

Testimony for Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs
“Somalia”

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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to update the Subcommittee on the Department of Defense’s (DoD) vision and role in Somalia.

Introduction

The United States has not held an official military relationship with Somalia since the early 1990s, in large part because there was not a U.S.-recognized government of Somalia until 2013

In light of the January 2013 recognition of the Federal Government of Somalia, the Department of Defense, in cooperation and close coordination with the Department of State (DoS), seeks to develop a normalized military-to-military relationship with the Somali National Security Forces (SNSF). Both agencies intend to work together in assisting Somalia to build the operational capacity of the SNSF and support the development of Somali security institutions.

Security Environment

Somalia is emerging from twenty years of civil war and the oppressive control of al-Shabaab. Since 2006, al-Shabaab has led a violent insurgency in southern and central Somalia, first against the former Somali Transitional Federal Government, and now against the Federal Government of Somalia and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces. Once controlling most major Somali cities, al-Shabaab operated with impunity.

Today, Somali, AMISOM, and Ethiopian forces have weakened al-Shabaab as a conventional fighting force in Somalia. However, al-Shabaab is still dangerous and capable of conducting sophisticated unconventional attacks to disrupt AMISOM operations and the Somali government. Recent events in Mogadishu and Nairobi are sobering reminders. Thus, for the foreseeable future, we must maintain focus on Somalia to sustain security progress made to date, as al-Shabaab is likely to remain the primary threat to Somalia and East Africa stability for some time to come.

The significant gains achieved by Somali and AMISOM forces over the past few years have been critical in providing space for the political process that resulted in Somalia's transition to a government now officially recognized by the United States. Somalia faces many challenges ahead, but it is moving forward on a positive path that was hard to imagine five years ago. As military-to-military relations mature and are normalized with Somalia, DoD through U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) will work with the DoS to design security cooperation activities to assist with the development of a unified Somali security force.

There have also been tremendous gains at sea. In and around the Horn of Africa, piracy has virtually been eliminated. As a maritime nation, the United States relies on the unhindered use of the seas to ensure our economic well-being, and we seek to ensure the same freedoms for other nations. As recently as 2011, Somali pirates held nearly 600 mariners hostages aboard 28 captured ships, and roamed an area the size of the United States looking for their next opportunity. Today, thanks to changes in business practices by the commercial maritime industry, and the presence of international naval forces, piracy is almost non-existent off the coast of Somalia. The last successful hijacking of a major commercial ship was in May 2012.

DoD Security Assistance /Cooperation

DoD's approach to the region and to Somalia reflects the U.S. National Security Strategy, the U.S. Strategy towards sub-Saharan Africa, Presidential Policy Directive 23 on Security Sector Assistance (SSA), and the Defense Strategic Guidance. DoD focuses in particular on advancing peace and security by working with partners to address security threats of shared concern and to create an environment that enables improved governance and sustainable broad-based development.

Looking forward, DoD will work, in conjunction with the DoS and other U.S. agencies providing security sector assistance to build the capacity of Somali security institutions in pursuit of the following objectives: (1) improve Somalia's ability to counter terrorism and secure its borders and coastline; and (2) reinforce democratic values and respect for rule of law. Additionally, we will continue to work with the State Department to support AMISOM and its troop-contributing countries in their efforts to counter and defeat al-Shabaab, creating space for the extension of governance throughout Somalia's territory. AMISOM represents an important success story in which African forces -- from Uganda, Burundi, Kenya,

Djibouti, , and Sierra Leone -- have collaborated to progressively regain territory from al-Shabaab, working in collaboration with the Somali National Army as well as Ethiopian forces. The United States and other international partners have provided critical training and equipment assistance to facilitate the efforts of these forces.

Once appropriations are approved for the Department, Fiscal Year 2014 (FY2014) would be the first in 20 years in which DoD is able to support the SNSF directly with Title 10 funding. Accordingly, USAFRICOM is working closely with Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) and DoS to ensure all proposed security cooperation programs are complementary to other ongoing U.S. Government and international efforts and are consistent with all laws affecting U.S. assistance, including the Child Soldiers Prevention Act. Initial training proposals for FY2014 will likely focus on logistics, personnel management, finance and budgeting, and maintenance, all of which were requested by the Somali leadership.

DoD has put in place a Senior Military Representative at the Somali Affairs Unit in Nairobi, who performs a role similar to a Defense Attaché, and we will increase our presence in Mogadishu in tandem with the State Department. CJTF-HOA personnel are now participating in both the Joint Security Committee led by the Somali government and the Somalia Defense Working Group led by the United Nations on a regular basis. Moreover, we have made a concerted effort to increase our key leader engagements with senior Somali officials. This summer, the Commander of USAFRICOM made an initial visit to Mogadishu. Additionally, Secretary Hagel recently hosted the President of Somalia, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and his Chief of Defense, General Elmi, at the Pentagon. These face-to-face engagements have been critical in identifying and better understanding Somali security needs and concerns.

With regard to maritime security, DoD has played and is playing a significant role in countering piracy and maritime crime. In 2009, we established Combined Task Force 151 (CTF-151) in a dedicated effort to prevent further attacks in the Gulf of Aden and off the eastern coast of Somalia. The United States has both commanded this Task Force and provided naval forces to it. In addition to CTF-151, the U.S. Navy also participates in NATO's counter-piracy efforts in the Horn of Africa, as part of Operation Ocean Shield. Today, pirates no longer roam freely. However, notwithstanding the positive trends of the past two years, the decline in piracy is perishable if these measures are not maintained.

Finally, DoD and DoS will explore opportunities to increase the SNSF border security capabilities; assist Somalia's maritime security capacity; build a Somali counterterrorism capability to deal with terrorists threats; and assisting in justice sector reforms.

Conclusion

Somalia will continue to present a complex and fluid set of challenges and opportunities. However, with sustained assistance from the United States and other international partners, Somalia's national security apparatus will be better positioned to fend off the al-Shabaab insurgency and gradually transform the fragile state into a success story.

Thank you for your enduring support to our men and women in uniform, and our dedicated team of civilian professionals. We look forward to working with you in the months ahead.