



# Foreign Counterterrorism Interventions and Their Impact on Somalia's State Sovereignty and Security Governance

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## Why Somalia Matters

Somalia's location on the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden makes it a strategic hub for global trade and security. It faces the long-standing Al-Shabaab insurgency, the rise of ISIS in Puntland, and spillovers from Yemen's Houthi conflict. These dynamics have drawn in a wide range of external powers, ensuring that Somalia remains one of the most important and contested arenas of foreign influence in Africa.

## A Complex Arena of Influence

- Western actors (US, EU, AU) – focus on counterterrorism, peacekeeping, and aid.
- Regional states (Kenya, Ethiopia, Egypt, Djibouti) – seek border security, political leverage, and economic access.
- Gulf states (UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia) and Türkiye – compete through ports, infrastructure, aid, and religious ties.
- New rivalries – US and Israel vs. Iran; Houthis threaten Gulf of Aden routes; ISIS and Al-Shabaab compete for recruits.
- Emerging powers (China, Russia) – expand influence via arms, infrastructure, and diplomacy.
- Multilateral missions – AMISOM (2007–2022), ATMIS (2022–2024), and AUSSOM (2025– ) seek stability but face donor fatigue and competing agendas.

## Internal Fragmentation

The federal government in Mogadishu remains weak and struggles to assert authority beyond the capital. Real power lies with regional states, which foreign actors use to advance their own agendas:

- Somaliland – relatively stable, close to Yemen, and increasingly attracting U.S. interest.
- Puntland – Bosaso has become a hub of U.S. strikes against ISIS since 2025.
- Jubaland – functions as Kenya's security buffer and economic foothold.
- This fragmentation prevents unified governance and undermines Somali sovereignty.

## Key Findings

- Conditional sovereignty – Somali priorities are dictated by external actors.
- Security paradox – Despite decades of peacekeeping missions, Al-Shabaab remains resilient and, in some areas, has grown stronger; meanwhile, ISIS is becoming a new focus in Puntland.
- Fragmented governance – foreign powers reinforce divisions between the federal government and regional states.
- Dependency and donor fatigue – aid reliance deepens, while international funding shows signs of decline.



Source: The Economist

“International actors thought they were tackling terrorism, but the militarised approach produced exactly what they wanted to avoid.”  
(Author's interview, 2025)

“Everyone claims to help Somalia, but each follows their own agenda.” (Author's interview, 2025)

## Policy Recommendations

1. Support Somali leadership – strengthen federal and regional institutions instead of bypassing them.
2. Work together – improve coordination between Western, Gulf, regional, and new global actors.
3. Go beyond the military – combine counterterrorism with efforts to reduce poverty, marginalisation, and poor governance.
4. Ease regional tensions – stop fueling divisions; promote dialogue and fair sharing of resources among Somali states.

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