisions a strong role for the federal government in national security, the practical utilization of entities not explicitly outlined in the constitution (such as the NCC, NSC and the Macawisley) provides fodder for opposition and other disputing parties to accuse the FGS of disregarding constitutional requirements.
- **The Galkacyo SNA: a possible blueprint:** The success of the Joint SNA Forces in Galkacyo presents a model for future SNA integration, where equitable representation and cooperation between different clans and FMS is key to sustainable and FGS-led security outcomes.
- **Extrajudicial but effective Macawisley:** The Macawisley fighters have become a key grassroots force in combating al-Shabaab, filling gaps in formal security in two FMSs. The short-term integration of these local clan militias into the federal government strategy also presents a challenge, as the emergence of uninformed state-sponsored clan militias is neither in the constitution nor the 2023 revised NSArch.
- **Security versus local sentiments:** The SNA–Southwest police conflict in Barawe underscores the imperative for developing professional security apparatus and a balanced and sensitive approach to deploying SNA forces. It highlights the importance of the SNA being able to reflect the diverse Somali population, respect local clan demographics and be cognizant of historical grievances to prevent exacerbating tensions.
- **International and domestic pressures have proven beneficial:** The ATMIS drawdown and calls for a unified NSArch have spurred the FGS to produce the revised security strategy, a move crucial for international support. In the near term, such consensus played a critical role in resource mobilization, such as the summit in Washington, DC and the lifting of the arms embargo. Yet for success, the FGS must inclusively engage all parties, especially Puntland, now the only FMS opposing federal government efforts. As al-Shabaab retains significant territorial control and Somaliland remains autonomous, the cooperation of the remaining FMS is essential for the FGS to project itself as a body that genuinely represents the majority of Somalia.

Methodology

This policy paper is based on a comprehensive desk review, with a focus on previous articles and analysis of the security architecture in Somalia, the National Security Architecture Pact of 2017 and the revised 2023 sequel, the Somali constitution, reports and articles on Somali history that are related to the security situation, relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and various position papers. The desk review also expanded to include media reports and news dating back to 2005; however, most are from between 2017 and 2023.

To complement the desk review, 17 interviews were conducted with government officials (both from the FGS and various FMSs), current commanders and other relevant security experts between September 2023 and November 2023. In combination, the comprehensive desk study and the interview allow for both a mapping of the official security framework and a better understanding of the perspectives of key stakeholders.

The following sections provide an in-depth analysis of Somalia National Security Architecture. It begins with a historical background and delves into the fragmented process of establishing Somali federalism, exploring its evolution and current challenges. The paper scrutinizes various aspects of the national security framework, including the role of the National Consultative Council (NCC) and the interplay between the constitution and security policies. A critical analysis is presented on the Federal Government of Somalia's (FGS) approach towards national security architecture. An exploration of the wider Federal Member States (FMSs) perceptions towards the security architecture is also discussed, highlighting the complexities in sub-national dynamics. Furthermore, the paper discusses the role of emergent militias such as Macawisley in national security, examining clan dynamics and their implications.

Finally, the study assesses collaboratively develop units, like the Joint SNA Forces of Galkacyo that FGS, Puntland and Galmudug co-created, as potential blueprints for future security strategies. The brief also looked at the SNA's recent tense interaction with Southwest State, which has been the opposite of the Galkacyo experience. The conclusion synthesizes key findings, offering practical recommendations for enhancing Somalia's national security framework.

Historical background

Somalia's NSArch in 2017 was presented to confront the security challenges in the country within its federal framework.² This initiative is a collaborative effort between the FGS and the FMSs. International partners interested in helping Somalia create a comprehensive and resilient national security strategy also backed the Somalia security architecture. The resulting framework is intended to foster extensive cooperation, encapsulating federal leadership aspirations and addressing FMS worries. The pact serves as a detailed manual for structuring the Somali military, police and other security apparatus, defining composition, command and control, and addressing financing roles and responsibilities of these institutions.³

The NSArch faced substantial obstacles from its outset. President Mohamed Farmaajo took office amid an aggressive insurgency from al-Shabaab and a climate of assertive FMS leaders who sought autonomy to the point of forging their own foreign relations.⁴ Three months into his term, President Farmaajo and the leaders of the five FMS formally approved this federal security accord. Endorsed at the UK-sponsored London Somalia Conference,⁵ the agreement attracted international backing as a cornerstone for Somali governance and international support alignment. Escalating disagreements between the president and FMS leaders overshadowed the pact, however. This culminated in October 2017 with a summit of FMS leaders in Kismayo, where they formed an alliance to coordinate their opposition to the FGS. FGS–FMS political infighting loomed large over Farmaajo's presidency. Farmaajo administration and the leaders of Galmudug, Puntland and Jubaland openly clashed, which led to persistent conflicts in these regions.

President Mohamed Farmaajo sought to overcome the political and security realities of Somalia that practically confined the FGS to Mogadishu. At the same time, the FMS operated largely autonomously from the FGS, with substantial territory controlled by al-Shabaab.⁶ The FMS were equally resistant to their powers being reduced by the president, whom they perceived as a centralist leader. Despite the potential advantages of the NSArch, it was widely seen as the product of external actors foisted upon the Somali people.⁷

The fallout from 2017 federal election exacerbated the underlying power struggle. President Farmaajo's leadership strategy, governance style, expectations and vision of other political actors in the capital did not align,

2 'About the London Somalia Conference 2017', *GOV.UK*, Accessed 29 January 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/london-somalia-conference-2017/about>.

3 Somalia National Security Council; Somalia's Political Agreement On National Security Architecture, *GOV.UK*, Accessed 29 October 2023, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82170d40f0b62305b926d4/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact.pdf>

4 'The UAE, perceiving the Somali government of President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmaajo" as too close to Qatar and keen to protect years of investment, has deepened its relations with the governments of Somalia's regions, or federal states.' See: 'The United Arab Emirates in the Horn of Africa', International Crisis Group, 6 November 2018. Accessed 29 January 2024, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/united-arab-emirates/b65-united-arab-emirates-horn-africa>.

5 According to the host, conference objectives were helping Somalia attain improved security, political reform and governance, economic development, humanitarian response and new partnerships, *GOV.UK*, 'About the London Somalia Conference 2017'.

6 'Somalia chides its regions for cutting ties with Qatar', *Al Jazeera*, 22 September 2017, Accessed 29 January 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/9/22/somalia-chides-its-regions-for-cutting-ties-with-qatar>.

7 'Communiqué', London Conference Somalia 11 May 2017, Accessed 29 January 2024, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82b276ed915d74e34031b7/london-somalia-conference-2017-communique.pdf>.

intensifying existing tensions.⁸ Unlike previous power shifts driven by clan coalitions, Farmaajo (with support from Qatar)⁹ sought to centralize authority in the capital. He brought a new generation of politicians and security officers to the fore, orchestrating regime changes in FMS that opposed him (Hirshabelle in August 2017,¹⁰ Southwest in November 2018¹¹ and Galmudug 2021–2022),¹² and replacing them with allies.¹³ By spring 2017, these moves had placed Farmaajo in opposition to all FMS leaders, a significant faction of the parliament and most political groupings in Somalia, including past presidents and their allies.¹⁴

Complications intensified with the constitutional principle of federalism, a cornerstone of the Somali provisional constitution. The 2023 NSArch revision, which expanded the size of the SNA and the national police force, also concentrated command and control predominantly within the federal government. The National Security Council – made up of FGS and FMS presidents, the prime minister, his deputy, security chiefs, and the mayor of Mogadishu – was designated as the pivotal body for security management.¹⁵ Despite NSArch’s design, the constitution prescribes distinct security responsibilities for federal and state entities, including the bicameral parliament, the council of ministers, the presidency and municipal governance such as the office of the mayor of Mogadishu.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the newly established NCC redefines the Somali political framework. The NCC bills itself as the primary national authority responsible for all contentious issues, particularly security. Consequently, this structure (the NCC, that is) downplayed the significance of the cabinet and the yet-to-be-formed and constitutionally-mandated inclusive National Security Commission in security discussions. The self-assignment of executive functions to non-constitutionally recognized entities, such as the National Consultative Council and its offspring, the National Security Council, predisposes Somalia to political contention and constitutional dilemmas.

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- 8 ‘Somali ex-leader says soldiers attacked his home, blames president’, *Reuters*, 25 April 2021, Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/supporters-somali-president-clash-with-opponents-residents-say-2021-04-25/>.
- 9 ‘Somalia turns down \$80m to cut ties with Qatar’, *Middle East Monitor*, 12 June 2017, Accessed 1 December 2023, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20170612-somalia-turns-down-80m-to-cut-ties-with-qatar/>.
- 10 ‘Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia (S/2017/751)’, *Reliefweb*, 5 September 2017, Accessed 1 December 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/report-secretary-general-somalia-s2017751>
- 11 ‘Somalia Politics: Influential regional president Sharif Aden resigns’, *CGTN*, 14 November 2018, Accessed 1 December 2023, https://news.cgtn.com/news/7a456a4e79494464776c6d636a4e6e62684a4856/share_p.html.
- 12 FGS leaders ousted both Galmudug president Ahmed Duale Gelle (Haaf) in 2020 and the Ahlu Sunna Wa Jamee’a Sufi group (which controlled parts of Galmudug) in 2021.
- 13 New York Times, ‘The Bureaucrat from Buffalo Who Pushed Somalia to the Brink’, *New York Times*, 30 April 2021, Accessed 1 December 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/30/world/africa/somalia-president.html>.
- 14 ‘Farmaajo government tries to block former presidents flights’, *Somali Dispatch*, 10 November 2019, Accessed 1 December 2023, <https://www.somalidispach.com/featured/farmaajo-government-tries-to-block-former-presidents-flights/>.
- 15 Somalia National Security Council; Somalia’s Political Agreement On National Security Architecture, GOV.UK, Accessed 29 October 2023, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82170d40f0b62305b926d4/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact.pdf>
- 16 Article 1 of constitution of Somalia states: ‘Somalia is a federal, sovereign, and democratic republic founded on inclusive representation of the people, a multiparty system and social justice. . . . All power is vested in the people and can only be exercised in accordance with the Constitution and the law and through the relevant institutions. It is prohibited for a person or a section of the public to claim the sovereignty of the Federal Republic of Somalia, or to use it for their personal interest.’ Article 3, which the constitution asserts cannot be changed, states: ‘The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Somalia promotes . . . the separation of powers between the legislature, executive and an independent judiciary, in order to ensure accountability’. [University of Minnesota, Human Rights Library, <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/Somalia-Constitution2012.pdf?>]

As we shall explain in detail, the 2023 Somalia National Security Architecture (NSArch) represents a significant evolution from its 2017 predecessor, marking a formalized agreement between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the majority of Federal Member States (FMSs), excluding Puntland. Some aspects of this iteration have been incorporated into decisions by the National Consultative Council (NCC), such as the December 2022 division of responsibilities among the FGS and FMSs. Additionally, other components of the NSArch have been enacted into legislation; a case in point is the 2023 National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) law, which aligns with the NSArch's revised vision by centralizing security roles under the FGS. Unlike previous frameworks, which were often short-lived due to political shifts, the legal stature of some aspects of the revised NSArch, as well as the adoption of other aspects by the NCC, indicates the durable nature of the new NSArch and its influence on Somalia's governance structure. Furthermore, the ongoing efforts to revise and finalize the provisional constitution and the FGS's role in driving this review, with the potential incorporation of NSArch elements, suggest the possibility of further institutionalizing the NSArch.

The fragmented journey to Somali federalism

The Somali journey to federalism is intricately connected to its post-civil war reconstitution, a challenging undertaking initiated after the collapse of the state in 1991. During this period, the nation fragmented into clan-centric fiefdoms, leading to the emergence of self-declared autonomous regions such as Somaliland in 1993 and Puntland in 1998. International efforts to broker peace have resulted in short-lived and fragile administrations, with the 2000 Arta peace conference in Djibouti establishing the Transitional National Government (TNG). However, TNG authority was mainly confined to parts of Mogadishu but met resistance from warlords in the city and the leadership in Puntland.¹⁷

Relentless power struggles and the establishment of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004 followed.¹⁸ This attempt at creating a federal Somalia was immediately beset by internal conflict.¹⁹ The brief ascendancy of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU)²⁰ and its subsequent displacement by Ethiopian forces sowed the seeds for the al-Shabaab insurgency.²¹ Amid the turbulence, the only existing FMS, Puntland, was becoming increasingly skeptical of the federal arrangement. Sentiments in Puntland, represented by politicians, media outlets and elites (including the diaspora), were marked by growing distrust toward the central government. This skepticism stemmed from historical grievances and was intensified as Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, the embattled TFG president from Puntland, who faced significant opposition was forced to resign.²² Puntland perceived him as being unfairly undermined, particularly in the face of resistance from politicians based in Mogadishu and the ongoing Islamist insurgency. This indicates how the Somali journey to federalism is intertwined with intricate and historical grievances and clan loyalties.

This backdrop frames the current impasse between the FGS and Puntland, with the latter adamant about adhering to its interpretation of constitutional principles. The FGS and some other states claim Puntland uses a narrow, selective interpretation and application of the constitution. Faced with urgent security threats such as the al-Shabaab insurgency, the looming withdrawal of African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) forces and the pressure to deliver results in limited timeframes, FGS leaders have been compelled to resort to unconventional strategies, including leveraging clan militias. These dynamics underline the tension between the politically driven call for constitutionalism and the practical security-driven approach to governance and politics, including the politics of security, in a fragile state.

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- 17 By 2001, all factions opposing the TNG established the Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC). For more information, see: 'SRRC to organise reconciliation conference', *The New Humanitarian*, 9 April 2001, Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/19979/somalia-srrc-organise-reconciliation-conference>.
 - 18 'Somalia: Truce agreement signed at Eldoret conference', *Reliefweb*, 28 October 2002, Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-truce-agreement-signed-eldoret-conference>.
 - 19 'MPs wounded as fighting breaks out during peacekeeping debate', *The New Humanitarian*, 18 March 2005, Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/report/53473/somalia-mps-wounded-fighting-breaks-out-during-peacekeeping-debate>.
 - 20 Cedric Barnes and Harun Hassan, 'The Rise and Fall of Mogadishu's Islamic Courts', AFP BP 07/02, Chatham House: London, April 2007, Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Africa/bpsomalia0407.pdf>.
 - 21 Said S Samatar, 'The Islamic Courts and Ethiopia's Intervention in Somali: Redemption or Adventurism?', Chatham House: London, 25 April 2007, Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Africa/250407samatar.pdf>.
 - 22 'Somali president quits amid power struggle', *CNN*, 29 December 2008, Accessed 19 September 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/africa/12/29/somalia.president.resigns/>; last accessed on 4 February 2024

Examination of the National Security Architecture

The evolution of the Somali NSArch from 2017 to its revised form in 2023 reflects the country's evolving political and security landscape as federalism was taking shape, although this is mainly unfinished business. The constitution is also not finalized.²³ The 2017 NSArch was an attempt to distribute and coordinate security responsibilities across the various layers of the Somali federal structure. It envisioned an integrated approach whereby the FGS and the FMSs would have significant roles in managing the security apparatus, from policy formulation to operational issues. For instance, the 2017 NSArch initially outlined a shared management system whereby the FGS and FMSs had distinct yet complementary roles. At the federal level, the National Security Council, chaired by the federal president, was tasked with crafting strategy, while the regional security councils, chaired by FMS presidents and including SNA sector commanders, were responsible for on-the-ground implementation of these strategies.²⁴

In contrast to the initial design, the 2023 revisions appear to centralize command, tilting the balance of power in favor of the FGS. The expansion of the SNA (from 18,000 to 30,000 soldiers) and the police force (from 32,000 to 40,000 officers) highlights this centralization, augmenting FGS's influence over security affairs, including assigning roles for FGS police within the FMS.²⁵ This pivot is also manifest in the revised role of the SNA sector commanders within the FMS, making their participation in regional security councils optional and placing the appointment of these commanders solely in the hands of the Ministry of Defense and the federal Commander of the Armed Forces.²⁶ Moreover:

- **The original NSArch notably omits any defined role for the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA).** The revised version explicitly defines NISA's responsibilities.²⁷ The agreement states that the federal government holds exclusive jurisdiction over intelligence activities and excludes FMS from intelligence gathering operations.²⁸ This demarcation in the revised NSArch points to a centralization of intelligence functions by the federal government, highlighting a significant shift from the previous iteration of the NSArch.
- **Puntland is not part of the revised NSArch agreement and operates its own intelligence agency.** This complicates the new NSArch roadmap because Puntland operates its intelligence services, including armed

23 The constitution only allocates four areas of responsibility to the FGS, including national defence. All other responsibilities are to be negotiated by FGS and FMS and parliament. Even within the four areas of its constitutionally mandated authority, in practice the FGS was not in charge due to the weakness of the Somali state. Forging an agreement on NSArch was vital for Somali efforts to deal with al-Shabaab and the need to establish a competent and professional security apparatus, especially in light of international support.

24 Somalia National Security Council, Somalia's Political Agreement On National Security Architecture, GOV.UK, Accessed 29 October 2023, <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a82170d40f0b62305b926d4/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact.pdf>

25 Somalia National Security Council, 'Revised NSArch', 7, lists their role, including being stationed in international borders, ports and boundaries between two FMS, protection of FGS offices in the regions, and other typical investigative and enforcement policing functions.

26 Somalia National Security Council, 'Revised NSArch', 16.

27 Somalia National Security Council, 'Revised NSArch', 16.

28 It added this caveat, however: 'When the country passes the current security situation, FMS will not have the intelligence gathering role or NISA-like armed special forces', Somalia National Security Council, 'Revised NSArch', PAGE. 13

special forces and plain-clothes agents.²⁹ A clause in the Puntland constitution grants the state autonomy until a ratified national constitution emerges from a comprehensive consensus-based review process.³⁰ Critics within the FGS and some FMS often view this clause as obstructionist and an attempt to seek a special status. Somali stakeholders agreeing on a final constitution is also not an easy endeavor. The process has remained frozen since 2012, although Articles 133 and 134 of the constitution require the review process to be completed during the 2012–2016 FGS institutions' term. Yet, after a decade, the constitution is still vague, contested and provisional. A genuine dialogue between the FGS and all FMS is essential to reach a permanent settlement if the NSArch is to be finalised. Likewise, securing buy-in from influential political actors is vital for the legalization of the agreement in the federal institutions particularly getting it passed by the bicameral parliament.

- **The SNA governance model could exacerbate tensions.** Whether already stationed or planned to be stationed in Federal Member States (FMSs), control of the SNA has been contentious since the NSArch negotiations in May 2017. The revised agreement reduces the influence of FMS leaders on the appointment of SNA commanders in their states, changing the appointment of sector commanders from a joint effort to one that limits the role of FMS leaders in filing complaints with the president of the FGS.³¹ This shift from a consultative appointment process, which gave FMS leaders a measure of control and counterbalance to federal authority, to a more centralized model could heighten tensions, particularly with Puntland – the most outspoken FMS. At the same time, without a consolidated command and control of federal forces, the FGS would struggle to maintain the law and order of SNA, and entity both the constitution and all FMSs concede are under the full jurisdictions of the FGS.

As the roles and responsibilities of FGS and FMSs are yet to be finalized constitutionally, some FMS leaders view the increasing federal oversight of SNA with wariness because of the past experience under military regime and also see as infringing on their autonomy³² as constitution is not finalized and functions settled. The NSArch, designed to strengthen and define roles in the security sector, thus sits at a contentious crossroads. It is caught between the push for a unified NSArch framework and the pull of some regions' desire for autonomy in the security sector.

29 'Somalia: Puntland president appoints new intelligence chief', *Garowe Online*, 24 September 2019, Accessed 30 January 2024, <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/puntland/somalia-puntland-president-appoints-new-intelligence-chief>; and Peter Albrecht, 'The interplay of interventions and hybridisation in Puntland's security sector', *Cooperation And Conflict* 53/2 (June 2018): 216–236.

30 Article 142 of the Puntland constitution and Article 42 of the provisional (national) constitution discuss the validity of the Puntland constitution until it is harmonized with federal constitution. Article 138 of the Puntland constitution states, 'Article 138 – THE LEGAL ROLE OF THE CONSTITUTION. 1. The Constitution shall be the supreme law of Puntland State, except for the Islamic Sharia. 2. Any law, including traditional law (*xeer*), regulation or administrative decree that contradicts the Islamic Sharia or this Constitution shall be null and void.' See; <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/som197962.pdf>. Constitution Of The Puntland State Of Somalia December 2009 English Translation November 2011

31 Somalia National Security Council, 'Revised NSArch', P. 16.

32 Interview senior Puntland minister, Garowe, 4 September 2023.

The NCC and the security landscape

Somalia's National Consultative Council is a prime example of political pragmatism. This entity operates in plain sight and beyond the written constitution to address the country's complex political and security realities. The NCC formulated the NSArch and the NSC – the framework of Somali security – and is now recognized as the highest authority on security issues. The NCC has evolved over the past decade, from an informal grouping first known as the Signatories in 2012³³ and later in 2015–2016 as the National Leaders Forum (NLF)³⁴ to its current iteration as a key political and security forum (by way of NSC). This highlights the fluid nature of Somali politics, where informal entities are often erected to overshadow formal institutions for expedient reasons. These ad hoc and extrajudicial platforms are more flexible mechanisms to foster dialogue and consensus.³⁵

The evolving nature of the NCC and the inclusion of various political stakeholders at different times (sometimes parliamentary leadership are included, and now the mayor of Mogadishu is a member) also reflect the fluid nature of governance in Somalia, in particular how national leaders see a necessity to accommodate, empower or enlist³⁶ the ever-changing political actors and stakeholders in the country. This adaptability, along with the enterprising national and regional politicians who created the NCC and its predecessors, is both a strength and a weakness. As a strength, it allows for responsiveness to pressing political needs. Also, as a weakness, because such ad hoc entities often face questions of legitimacy; for example, the NCC is not a constitutional entity.

33 'Consultative Meeting of the Somali Signatories of the Process for Ending the Transition: Communiqué', *Reliefweb*, 1 April 2012, Accessed 1 December 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/consultative-meeting-somali-signatories-process-ending-transition-communiqué>.

34 'National Leader Forum Communiqué', *ACE Project*, 12 April 2016, Accessed 30 January 2024, <https://aceproject.org/ero-en/misc/somalia-national-leader-forum-communiqué-2016/view>.

35 Historically, when mandates of national government come to an end and political stakeholders were not in agreement as to the way forward, donors pushed hard to start a consultative process to ensure agreement would be reached about a way forward. All these forums and consultative initiatives were more or less expedient and ad hoc arrangements, wherein actors had to negotiate election modalities and other significant issues that were time-sensitive agreements.

36 Sometimes, sitting presidents include actors of officials who are supportive of their policies;

The NCC and Puntland (the sole hold-out FMS)

For Puntland, being the first state and with its self-identification as ‘the mother of federalism’,³⁷ its participation in the NCC has been halting and cautious. This reflects both its desire to shape the Somali federal structure and its concern over maintaining its semi-autonomous status. Puntland carved itself a semi-autonomous status when it was established in 1998 – six years before federalism was officially adopted in Somalia, in 2004; it also fortified FMSs’ powers during the drafting of the current provisional constitution in 2010 – 2012, which affirmed some of the prerogatives in Puntland’s constitution that give the state more leeway until a finalized constitution is adopted. Thus, the tension between Puntland and the NCC highlights the broader tension between the FGS and the FMS regarding the balance of power in the federal framework. The disagreement over the proposed power distribution by the NCC in December 2022 manifests this friction.³⁸ Successive Puntland administrations have advocated for a relatively weaker federal government and stronger FMSs for fear of a dominant central authority emerging from Mogadishu.³⁹ Puntland held this position even when FGS leaders hailed from the state itself, signifying how entrenched the Puntland view of a loose federation is.

The Puntland decision to step back from the NCC discussions and insist on directly negotiating with the FGS underlines its commitment to federalism that aligns with its interests.⁴⁰ This move highlights the delicate and often contentious process of negotiating authority and governance, including security, in a developing federal system, especially one emerging from decades of conflict and fragmentation. In this context, the NCC is thus a vehicle for potential progress and a flashpoint for existing tensions. The subdued recent FGS reaction to Puntland’s demands for bilateral talks reflects the fluctuating nature of federal and state power relations. It simultaneously reveals the FGS preference to negotiate from a position of strength, ignore Puntland demands when it can, and lays bare the ebbing power framework that no longer holds sway for Puntland in the national discourse. A case in point is President Hassan Sheikh ignored a call by Said Deni along with other senior Puntland leaders, namely former PM Omar Sharmarke and former president Abdirahman Farole, on 11 January 2024 for a ‘comprehensive talks on crucial federal matters & the completion of the Federal Constitution of Somalia.’⁴¹

37 The two years before the 2000 Arta process produced the Transitional National Government (TNG) were preceded by ten years of state collapse. In response, Puntland politicians and clans established the state in north-eastern and central Somalia, during the Eldoret and Mbagathi peace conferences in 2002–2004. Puntland also helped produce the Transitional Federal Charter and the TFG institutions, which officially founded Somalia as a federal state. Since then, Puntland politicians refer to the state as the ‘mother of federalism’.

38 National Consultative Communiqué, Mustaqbal Media: ‘GOLAHA WADATASHIGA QARAN (GWQ) ASTAYNTA AWOODAHA HAY’ADAHA DOWLADDA’, December 2022, Accessed 30 January 2024, <https://mustaqbalmedia.net/so/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Final-Version-Astaynta-Awoodaha.pdf>.

39 This power allocation assigned the FGS 44 powers, whereas the FMS were given 29 responsibilities. See: ‘Somalia: Puntland rejects result of the NCC forum in Mogadishu’, *Garowe Online*, 30 May 2023. Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/puntland/somalia-puntland-rejects-result-of-the-ncc-forum-in-mogadishu>.

40 Interview with the Puntland federal government technical negotiation team, Garowe, 7 September 2023.

41 Garowe Online: War Saxaafadeed, 11 January 2024, Accessed 4 February 2024, <https://twitter.com/GaroweOnline/status/1745711317447516621>.

The constitution and national security

The provisional constitution and the declarations on the NSArch are inherently contradictory in several aspects, and this further complicates the adoption and adherence to a cohesive NSArch. Article 127 of the constitution emphasizes that Somalia's security forces must exemplify professionalism, discipline and strict adherence to the rule of law. Moreover, Article 111H calls for a National Security Commission, an entity intended to bring about objective professionalism and to be comprised of security experts from various sectors of society tasked with devising a comprehensive strategy that anticipates and addresses imminent and long-term threats. This commission was never created, however.

In stark contrast, the NSArch of 2017 and the 2023 revised version call for the National Security Council (NSCouncil, not the NS Commission) to be established.⁴² Although staffed by influential and encompassing members who range from the federal president to military commanders and the mayor of Mogadishu, as well as the prime minister and select cabinet members, the NS-Council is not constitutionally mandated. The central role of the NSC in the national security structure, as underscored by the NSArch, clearly contradicts Article 99 of the provisional constitution, which vests national security responsibilities with the council of ministers. Article 97 designates the Council of Ministers as the supreme executive authority of Somalia. Thus, national security is specified as a key function of the cabinet, but the NSArch and NCC task that with the National Security Council.

The provisional constitution was adopted in a post-conflict era when distrust prevailed, and inclusive state-building was prioritized. Article 142 of the Somali constitution, which grants Puntland the right to adhere to its constitution until the federal constitutional review process is finalized, illuminates the bargaining powers of Puntland at that time. It likewise indicates that the national security architects of this time prioritized the creation of a document that was both resistant to changes and only amendable through a broad-based approach.

42 During the first year of President Farmaajo's tenure, he used the term 'national security council' to convene the multi-stakeholder conference. He was also the first national leader who included the mayor of Mogadishu in such deliberations. See: 'COMMUNIQUE OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL', Hiiraan online, 11 July 2017, Accessed 29 January 2024, https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2017/July/143053/communique_of_the_national_security_council.aspx.

FGS perspectives on the NSArch

Constitutional mandates, the pragmatic considerations of evolving security dynamics, and the political realities in Somalia shape FGS's perspectives on the NSArch. The FGS seeks to navigate these factors while advancing a security architecture in which federal prerogatives broadly align FMSs' legitimate interests.⁴³ The FGS views the NSArch as an essential framework for establishing and maintaining national security, grounded in the constitutional authority granted to the federal government. The constitution delineates FGS's jurisdiction over key national defence and security areas, reinforcing the leading role FGS envisages for itself, as per the constitution.⁴⁴

FGS's emphasis on the NSArch is a strategic move to consolidate national security ahead of significant transitions, including the scheduled end of 2024 withdrawal of ATMIS forces. Reducing African Union troops from 22,000 to 14,500 in December 2023,⁴⁵ with a complete exit planned by December 2024, creates an urgent need for a robust and domestically supported security framework. Through the United Nations Security Council, the international community has also signaled the importance of Somalia establishing a credible and unified NSArch.⁴⁶

Internally, the FGS hoped that the just-ended elections in Puntland would bring new leadership more amenable to collaboration, potentially enhancing the NSA's nationwide effectiveness and implementation.⁴⁷ However, Said Abdullahi Deni retained power in Puntland in the 8 January 2024 election. His re-election will require a recalibration of assumptions and strategies at the federal and FMSs levels.⁴⁸ Mr. Deni's inaugural ceremony, officiated by the federal president, was tense and amicable, as FGS and Puntland leaders held hands in a conciliatory gesture. However, in a televised scene during the ceremony, Mr. Deni opted not to stand for the president as the custom has been and asked his vice president, who was halfway-standing, to sit,⁴⁹ this can be interpreted as a sign of protest.

During his inauguration ceremony, the Puntland leader also announced that he will host a national deliberation summit, which he offered the FGS to lead, and President Hassan accepted that. Analysts consider the summit as political maneuvering and, though a possible avenue for collaboration, also a potential conflict flashpoint. Former presidents and prime ministers supported this initiative, which some analysts interpreted as a Puntland

43 Somalia's federalism is a work in progress and often national politicians (and all hail from all FMSs) are predisposed the creation of viable national institutions (i.e. federal government) as opposed to FMSs leaders particularly Puntland leaders who often focused on federalism that region retain substantial powers.

44 Article 54 of the constitution explicitly assigns national defence and three other functions (foreign affairs, citizenship and immigration, and monetary policy) as federal government responsibilities.

45 'AU peacekeepers are leaving Somalia: what needs to happen to keep the peace', *The Conversation*, 10 September 2023, Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://theconversation.com/au-peacekeepers-are-leaving-somalia-what-needs-to-happen-to-keep-the-peace-212674>.

46 United Nations, Security Council, 'Resolution 2687 (2023)', 27 June 2023, S/RES/2687 (2023), Accessed 30 January 2024, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N23/184/91/PDF/N2318491.pdf?OpenElement>

47 FGS is said to have supported various candidates who all lost to Mr. Deni. Interview with a member of one of the campaign teams. Mogadishu, 29 January 2024

48 Two FMS leaders namely Galmudug and Southwest leaders who attended Mr. Deni's inauguration ceremony said, they will work hard to get themselves re-elected as Deni did; they men were considered by many analysts as 'dead men walking' as federal presidents often change the leaders of their states thanks largely to to FGS's proximity to and having robust presence in these states, including SNA and NISA forces.

49 See the video of the event; <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/Y1eWpUZPC2DqHGaM/?mibextid=Dpxkx3&startTimeMs=3000>

strategy, backed by opposition politicians⁵⁰, to cajole/steer the FGS president to accept collaborative federalism rather than what these politicians term as solo governance model.

According to Puntland politicians,⁵¹ President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud is pushing a unilateral constitutional finalization process. They argue even during the inauguration of Said Deni, president's disinclination for consensus-based politics was evident. Even some erstwhile political adversaries of Said Deni, such as former national president Farmajo, and many other politicians welcoming this, indicate not sudden realignments of all political interests and ideologies but calculated maneuvers.

Meanwhile, the recently announced lifting of the 1992 arms embargo at the United Nations Security Council meeting better positions the FGS to garner international support. Lifting the arms embargo also ensures the security apparatus could be resourced to take on the responsibilities that ATMIS will leave behind.⁵²

50 In separate media statements two former presidents also welcomed the proposed Garowe meeting; Halqabsi News: Former President Farmajo Welcomes Upcoming Garowe Conference; 31 January 2024, Accessed 4 Feb 2024, <https://halqabsi.com/2024/01/former-president-farmaajo-welcomes-upcoming-garowe-conference/>

51 Including current and former Puntland leaders as well as former FGS Prime Ministers from Puntland such as Omar Abdirashid Sharmarke; see his 15 February 2024 tweet; <https://twitter.com/OmarSharmarke/status/1758007876231086466>

52 UN Security Council, S/RES/2687 (2023). Furthermore, Resolution 2714 (2023) lifts the arms embargo on the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), while Resolution 2713 (2023) imposed a targeted arms embargo on Al-Shabaab which operates in Somalia and this restriction on AL shabaab gives latitude to the international actors who wants to monitor arms coming to Somalia; Resolution 2713 also necessitates FGS to interface with others to ensure arms coming to Somalia goes to them and not to Al Shabaab. Meanwhile, the relationship between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Federal Member States (FMS) has been characterized by a delicate power-sharing arrangement. The newfound ability of the FGS to independently arm itself could potentially tilt this balance, raising questions about the future of federalism and power distribution in Somalia. Of course, there is a reality between having no embargo imposed and the capacity to actually to arm oneself.

FMS perceptions of the NSArch

FMS view the NSArch through varied lenses, with each perspective influenced by the unique political, security and socioeconomic realities that have shaped them.

Puntland

As the first and most stable state in the union, Puntland is both an architect of the provisional constitution and, often, a principal protagonist in the constitutional debate. Successive Puntland leaders have staunchly advocated for a loose form of federalism in Somalia – a view widely rejected by other FMS and a significant number of the Somali people. Puntland frequently anchors its stance in the interim constitution of 2012 and the initial federal arrangement of 2004. It is often also the first state to sound the alarm when the FGS is perceived to be deviating from constitutional provisions.⁵³ Consequently, Puntland is sometimes perceived as obstructionist and a state seeking confederation rather than federation.

Tensions escalated after the May 2023 NCC meeting at which large-scale decisions were made. Having withdrawn from the NCC at the end of 2022, Puntland was absent from the NCC discussion about a new political framework. Despite Puntland's calls for bilateral talks, the lack of an FGS-appointed negotiation committee further aggravated relations.⁵⁴

Senior Puntland politicians claim President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's strategies are skewed in favour of his own Hawiye community, citing concerns over a clan imbalance in power dynamics, particularly with the arming of clan militias in the two Hawiye-dominated FMS, Hirshabelle and Galmudug.⁵⁵ Puntland leaders interviewed for this study were also apprehensive about the implications of lifting the UN arms embargo, viewing the FGS's alleged unilateral constitutional amendments and state structure changes as detrimental to their state's interests.⁵⁶ In addition, Puntland officials criticize the composition of the SNA, pointing out that the SNA is predominantly made up of individuals from Mogadishu and its environs, with claims that Puntland has been neglected in military aid distribution despite confronting armed groups such as al-Shabaab and ISIS.⁵⁷ Although Puntland's claims about the SNA cannot be verified, there is nonetheless a widespread perception among Puntland and other regions that the Hawiye clan dominates the federal forces.

This could be a consequence of the FGS being based in Mogadishu. Hawiye politicians repeatedly make the argument that their sons have shed more blood, and the clan has spent more resources to defend the FGS from al-Shabaab than others.

53 Interview senior Puntland minister, Garowe, 4 September 2023.

54 Interview with senior aide to the Puntland president, Garowe, 6 September 2023.

55 Interview with the former security agency leader, Garowe, 12 September 2023; and interview with a senior Puntland official, Garowe, 6 September 2023.

56 Interview with member of Puntland federal negotiation technical team, Garowe, 7 September 2023.

57 See Colin Robinson, 'Revisiting the rise and fall of the Somali Armed Forces, 1960–2012', *Defense & Security Analysis* 32/3 (2016): 237–252, 242, Accessed 13 September 2023, DOI: 10.1080/14751798.2016.1199122.

Also see: Michael Keating and Sagal Abshir, 'The Politics of Security in Somalia', New York, New York: Center on International Cooperation, April 2018, Accessed 13 September 2023, https://s42831.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/1662/65/politics_of_security_in_somalia_2018_final_0.pdf.

Puntland apprehension about FGS support for the Macawisley and the potential inter-clan conflict it could incite are also cited as a reason for unease, given Puntland's proximity to Galmudug, which has clashed in the past.⁵⁸ Puntland trust issues predate President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. State officials indicate that the last time President Farmaajo (a Darod president) visited Garowe, the capital of Puntland, they restricted the movements of Farmaajo's security team.⁵⁹ Puntland's wariness of FGS's intentions has led to its prohibition of visits by FGS politicians, including federal MPs and FGS ministers from Puntland.⁶⁰ Amid these challenges, the Joint SNA Forces in Galkacyo, consisting of about 170 soldiers from Galmudug and Puntland (a city of recurrent intra-state conflicts),⁶¹ is a positive example of collaboration that deviates from the typical hardball politics at play between Puntland and the FGS.

Hirshabelle, Galmudug and Southwest

In Hirshabelle, Southwest and Galmudug, the presence of the SNA, NISA agents and the Somali Police Force (SPF) has shaped more accommodating views of the NSArch.⁶² This is partly due to the anti-al-Shabaab military campaign led by the FGS, which aligns with state objectives to defeat the group. NSArch cooperation is also sustained by the conciliatory stance of the current president, who could unseat FMS leaders whose terms are ending (as they were installed by the previous president),⁶³ and the financial reliance of these FMS on the federal government.

Jubaland

The Jubaland stance on the NSArch is complicated by internal clan disputes in the state (for example, between the Marehan and Ogaden)⁶⁴ and external geopolitical factors, including Kenyan influence in general and the Somali–Kenyan maritime dispute in particular. Despite historical opposition to the NSArch, current backing by Jubaland is partly because the FGS Prime Minister has roots in the region.⁶⁵ In the future, however, this support may sometimes

58 Interview with a senior Puntland minister, Garowe, 6 September 2023.

59 Interview with an office rep Puntland Presidency, Garowe, 6 September 2023.

60 Radio Risaala: Puntland oo Wasiiro ka tirsan Dowladda Soomaaliya u diiday Garowe; 6 June 2019; <https://radiorisaala.com/puntland-oo-wasiiro-ka-tirsan-dowladda-soomaaliya-u-diiday-garowe/>

61 Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 'Galkacyo Conflict Drivers Contributors and Potential Solutions', Mogadishu: Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, December 2016, Accessed 13 September 2023, www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Galkacyo-Conflict-Drivers-Contributors-and-Potential-Solutions-.pdf. Interview with current commanders, by phone, 12 September 2023.

62 Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 'Security Sector Reform in Somalia: Challenges and Opportunities', Mogadishu: Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 31 January 2023, Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://heritageinstitute.org/security-sector-reform-in-somalia-challenges-and-opportunities/publications/>.

63 In these three regions, they were historically installed and unseated by FGS leaders. For instance, President Farmaajo helped each one of these leaders to become FMS president.

64 For more information about the history of Jubaland and how leadership has changed hands over the years and the deep-rooted rivalry between Marahan and Ogaden clans, as well as other interests involved in this most southern region of Somalia, see: 'Jubaland in Jeopardy: The Uneasy Path to State-Building in Somalia', *International Crisis Group*, 21 May 2013, Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/jubaland-jeopardy-uneasy-path-state-building-somalia>.

65 Premier Hamza Abdi Barre is the first prime minister from the Ogaden clan, which now politically dominate Jubaland. In Somali politics, communities or politicians from such clans who receive the premiership often work with and support the president who gave them the number two position.

be more nominal than substantive, given the persistent strategic differences and the term limits on the tenure of elected politicians.⁶⁶

Yet, the broader clan composition in Jubaland, including significant Hawiye, Digil and Mirifle populations and other marginalized groups, does not subscribe to the Darod-centric narrative in Jubaland. Darod-centric, in the sense that only Ogaden and Maehan are the only relevant stakeholders in the state. The impact of the NSArch on the other clans and their perceptions of marginalization in the multi-clan state of Jubaland adds another layer of complexity to the state's security and political narrative.

In other words, there is the official Jubaland position – a region dominated and run by Ahmed Mohamed Islan (Madobe) of Ogaden lineage, who has headed the state since its creation in 2013; likewise, there are other views, such as the Gedo view. Gedo is a semi-independent region in Jubaland largely inhabited by the Marehan clan – whose politicians are erstwhile adversary of Ahmed Madone, the Puntland president. As all Somali clans, however, the Marehan are not monolithic and one of Jubaland's vice presidents hails from this community. For instance, some Marehan politicians floated the idea and sought FGS and Kenyan support to mobilize Macawisley (Marehan militia) to help the liberation of the Middle Juba region, which Al Shabaab completely controls.⁶⁷ Jubaland authorities saw this as a Marehan roundabout way of arming themselves to get hold of regions near the port city of Kismaayo. Also, the significant other forty-plus clans who reside in Jubaland⁶⁸ – but whose overt influence for now is limited – also have interests and views, but these views for now are too submerged by the narratives of the dominant Ogaden or that of the President Ahmed Madobe.

66 On average, most of the last 13 Somali prime ministers served around a year. See: Heritage Institute for Policy Studies, 'Somalia's Council of Ministers: A Call for Competent and Rule-Based Cabinet', Mogadishu, 27 May 2022, Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://heritageinstitute.org/somalias-council-of-ministers-a-call-for-competent-and-rule-based-cabinet/publications/reports/>.

67 'Kenya should launch offensive against al Shabaab in Middle Jubba', *The star*, 12 November 2022, Accessed 20 September 2023, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/opinion/2022-11-12-kenya-should-launch-offensive-against-al-shabaab-in-middle-jubba/>; the writer of the article goes on to say: Liberating Middle Jubba from Shabaab is the only way to protect Kenyans from the unfolding danger from Shabaab. It is now or never—Kenya should act now. Macawisley alone will not liberate Middle Jubba and the rest of Jubaland from Shabaab. Government of Kenya should seek assistance from local communities rather than Jubaland Administration.

68 See, Forging Jubaland: Community perspectives on federalism, governance and reconciliation; April 2016; <https://www.saferworld-global.org/resources/publications/1064-forging-jubaland-community-perspectives-on-federalism-governance-and-reconciliation>; last accessed 18 February 2024: Further to the Darood groups, Jubaland is also home to members of the Digil Mirifle clan, some Hawiye subclans and a number of minority groups. During the stakeholder analysis workshop, participants identified as many as 43 clans and sub-clans.⁶⁴ In addition, religious/ political actors include ASWJ, Al Shabaab and Takfir. There are competing political authorities and historical divisions. For example, the Gedo Region was conceived as a distinct political unit separate from the Jubas, and political affiliations with the TFG shifted with the change in 2012 to the SFG.

Macawisley, clan dynamics and national security implications

The Macawisley uprising, led by the Hawadle clan in Hiraan in Hirshabelle state since mid-2022, had garnered support from the highest echelons of Somali politics, including the FGS president. These local clan-based fighters, also referred to as ‘community defense forces’, have emerged in response to the prolonged presence of al-Shabaab, which is characterized by terror attacks, targeted assassinations and coercive taxation. The spring of 2022 marked a turning point. Fatigued by al-Shabaab domination, the Hawadle clan Macawisley revolt signifies a significant shift in clan tolerance of the group and its tactics, prompting government endorsement for their counter-offensive actions in regions such as Hirshabelle and Galmudug.

The March 2023 revised version of the NSArch does not formally recognize the use of clan militias such as the Macawisley for national security objectives. Nevertheless, their strategic role in the anti-al-Shabaab movement was underscored in October 2023, when President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud appointed Ali Jeyte, the former governor of the Hiraan region and prominent Macawisley leader, as the presidential coordinator for clan militia that the FGS termed: community defense forces. Despite not being codified in the NSArch, this role signifies federal government reliance on the Macawisley in its strategy to combat al-Shabaab. At the same time, legitimizing clan militias is fraught with legal, political and security complexities specially a country such as Somalia that clan militias rendered it a failed state in the decade between 1991 – 2000.

A case in point is Ali Jeyte’s secessionist and insubordination actions. He revolted immediately after achieving battlefield success and in a dispute with Hirshabelle President Gudlawe over revenue allocation, which resulted in Jeyte’s dismissal as governor. Making use of his popularity due to the anti-al-Shabaab campaign, in May 2023 Jeyte declared that the Hiraan region would secede from Hirshabelle state and proclaimed himself president. This was a direct challenge of Hirshabelle state and FGS authority, which could not be tolerated at either level in a normal circumstance. At the same time, this declaration further reflects long-standing internal grievances in the Hawadle clan regarding their representation in the Hirshabelle government.⁶⁹

Arming clan militias such as the Macawisley is divisive among the FMS. The Puntland, Jubaland⁷⁰ and Southwest state⁷¹ administrations have expressed opposition to such policy, fearing the redirection of government assets toward clan agendas, potentially sparking inter-clan and intra-state conflicts. Conversely, states such as Galmudug and Hirshabelle view such militias as essential allies in the fight against al-Shabaab. This disparity highlights the ever-present divergent visions and interests of the national security debate in Somalia.

69 When Somalia gained independence, it comprised six regions. By 1991, with the collapse of the military government, these regions had expanded to eighteen through subdivision. Hiiraan, one of these original regions and now part of the Hirshabelle state, remains singular and is predominantly inhabited by the Hawadle clan. Since 2012, the Hawadle clan has been advocating for Hiiraan to be divided into two regions. This division would allow them to establish a Federal Member State (FMS), as the provisional constitution mandates a minimum of two pre-1991 regions for FMS formation.

70 Stephen Astariko, ‘Jubaland oppose plan for clan militia for security reasons’, *Star Newspaper*, 20 March 2023, Accessed 29 January 2024, <https://www.the-star.co.ke/counties/north-eastern/2023-03-20-jubaland-oppose-plan-for-clan-militia-for-security-reasons/>.

71 Interview with senior Southwest minister, Mogadishu, 23 September 2023. This interviewee says arming clan militia is ‘akin to arming al-Shabaab’ as they could go to al-Shabaab and or turn against the government at any time.

The presence of Al Shabaab in a state does not seem to influence the state's willingness or resistance to integrate the Macawisley into its security framework. The pressure from Al Shabaab on Jubaland, the Southwest, Hirshabelle, and Galmudug is comparable, as the terror group controls significant territories in all four regions. Hirshabelle and Galmudug, which support the Macawisley, are dominated by Hawiye, the same clans from which the federal president hails. This suggests that the leaders of these two states do not fear external or federal domination, in the broader sense, in their regions.

As highlighted earlier in this paper, the Macawisley phenomenon arose naturally, a development that the FGS leadership and MPs from these regions capitalized on as it unfolded. Initially, the Macawisley emerged as localized revolts, developing slowly and organically rather than appearing in its current form overnight. These movements germinated after the FGS initiated efforts to dislodge Al Shabaab from these areas. Consequently, it remains to be seen whether the resistance from FMS leaders will persist if and when the FGS commences phase II of the liberation campaign in regions like Southwest or even Jubaland. Additionally, communities and clans might begin to organize themselves as they previously did in Hirshabelle and Galmudug.

Conversely, as discussed in other sections of this paper, the Southwest is cautious of the Hawiye-dominated SNA. Jubaland, where the Merehan clan jostle and tussles for control of the state with the dominant Ogaden clan, also opposes the Macawisley. It could be argued, therefore, that the threat posed by Al Shabaab and the insecurity they bring are not the sole factors regions consider regarding their stance on the Macawisley and that each FMS or their leaders have their own nuanced and granular reasons and rationale for their stances.

The Joint SNA Forces of Galkacyo: a blueprint for a future SNA?

The Joint SNA Forces in Galkacyo, established in February 2018,⁷² offer a possible model for the broader SNA as this contingent demonstrates the effectiveness of an inclusive multi-clan force in maintaining stability. This model reflects a practical approach to the political and clan complexities in Somalia in general and multi-clan states in particular by showing how a security force can function efficiently and gain the trust of the local population when it represents the diverse interests of entities and the community it serves – in this case residents of the city of Galkacyo. The SNA Galkacyo contingent is co-created and co-managed by Puntland, Galmudug and FGS.

The establishment of this joint force provides a blueprint for resolving local mistrust and conflicts through shared and equitable security responsibilities⁷³. It suggests that when communities and political entities have a stake in their security arrangements, as evidenced by the equal troop contributions from Galmudug and Puntland in the Gaaalkacyo's joint forces, there is a stronger incentive to maintain peace. Despite challenges, such as reduced payment from their initial USD 350 salary to the current USD 200⁷⁴ and the killing of their inaugural leader by al-Shabaab,⁷⁵ the resilience and effectiveness of the Joint SNA Forces underscore the potential benefits of such practical security arrangements. Due to the confidence that three authorities, namely, Puntland, Galmudug and FGS, have in this force, their operations extend beyond Galkacyo and include protecting SNA leaders who visit Galmudug and Puntland as well as taking responsibility for anti-al-Shabaab FGS war logistics not to mention peacekeeping work when clan fighting erupts in the countryside.⁷⁶ This scope of action highlights the multifunctional capability of the Joint SNA Forces and the broad trust it enjoys from both the federal government and two state administrations and at the community level.⁷⁷

By operating under the central SNA command, the Joint SNA Forces of Galkacyo manage to stay outside regional political frictions, which sometimes hinder the effectiveness of federal-led security initiatives or create clan perception issues such as the Barawe case, which we shall discuss in the next section. The joint SNA force's success in Galkacyo presents a credible model for expanding such forces to other parts of Somalia, particularly as the country continues to build its security infrastructure in anticipation of taking over from ATMIS forces. Despite political tensions among FMSs and some FMSs and FGS, the longevity and consistency of this unit also offer valuable lessons in depoliticizing the security forces. Since 2018, FGS and both Galmudug and Puntland leaders avoided transporting their political differences (and there were many and contestations) to this relatively well-functioning joint force.

72 'Taliye Gorod oo magacaabay taliyaha ciidanka isku dhafka ee gobola Mudug', *Somalia Online*, 1 February 2018, Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://www.somaliaonline.com/community/topic/84897-taliye-gorod-oo-magacaabay-taliyaha-ciidanka-isku-dhafka-ee-gobola-mudug/>

73 Danab and other special forces, trained, mentored, and led by the United States and stationed in Mogadishu and Galkacyo, are also not viewed through clan lenses. This perception is due to the confidence politicians and citizens alike place in their professionalism and the US's control (along with their apolitical nature), aspects that are beyond the scope of this study but worth noting.

74 Interview with current commanders, by phone, 12 September 2023.

75 'Al-shabaab oo sheegtay qarax Galkacyo lagula eegtay sarkaal katirsan ciidanka isku dhafka Puntland iyo Galmudug', *Hiiraan Online*, 6 January 2020, Accessed 13 September 2023, https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2020/jan/wararka_maanta6-163055.htm.

76 Interview with current commanders, by phone, 12 September 2023.

77 The 2023 revised NSArch envisages that the FGS will cover the expenses of the SNA, NISA and the federal police, whereas FMS are responsible for the regional police.

SNA and Southwest state: the Barawe fault line

In June 2023, a well-publicized conflict erupted in Barawe, a town 200 km west of Mogadishu. The fighting was between the newly deployed, outnumbered Southwest police and elements within the significantly larger Somali National Army (SNA) forces. Barawe, an ancient coastal town, is designated as the capital of the Southwest State, though Baydhabo has functioned as the interim capital since the state's inception. The incident ignited or had the potential to exacerbate tensions fueled by and rooted in clan dynamics, demographic shifts, civil war-related grievances, and the power dynamics between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the Southwest state. Historically, the light-skinned Baravanes people, who speak a distinct language close to Kiswahili than Somali, predominantly inhabited the city.⁷⁸ Along with other clans residing in the Barava, the city and its people became part of the diverse clan communities of the Southwest State created in 2014 under Somalia's federal model⁷⁹

Before the civil war, many Somalis from multiple clans had substantial agricultural business interests in Lower Shabelle. After the civil war of the 1990s, Hawiye businessmen remained the main clan group in the Lower Shabelle region, where Barawe is located, to establish or expand agricultural and fisheries businesses.⁸⁰ Given their access to arms and militia due to their proximity to Mogadishu, locals often viewed these newcomers in the region as expansionists. This has led to simmering discontent between the Digil communities, the dominant clans in Lower Shabelle and their Hawiye neighbors from Mogadishu.

The liberation of the city from Al Shabaab on 6 October 2014 by AMISOM and Somali government forces marked a significant turn.⁸¹ Despite Al Shabaab's control over villages and towns in Lower Shabelle, SNA forces, heavily recruited from Mogadishu and its surroundings, stayed, and dominated life in Barawe for a decade since the eruption of the 2023 conflict. This presence fostered resentment among the city's communities, the Lower Shabelle region, and the Southwest States, viewing the supposedly Hawiye-dominated SNA as outsiders if not occupiers. The conflict between the Southwest police, seen in the state as 'natives' and the SNA, viewed in the state as 'externals', has publicly underscored the tension the firefight has produced at the FMS FGS level and the communities.⁸²

78 Somalia: The Bravanese (Barawan) ethnic group, including the location of their traditional homeland, affiliated clans and risks they face from other clans, 3 December 2012, Accessed 17 November 2023, https://www.refworld.org/docid/51e4f9aa4.html?__cf_chl_tk=GndGPUYeQ0QsR0cRmtDKCq8W08xukztjiHCQGwvIo7o-1707046566-0-gaNycGzNDaU

79 'Somalia: Former Parliament Speaker Elected Southwest State President', *Garowe Online*, 17 November 2014, Accessed 4 February 2024, <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-former-parliament-speaker-elected-southwest-state-president>

80 After the civil war, many Hawiye entrepreneurs acquired farms from other Somali clans that had fled Mogadishu and South-central Somalia. Some Hawiye individuals already owned farms in the region during the Siyad Barre era. Following the conclusion of the war, significant Hawiye (especially Habar Gidir) business interests were present in the Lower Shabelle region, where Barawe is located. This led to the perception among the Digil and Mirifle community that these activities constituted clan expansionism and land grabs. The shift to single-clan dominance in most regions after the civil war heightened concerns and resentment among the Digil and Mirifle community, which felt they were being marginalized and taken advantage of.

81 AU: Somalia National Army and AMISOM liberate coastal city of Baraawe, 6 October 2014, Accessed 4 February 2024, <https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/somalia-national-army-and-amisom-liberate-coastal-city-of-baraawe>

82 'Muxuu salka ku hayaa dagaalka Baraawe?', *BBC Somali*, 13 June 2023, Accessed 4 February 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/somali/articles/clex8l6zg97o>

The Barawe incident highlights the challenges the SNA faces in establishing security across Somalia's diverse federal landscape.⁸³ While the joint SNA forces in Galkacyo demonstrate successful integration across different states and clans, the situation in Barawe underscores the difficulties arising from the local population's perception of the SNA as an occupying or partisan force.⁸⁴ This perception inadvertently rekindles historical tensions between the Digil and Mirifle clans and the Hawiye communities, affecting the reception and perception of the SNA by the local population and Southwest state officials. The deep entrenchment of the SNA in Barawe's political economy, including alleged taxation practices, further exacerbates conflicts of authority between the federal government and Southwest State, highlighting the complex dynamics at play in maintaining security and stability in the city and Southwest state.⁸⁵

83 'Dozen killed in a fighting in Barawe as clan-based conflict escalates in Somalia', *Horn Observer*, 14 June 2023, Accessed 13 September 2023, <https://hornobserver.com/articles/2260/Dozen-killed-in-a-fighting-in-Barawe-as-clan-based-conflict-escalates-in-Somalia>.

84 Prominent civil society leader from Southwest state, Twitter post, 14 June 2023, TIME1:26 AM, https://twitter.com/smukhtar_/status/1668852377234067456, writes, 'There is so much misinformation surrounding #Barawe but basics need answers. Shouldn't SNA be fighting al-Shabaab? Who gave orders to fight local communities? The SNA make up of Lower Shabelle is one clan, no new knowledge there & that should be addressed H.E @HassanSMohamud.'

85 Interview with a senior Southwest minister, Mogadishu, 23 September 2023. He says the SNA soldiers also are district and or neighbourhood officials.

Past grievances and events in Southwest state

Historically, Southwest communities have faced marginalization. In the 1990s, the power struggle between Hawiye and Darod faction leaders and warlords, the regions now comprising Southwest state (specifically, Bay, Bakool and Lower Shabelle) became battlegrounds for both warring factions. Consequently, the Digil and Mirifle communities in these areas suffered greatly, exemplified by the 1993 famine that earned Baydhabo (the current interim capital of Southwest state) the grim nickname ‘City of Death’. This famine resulted from warlords obstructing the delivery of relief aid to these communities.

could also be seen as symptomatic of broader issues regarding federalism in Somalia. The conflict reflects the delicate balance needed when deploying national forces in the FMSs, particularly in regions where clan allegiances and historical grievances run deep. To foster trust and cooperation, it is essential that federal institutions, including security forces, reflect the diverse demographic composition of Somalia. Hence, there is a necessity for consent and adherence to an agreed-upon NSArch. More stable FGS–FMS relations are a prerequisite for a conducive environment for the development and deployment of a professional, accountable, and inclusive national army.

The NSArch originally mandated forming an SNA integration commission to oversee recruitment processes.⁸⁶ Since 2017, this approach has continued, with the SNA ensuring diverse representation from all FMS during SNA recruitment drives. NSC officials confirm that soldiers, including those trained abroad in Uganda, Turkey or Eritrea, hail from across all communities and FMS. Despite the Puntland government’s non-cooperative relations with the FGS, its residents could and have enlisted in the army via Galkacyo on the Galmudug side, where recruitment took place.⁸⁷

Notably, enlistment in the army remains voluntary, subject to age and physical fitness criteria. Independent assessment by the envisaged NSC may indicate the final tally of soldiers recruited from each FMS and if glaring disparity and lopsidedness exist and persist. Acknowledging the importance of an inclusive national army, the original NSArch and the current policies of the SNA command and the ministry of defense are vital steps toward a representative military framework. Furthermore, professionalism and depoliticizing the military (or, as the national security advisor put it, ‘demilitarizing the military’)⁸⁸ could mask or make SNA adherence or noncompliance to 4.5 clan power-sharing formula irrelevant.

86 ‘Security Pact’, London Conference Somalia 11 May 2017, 6, Accessed 30 January 2024, <https://unsom.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact.pdf>.

87 Interview with the commander of SNA Joint Forces for Galkacyo, by phone, 12 September 2023; and interview with a senior leader of the Somali president’s national security office, Mogadishu, 18 October 2023.

88 Interview with the office of the national security advisor, Mogadishu, 18 October 2023.

Conclusion

The quest for an agreed-upon and functional NSArch is an ambitious endeavor, important for state-building efforts in the country. While representing progress, the 2017–2023 NSArch confronts the reality of internal political fragmentation, capacity constraints, unsettled federalism issues and the persistent threat al-Shabaab poses. Critical to NSArch’s success is the management of these internal dynamics and the alignment of FMS security interests with FGS national objectives.

The contrasting and anecdotal examples of FGS–FMS and intra-FMS interactions, such as those between Puntland and Galmudug in Galkacyo and the FGS–Southwest state in Barawe, illustrate the necessity for a security strategy that is guided by professionalism and sensitivity to historical and clan-related issues. The experiences drawn from these regions indicate that co-created solutions and integrative military structures – as the Joint SNA Forces in Galkacyo – can serve as a model or anchor points for broader national security reforms or even state such as Jubaland or Gedo region security where cleavages run deep. The fact that this contingent is equally populated by soldiers from two regions, that knowledgeable commanders from the city were tasked to lead⁸⁹ and that the FGS covered their salaries seems to preempt the unit from faltering, in contrast to what happened between SNA forces in Barawe who were not from the state and Southwest state police units.

As Somalia is on the cusp of significant transitions, including the expected withdrawal of ATMIS forces and the lifting of the arms embargo, it is imperative to ensure the NSArch remains robust, inclusive, and well-coordinated. The FGS must harness the positive outcomes from cooperative frameworks such as the Joint SNA Forces in Galkacyo and address areas of contention, particularly with the new Puntland leadership,⁹⁰ through dialogue and political inclusivity.

89 Both the first commander and the current commander are Galkacyo natives, and from the Puntland side, so know the fault lines and pitfalls to avoid.

90 In the past, none of the previous Puntland presidents have been re-elected. Mr. Said Deni became the first to be re-elected in Puntland on 8 January 2024. FGS president attended Mr. Deni’s inauguration ceremony, though tension between them was palpable. They however agreed to co-convene a summit in the near future in Garowe -- hosted by Mr. Deni and led by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and this could start afresh in negotiations or settlement.

Recommendations

- **Promote equitable security participation:** FGS and FMSs should cultivate an inclusive national security framework by actively encouraging participation from all segments of society based on merit. This involves implementing measures to ensure diverse and widespread representation without perpetuating clan divisions.
- **Enhance federal and state security synergy:** National and FMS leaders should strengthen cooperative frameworks between the FGS and FMS for security planning and operations, focusing on shared goals and mutual respect for the roles and responsibilities of each level of governments.
- **Constitutional adherence and Puntland engagement:** The FGS should adhere to the letter and spirit of the provisional constitution in all matters to maintain legitimacy and order. As for Puntland, the incumbent's re-election should hasten FGS and Puntland's engagement in good faith. It is essential for all parties to recognize that a sustainable win–win situation akin to the success in Galkacyo is attainable and in the national best interest, moving beyond standoffs that hinder progress.
- **Expand the Joint SNA Force model:** Use the Joint SNA Forces model from Galkacyo as a pilot project or blueprint for other regions, emphasizing shared security management to unify diverse communities under a common purpose. The merger of the FGS and local security forces, including FGS and FMS police units, could help alleviate suspicion and mistrust.
- **Establish clear guidelines for militia integration:** Develop explicit protocols in the NSArch that address the short-term integration of grassroots forces such as the Macawisley into the FGS strategy. Ensure that such integration aligns with constitutional provisions and the principles outlined in the revised 2023 NSArch.

Credits

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