

Strategic Determinants of Military Effectiveness in Fragile States: The Case of Somalia

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ABSTRACT

The military efficacy in fragile nations is influenced by a confluence of strategic, institutional, and contextual factors that affect the capacity of armed forces to maintain stability and fulfil national security goals. Somalia's prolonged war, fragile governmental frameworks, and foreign involvement have posed significant obstacles to the establishment of a competent military. This article analyses how elements like as leadership, resource mobilisation, training and professionalism, institutional coherence, and the influence of foreign relationships affect the performance of Somali National Army. It underscores the influence of political instability, clan dynamics, and tenuous governance on military operations and strategic planning. The article examines how Somalia's dependence on foreign entities, notably the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia and international donors, has influenced its military capabilities and strategic goals. Research reveals that while external funding has improved capabilities in logistics, training, and equipment supply, excessive reliance on foreign aid jeopardises long-term sustainability and independence. The paper asserts that enhancing Somalia's military efficacy requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates political stability, institutional changes, and capacity-building programs suited to the nation's precarious circumstances.

Key Words: Military effectiveness, leadership, resource mobilization, training and professionalism, and performance of the Somali National Army

INTRODUCTION

The military efficacy in fragile nations is influenced by a complex interaction of strategic, institutional, and contextual elements that dictate the capacity of armed forces to fulfil national security goals. Fragile governments, marked by inadequate governance, political volatility, and little resources, often have difficulties in establishing unified and professional armies capable of confronting both internal and foreign challenges. Somalia is a significant case study due to its enduring war, reliance on foreign interventions, and continuous attempts to reconstruct its national defence forces amidst continuing issues of insurgency, clan politics, and outsider influence. Comprehending the strategic factors influencing military efficacy in these situations is essential for enhancing Somalia's security framework and for offering insights into wider peacebuilding and state-building initiatives in vulnerable settings.

The military effectiveness of a nation is a key element in the preservation of its sovereignty, security, and stability, especially in fragile states plagued by internal conflict, political instability, and governance challenges. **Strategic determinants of military effectiveness** are critical factors that influence military's ability to achieve its objectives. These include leadership quality, organizational structure, resource allocation, strategic planning, institutional capacity and the coherence between military goals and broader national security priorities (Black, 2005; Betts, 2009). In fragile states, these determinants are often compounded by additional challenges such as internal divisions, corruption, external dependency, and a lack of coherent state institutions, which can severely hinder the military's operational capacity.

In Somalia, these strategic determinants play a pivotal role in shaping the Somali National Army's (SNA) ability to confront insurgencies, protect the population, and stabilize the country. Since the collapse of its central government in 1991, Somalia has experienced a fragmentation of state power, and its military has struggled to

adapt to a constantly shifting security environment. The emergence of militant groups like al-Shabaab, which has consistently undermined national security, is a reflection of the SNA's failure to maintain control over large parts of the country and protect vital state institutions (Menkhaus, 2014). This highlights the significant challenges faced by the Somali military in maintaining its effectiveness in a volatile environment.

The Somali National Army, historically considered a symbol of state power, was severely weakened following the collapse of the Barre regime. Decades of conflict, internal power struggles, and the lack of institutional reforms have left the SNA ill-equipped to carry out its duties effectively (Shinn, 2017). As a result, the Somali military's success in restoring order and securing territory has been limited, despite heavy external military interventions. In particular, the involvement of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which has provided critical support to the government and military, has highlighted both the need for external intervention and the challenges of building a sustainable, self-sufficient military force in the absence of robust national institutions (Baldwin, 2014).

This section explores the key **strategic determinants of military effectiveness** in fragile states, with a particular focus on how these factors manifest in Somalia. By examining the interplay of internal divisions, external military support, training deficits, and institutional fragility, this paper will highlight the complexities that shape the operational effectiveness of the Somali military and offer insights into the broader challenges faced by fragile states in ensuring military efficacy. The study examined strategic determinants of military effectiveness in fragile states, with a particular focus on Somalia. Through this exploration, the paper sought to provide insights into the complex relationship between military strategy, institutional capacity, and security outcomes in fragile and conflict-affected settings (Menkhaus, 2014; de Waal, 2015).

Background

Somalia's military history is fundamentally intertwined with the political and socioeconomic instability that has plagued the nation since the disintegration of its central government in 1991. The collapse of Siad Barre's administration dissolved state institutions and initiated an extended era of clan-based violence, militia operations, and governance disintegration (Lewis, 2002). The Somali National Army (SNA), once an organised military entity, was dismantled, resulting in the devastation of the nation's defense infrastructure and the emergence of a perilous security vacuum (Menkhaus, 2014). Warlords and non-state armed factions, resulting in extensive lawlessness and undermining the potential for national unity, rapidly exploited the resultant vacuum. The rise of al-Shabaab in the mid-2000s introduced a new facet to the war, as the organisation sought to build a radical Islamist state and conducted assaults against military entities and civilians (Williams, 2012).

In reaction to the escalating crisis, regional and international entities intervened to stabilize Somalia, particularly via the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), initiated in 2007. AMISOM provided essential assistance to the Somali government by combating al-Shabaab assaults, protecting vital metropolitan areas, and training Somali military personnel (Baldwin, 2014). Nonetheless, despite these achievements, Somalia's defence sector persists in encountering substantial obstacles. Factors like insufficient training, restricted financing, corruption, weak command structures, and clan-based divisions hinder the operational efficacy of the SNA (Hirsch, 2017). These institutional deficiencies have impeded the establishment of a viable national defence force capable of independently securing the nation.

Furthermore, Somalia's significant reliance on foreign military assistance has elicited apprehensions about the long-term viability of its defence industry. Although AMISOM and several international partners have been instrumental in repelling militants and facilitating security sector changes, the Somali military continues to be heavily dependent on foreign assistance and logistical support (Shinn, 2017). This reliance not only concerns Somalia's sovereignty but also the capacity of its military institutions to operate independently after the withdrawal of foreign troops. Reconstructing Somalia's defence capabilities necessitates confronting deep-rooted structural obstacles while fostering internal unity, accountability, and institutional robustness to guarantee enduring stability and national security.

Statement of the Problem

Fragile governments often have difficulties in establishing efficient military institutions owing to inadequate governance, limited resources, and ongoing instability. Somalia illustrates this difficulty, since prolonged civil conflict, terrorism, and clan rivalries have diminished the ability of the military forces to provide national security (Gichuki, 2016). Notwithstanding substantial foreign aid, the Somali National Army persists in encountering difficulties related to poor coordination, corruption, insufficient supplies, and little professionalism, all of which detract from its efficacy in combating threats like Al-Shabaab.

Although military assistance, foreign training, and regional initiatives have offered transient enhancements to Somalia's security framework, these external measures have failed to provide enduring efficacy (Abdi, 2016). The ongoing insurgency, unstable command structures, and inadequate integration of security tactics demonstrate that foreign assistance alone cannot ensure enduring military efficacy. Military performance in fragile governments such as Somalia relies on a confluence of strategic factors, including leadership, institutional changes, local legitimacy, and the congruence of military aims with overarching political stability. Moreover, Somalia's military struggles are compounded by a complex network of clan loyalties that undermine unity and discipline within the armed forces (Menkhaus, 2014). This fragmentation of the military and its inability to secure key territories under its control continue to perpetuate insecurity, and despite international efforts, the country remains vulnerable to attacks from both al-Shabaab and external actors (Williams, 2012).

Despite the recognition of these aspects, there exists a lack of academic consensus over which determinants are paramount in influencing Somalia's military efficacy. The absence of empirical clarity obstructs politicians and foreign partners from formulating solutions that tackle underlying causes instead of just addressing symptoms of military inadequacy. The question arises: **What are the strategic determinants that influence military effectiveness in fragile states, and how do these factors manifest in the case of Somalia?**

Main Objective

The main objective of the study was to determine the strategic determinants that influence military effectiveness in fragile states: the case of Somalia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study sought to identify the strategic factors that affect military effectiveness in fragile states, including the role of external military support, institutional weaknesses, clan-based divisions, and broader geopolitical factors. Without a robust and capable military, Somalia remains exposed to internal and external threats, undermining its prospects for peace, stability, and development (Baldwin, 2014). Certainly. Below is a **continuous, prose-style version** of the elaborated analysis on **Somalia's military power projection during the Siad Barre era (1970s–1980s)**, covering its formation, structure, political role, regional impact, and collapse. This version is crafted in an academic tone, suitable for reports or essays, and includes references at the end.

Somali Military Power Projection in the 1970s–1980s: The Siad Barre Era

Under the regime of President Mohamed Siad Barre (1969–1991), Somalia developed one of the largest and most formidable military forces in sub-Saharan Africa. The rise of the Somali National Army (SNA) during this period must be understood in the broader context of Cold War dynamics, post-colonial state-building, and Somalia's irredentist ideology aimed at unifying all Somali-inhabited regions across the Horn of Africa.

After gaining independence in 1960, Somalia inherited a modest military from the British Somaliland Scouts and Italian-trained security units. The newly unified state prioritized military development, seeing the armed forces not only as a bulwark against external threats but also as a national institution capable of fostering unity and stability in a newly formed nation. However, this changed drastically after the 1969 military coup led by Siad Barre. Barre, espousing "scientific socialism," realigned Somalia with the Soviet Union and began a major military expansion. During the 1970s, the Soviet Union provided extensive support, supplying modern weapons including MiG-17 and MiG-21 fighter jets, tanks, artillery, and naval vessels while also building military

infrastructure such as the port and airbase in Berbera. Soviet and Cuban advisors trained thousands of Somali officers both domestically and abroad, contributing to the rapid professionalization of the military.

By the mid-1970s, the Somali Armed Forces had grown to approximately 100,000 personnel, comprising a well-equipped army, navy, air force, and air defense units. The military was divided into six major sectors, each with its own command and control structures. In addition to the regular armed forces, the regime created paramilitary formations such as the Victory Pioneers and the People's Militia, which were instrumental in maintaining internal order and ideological loyalty. Military academies, such as the Siad Barre Military Academy and the Ahmed Gurey War College, were established to train officers and instill political indoctrination.

While ostensibly a national defense institution, the military quickly became the primary instrument of regime control. Barre relied heavily on the armed forces and security apparatus including the National Security Service (NSS), modeled after the Soviet KGB to suppress dissent and consolidate power. Political opposition was criminalized, and the use of arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings became widespread. Initially promoting a rhetoric of anti-clan nationalism, Barre gradually reverted to clan favoritism, particularly favoring his own Marehan sub-clan of the Darod and forming the so-called MOD alliance (Marehan, Ogaden, Dhulbahante). This shift alienated other major clans, notably the Hawiye and Isaaq, who began organizing armed resistance.

Somalia's military might was dramatically projected in the late 1970s during the Ogaden War. In 1977, Barre launched a full-scale invasion of Ethiopia's Ogaden region, home to a large ethnic Somali population. The Somali army initially succeeded, capturing up to 90% of the territory. However, the tide of the war turned when the Soviet Union, formerly Somalia's key backer, shifted support to Ethiopia and facilitated the deployment of over 15,000 Cuban troops and Soviet military advisors to assist the Derg regime. The Somali army, outnumbered and outgunned, was forced to retreat by 1978, suffering devastating losses: approximately one-third of its soldiers, half its air force, and a significant portion of its armored divisions were destroyed. The war also caused massive displacement, with over a million Ethiopian refugees, mostly ethnic Somalis, fleeing into Somalia and putting additional strain on the state.

The Ogaden defeat marked a turning point for Somalia. Militarily, the country had overextended itself. Politically, the loss eroded Barre's legitimacy. In response to the Soviet betrayal, Somalia expelled Soviet advisors and sought support from the United States. Washington, eager to counter Soviet influence in the region, began providing military and economic aid to Somalia throughout the 1980s, including logistical and intelligence support. However, this aid never matched the scale or depth of the previous Soviet assistance, and Somalia's military capability never fully recovered.

Domestically, Barre's regime became increasingly authoritarian and dependent on coercion. As political dissent grew, especially among marginalized clans, the military was used to violently suppress uprisings. The Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), Somali National Movement (SNM), and later the United Somali Congress (USC) emerged as armed opposition movements, many led by former military officers disillusioned with the regime. In the northern regions, particularly among the Isaaq population, government forces carried out brutal campaigns of collective punishment, including mass killings and the aerial bombing of cities like Hargeisa in 1988, resulting in tens of thousands of civilian deaths and large-scale displacement.

By the late 1980s, the Somali military once among Africa's most capable had degenerated into a fragmented and demoralized force. Clan favoritism undermined cohesion, and many units began to act autonomously or defect to rebel groups. The centralized chain of command deteriorated, and the distinction between state security forces and clan militias became increasingly blurred. When Barre was overthrown in 1991, the Somali National Army disintegrated entirely. No successor national force emerged; instead, power was dispersed among warlords and clan-based militias, plunging the country into a protracted civil war.

The collapse of Somalia's military was not merely a symptom of regime change; it was central to the unraveling of the Somali state itself. Barre's strategy of militarization, repression, and clan-based patronage had hollowed out national institutions. Once the army fell apart, there was nothing left to hold the state together. The legacy

of this militarized authoritarianism still haunts Somalia, where rebuilding a unified, professional national army remains one of the most difficult challenges of the post-conflict era.

Post - 1991: Collapse, Fragmentation, and the Disintegration of the Military Institution

The fall of Siad Barre in 1991 triggered the complete collapse of the Somali state, including its once-formidable military institution. With the disintegration of the Somali National Army (SNA), no unified national military existed for more than a decade. The armed forces fragmented along clan lines, with former military officers aligning with their respective sub-clans and warlords, effectively transforming the national army into competing militia groups (Menkhaus, 2003).

This fragmentation crippled any possibility of maintaining a centralized defense apparatus. Instead of a national army, a mosaic of **clan militias**, **warlord-led factions**, and later **Islamist armed groups** such as *Al-Itihaad al-Islamiya* and *Al-Shabaab* emerged, each exerting territorial control and enforcing their own security agendas (Bryden, 2013). As loyalty shifted from the state to the clan, the ethos of a professional military force gave way to patronage-driven violence and localized militarization.

Early transitional governments, namely the **Transitional National Government (TNG)** formed in 2000 and the **Transitional Federal Government (TFG)** in 2004 lacked the capacity to reconstitute the national military. Their security forces were weak, fragmented, and often comprised former militiamen with divided allegiances. These governments never achieved a monopoly on the use of force and relied heavily on foreign military support, notably from **Ethiopia (2006–2009)** and later **African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)** (Menkhaus, 2007). This external dependence further undermined the legitimacy and autonomy of Somalia's security institutions.

The collapse of the military also had strategic consequences. The absence of a functioning national army created a security vacuum that allowed piracy to flourish along Somalia's coast and turned parts of the country into safe havens for jihadist networks. Rebuilding a professional military has since proven difficult due to deep-rooted mistrust among clans, the politicization of the recruitment process, and the continued dominance of local militias.

In short, the post-1991 fragmentation did not merely weaken the military it **dismantled it as a national institution**, replacing it with decentralized, clan-aligned armed entities that contributed to Somalia's prolonged state failure.

2004–Present: Rebuilding the Somali Military in a Fragmented Security Order

Since 2004, Somalia has pursued the reconstruction of its national military under fragile political conditions, external dependence, and ongoing conflict. Efforts to reestablish the **Somali National Army (SNA)** have been deeply constrained by **clan-based fragmentation**, **parallel security forces**, and the persistent threat of **Al-Shabaab** (Menkhaus, 2014).

Early security sector reform under the **Transitional Federal Government (TFG)** lacked coherence and legitimacy. Instead of forming a unified army, the SNA evolved as a patchwork of regional clan militias and externally trained units, often lacking coordination or central command (Williams, 2015). A revised **National Security Architecture (2017)** aimed to standardize and integrate forces, but implementation stalled due to elite power struggles and federal-regional tensions (UN Security Council, 2022).

Key international actors have filled this institutional vacuum:

- **The U.S.** supported the elite **Danab Brigade**, Somalia's most professional unit, though its impact remains limited by scale and sustainability (Bryden, 2013).
- **Turkey** established **Camp TURKSOM** in Mogadishu, training thousands of SNA soldiers and leading modernization efforts, including a 10-year defense agreement in 2024 focusing on air and naval capacity (Hansen, 2020).

- **Italy** and the **EU** contributed to military equipment and training, while **AMISOM** (now **ATMIS**) provided vital battlefield support but failed to build lasting national capacity (Williams, 2018).

These parallel efforts resulted in a **hybrid security order**, where national forces operated alongside foreign-trained units, clan militias, and private security often with competing loyalties (Debos, 2021). Despite donor investment, the SNA remains fragmented, underfunded, and reliant on external actors for logistics, training, and airpower (UNSC, 2023).

Al-Shabaab has capitalized on these weaknesses. Though expelled from major cities, the group maintains territorial control in rural regions, collects taxes, and conducts asymmetric attacks even infiltrating military ranks (Menkhaus, 2018; Crisis Group, 2023). The militarization of politics and lack of unified command have hindered counterinsurgency effectiveness and undermined public trust.

Ultimately, Somalia's military rebuilding has seen **incremental progress** but lacks the institutional coherence and legitimacy necessary for full state security autonomy. With **ATMIS scheduled to withdraw**, the burden of defense now rests on a fragmented security architecture still struggling to transition from dependence to sovereignty.

Theoretical Framework: Rethinking Military Effectiveness in Fragile States

Conceptualizing Military Effectiveness

Military effectiveness is broadly defined as the ability of armed forces to achieve intended strategic objectives in warfare or peace enforcement operations. Understanding military efficiency requires comprehending how a state or armed organisation may convert its military resources, capabilities, and plans into intended political and security results. It transcends just having substantial military forces or sophisticated armaments; rather, it emphasises the efficacy of their organisation, management, and use in achieving strategic goals. In these environments, military effectiveness must be seen not only in terms of combat performance but also in terms of institutional sustainability, political reliability, and the capacity to contribute to **state building**.

This broadened comprehension is essential in contexts where the military functions not just as a combat instrument but also as a significant political entity, a source of security, and a representation of national unity. In unstable governments, military forces are often entrenched in patronage systems, ethno political divides, or foreign dependencies, rendering traditional measures insufficient (Brooks, 2003; Biddle & Zirkle, 1996). A military that excels tactically but intensifies social divides or subverts civic authority may achieve success on the battlefield but ultimately fail in state building.

Moreover, institutional sustainability refers to whether a force can maintain operations independently over time through budgetary, training, and recruitment systems without collapsing or reverting to militias. Political reliability includes loyalty to civilian leadership and respect for democratic or constitutional norms. This is particularly important in fragile states where militaries have historically been coup-prone or instruments of elite repression (Feaver, 2003; Stanley, 2022).

A third essential dimension is the contribution of the military to broader state-building goals. This includes integration of diverse ethnic or clan elements, equitable recruitment, and civilian oversight mechanisms factors that determine whether the armed forces enhance or erode state legitimacy (Mumford, 2013; Tilly, 1992). In addition, military effectiveness in fragile contexts must be **multidimensional**, incorporating strategic performance, institutional capacity, and political accountability. Any attempt to rebuild or assess militaries in such states like Somalia must therefore consider both tactical capability and their broader role in governance, identity formation, and post-conflict recovery

Four Strategic Determinants

This paper identifies four interrelated strategic determinants of military effectiveness in fragile states:

1. **Political Cohesion:** The degree to which political elites and military leadership align in vision, authority, and strategy.
2. **Institutional Capacity:** The administrative and organizational strength of military institutions to recruit, train, and sustain forces.
3. **External Alignment:** The role of foreign assistance, alliances, and intervention in shaping military performance.
4. **Strategic Leadership and Doctrine:** The extent to which coherent leadership and operational doctrine guide military actions.

Each determinant was operationalized and applied to the case of Somalia to measure the level Somali National Army Forces in the strategic determinants in the effectiveness in fragile state.

Political Cohesion and Military Fragmentation in Somalia: Implications for Military Effectiveness

1. Theoretical Context: Civil-Military Relations in Fragile States

In fragile states, the relationship between political cohesion and military organization is central to military effectiveness. **Cohesive political leadership** is typically required to establish a unified defense vision, allocate resources equitably, and exert credible civilian control over the armed forces. However, where political fragmentation or elite rivalries dominate often along ethnic or clan lines militaries tend to reflect these divisions, resulting in fragmented command structures, patronage-based recruitment, and factional loyalties (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997; Feaver, 2003).

2. Somalia: A Case of Clan Politics and Military Dysfunction

Somalia presents a textbook case of how **weak political cohesion and entrenched identity politics** can fracture the military and limit its effectiveness. Following the collapse of the central state in 1991, clan-based factions, with no overarching national consensus or strong state institutions to consolidate power, dominated Somalia's political system. The militarization of clan identity, rather than national allegiance, has deeply penetrated the armed forces. **Recruitment into the Somali National Army** is often influenced by clan quotas or local power brokers rather than meritocratic or strategic criteria (Menkhaus, 2007; Williams, 2015). As a result, units are frequently more loyal to their clan elders or regional leaders than to the federal government. This undermines **unit cohesion, interoperability, and command discipline** core components of military effectiveness (Brooks, 2003). For example, the **Federal Member States (FMS)** maintain their own regional security forces, which often function more like private militias than components of a national defense force. The failure to integrate these forces under a unified command structure has left the SNA fragmented and unable to coordinate nationwide operations effectively (International Crisis Group, 2020).

3. Politicization of the Security Sector

The Somali political elite have frequently used the security sector as a tool for consolidating power rather than defending the state. Governments have promoted officers and deployed forces based on political loyalty or clan affiliation, not professional criteria. This has led to **frequent defections**, poor morale, and an erosion of the military's legitimacy among the population (Menkhaus, 2014). For instance, units withdrawn from certain regions have left security vacuums that are quickly filled by **Al-Shabaab**, demonstrating the tactical and strategic vulnerabilities created by political manipulation of the military. Additionally, **external actors** often engage with Somalia's fragmented military architecture based on their own geopolitical interests, training elite units (e.g., **Danab, Gorgor**) that are disconnected from a coherent national strategy. While these units may exhibit localized tactical success, they risk reinforcing fragmentation by bypassing national command and control mechanisms (Williams, 2018; Bryden, 2013).

4. Impact on Military Effectiveness

The absence of political cohesion and the prevalence of military fragmentation in Somalia directly hinder the core dimensions of military effectiveness:

- **Strategic Integration:** Without political consensus, Somalia lacks a coherent national security doctrine or unified chain of command.
- **Operational Coordination:** Fragmented units do not coordinate across sectors or regions, hampering multi-pronged operations against threats like Al-Shabaab.
- **Institutional Development:** Politicization and clannism prevent the establishment of a professional military ethos, weakening training, discipline, and accountability systems.

Ultimately, the Somali case illustrates that **military effectiveness in fragile states** is inseparable from political context. A fragmented political system cannot produce a coherent, professional, and loyal military. Efforts at defense reform must, therefore, be embedded within broader **state-building** and **political reconciliation** processes.

Institutional Capacity and Military Effectiveness in Fragile States: The Case of Somalia

1. Theoretical Framework: Institutional Capacity in Military Organizations

Institutional capacity refers to the **administrative, logistical, and organizational ability** of a military to recruit, train, equip, deploy, and sustain its personnel in line with national security objectives. In fragile states, where central institutions are weak or contested, building such capacity is foundational to achieving military effectiveness (Huntington, 1957; Brooks, 2003). A professional, functioning defense institution requires bureaucratic coherence, functional training pipelines, equipment maintenance systems, and sustainable funding mechanisms (Pion-Berlin, 2005). In the absence of these, militaries tend to be fragmented, informal, undertrained, and reliant on external actors conditions that severely compromise effectiveness both in combat and in supporting broader state building.

2. Somalia's Institutional Military Capacity: A Persistent Deficit

Somalia illustrates how fragile institutional capacity constrains the military's operational performance and long-term sustainability. After the state collapse in 1991, Somalia lost not only its central political institutions but also its defense bureaucracy, training academies, payroll systems, and logistics infrastructure (Menkhaus, 2007). Efforts to rebuild the Somali National Army (SNA) since 2004 have been repeatedly hindered by the absence of a **functioning defense ministry, reliable personnel management systems, and unified chains of command** (Williams, 2015). The **Ministry of Defense** and **General Staff** often lack the human resources and administrative systems to oversee recruitment, vetting, or promotions. As a result, many SNA units are formed ad hoc, based on clan quotas or foreign training arrangements, without centralized planning or doctrine (Bryden, 2013; Crisis Group, 2020). This severely undermines force cohesion and command discipline.

3. Logistical & Financial Incoherence

Somalia's military institutions struggle with basic logistical functions such as arms distribution, troop rotations, and equipment maintenance. Troops frequently go unpaid due to corruption, donor mismanagement, or disorganized payroll systems, leading to desertions, defections, and low morale (Menkhaus, 2014; UNSC, 2023). In one notable case, a **2019 UN Panel of Experts** report found that weapons provided by international partners were routinely diverted to clan militias or black markets due to the absence of arms control systems (UN Security Council, 2019). Similarly, some foreign-trained units (e.g., Turkish-trained **Gorgor** or U.S.-trained **Danab**) remain functionally separate from the SNA, creating parallel command structures and duplication of efforts.

4. Training and Professional Development Gaps

Somalia lacks an integrated national military academy system capable of training officers and NCOs at scale. Most professionalization occurs via **foreign training missions**—with varied curricula, standards, and strategic goals. This disjointed approach limits doctrinal cohesion and leaves Somali forces dependent on external actors for leadership development, counterinsurgency skills, and logistics management (Williams, 2018; Hansen, 2020). Without domestic institutional mechanisms for continuous professional development, promotions are often political or clan-based rather than meritocratic, undermining leadership quality and operational effectiveness (Menkhaus, 2018).

5. Institutional Capacity and State-Building

Beyond tactical performance, weak institutional military capacity in Somalia negatively affects the military's contribution to state legitimacy. A fragmented and incoherent army cannot be an instrument of national unity or reliable public service. Instead, it reinforces perceptions of elite corruption, clan bias, and external dependence limiting the military's potential role in national integration and sovereignty (Tilly, 1992; Debos, 2021). Efforts to professionalize the force such as the **Somali Transition Plan** and **National Security Architecture** have repeatedly stalled due to institutional weaknesses in budgeting, coordination, and implementation (UNSC, 2022).

In fragile states like Somalia, institutional capacity is not a peripheral concern it is **central to military effectiveness**. Without capable institutions to recruit, train, equip, and manage forces, militaries cannot perform their basic functions, let alone contribute to national cohesion or sovereignty. Somalia's ongoing struggles with fragmented command structures, parallel forces, weak logistics, and politicized promotions demonstrate how the absence of institutional capacity systematically undermines military effectiveness. Any durable solution must therefore prioritize not just tactical capabilities, but the bureaucratic and administrative foundations of a national defense system.

External Alignment and Military Performance in Fragile States: The Case of Somalia

In fragile states, **external alignment** encompassing foreign military aid, alliances, training missions and direct intervention plays a pivotal role in shaping military performance. While such assistance can provide essential resources, it often comes with strategic fragmentation, dependency, and sovereignty trade-offs (Brooks, 2003; Pion-Berlin, 2005). Somalia exemplifies the paradox of external alignment. Since 2004, the country has been heavily reliant on international actors to rebuild its military, including the **U.S.**, **Turkey**, the **EU**, **Ethiopia**, and **ATMIS** (formerly AMISOM). Each actor has trained and supported different units such as the **Danab (U.S.)**, **Gorgor (Turkey)**, and regional police units leading to a patchwork army without unified command or doctrine (Williams, 2018; Bryden, 2013).

While foreign-trained units often outperform domestically raised ones, they remain **tactically siloed, logistically dependent**, and politically disconnected from Somali institutions. This reinforces fragmentation within the Somali National Army and weakens national ownership of the security sector (Menkhaus, 2014; Crisis Group, 2020). Moreover, shifting donor agendas and inconsistent funding especially during ATMIS drawdowns have further destabilized Somalia's security apparatus, leaving gaps quickly exploited by insurgent groups like **Al-Shabaab**. These dynamics illustrate that external alignment, while indispensable in fragile settings, must be strategically coordinated, locally embedded, and institutionally integrated to enhance long-term military effectiveness and sovereignty.

Strategic Leadership and Doctrine: Foundations of Military Effectiveness in Fragile States – The Case of Somalia

In fragile states, the presence or absence of **coherent strategic leadership** and **operational doctrine** fundamentally shapes the effectiveness of the military. Effective strategic leadership provides vision, enforces accountability, and aligns military force with national political objectives (Huntington, 1957; Pion-Berlin, 2005). Complementarily, doctrine serves as the intellectual and operational backbone of military action, ensuring

consistent decision-making, tactical standardization, and inter-unit coordination (Biddle, 2004). In Somalia, however, both strategic leadership and doctrine remain **underdeveloped or fragmented**, undermining the Somali National Army's capacity to function as a cohesive and effective force. Years of state collapse, clan politics, and international intervention have disrupted the development of centralized command structures and long-term strategic thinking.

1. Leadership Fragmentation and Political Interference

Somalia's strategic leadership suffers from **institutional discontinuity, politicization, and clan-based factionalism**. Military leadership positions, such as chief of defence forces and division commanders, are often politically selected based on clan balancing rather than professional qualifications (Menkhaus, 2007; Williams, 2015). This technique compromises command unity, diminishes operational coherence, and fosters intra-force competition. The frequent reassignment of senior commanders and defence ministers, frequently for political motives, hinders the formulation and execution of enduring strategic plans. Consequently, Somalia lacks a cohesive national defence strategy, resulting in military actions that are reactive, disjointed, and excessively reliant on external entities (Crisis Group, 2020).

2. Absence of Unified Doctrine

Equally detrimental is the **absence of a nationally developed and enforced military doctrine**. The SNA does not operate under a cohesive framework of principles guiding tactics, force deployment, civil-military engagement, or counterinsurgency operations. Instead, disparate foreign-trained units (such as Danab, Gorgor, EU-supported police forces) operate under **multiple external doctrines**, resulting in doctrinal incoherence and poor interoperability (Williams, 2018; Bryden, 2013). This doctrinal vacuum has direct battlefield consequences. For instance, counterinsurgency efforts against **Al-Shabaab** have lacked consistency in operational strategy, rules of engagement, and post-operation stabilization. Without a formal doctrine that integrates military efforts with political and community-based stabilization, short-term tactical gains fail to produce lasting security improvements (Menkhaus, 2014; Hansen, 2020).

3. Consequences for Military Effectiveness

The result of weak strategic leadership and doctrinal fragmentation is a military that lacks:

- **Clear operational priorities**
- **Command and control unity**
- **Inter-unit coordination**
- **Strategic adaptability in asymmetric warfare**

This severely impairs Somalia's ability to transition from external dependency to **self-reliant security governance**, particularly as **ATMIS draws down** and Somali forces must assume greater responsibility for territorial defense and civilian protection (UNSC, 2023)

CONCLUSION

This study examined the strategic determinants of military effectiveness in fragile states, using Somalia as a focused case. The analysis demonstrates that in contexts of protracted fragility, military effectiveness cannot be measured solely by battlefield outcomes, but must be understood as a **multidimensional concept** that incorporates institutional capacity, political cohesion, strategic leadership, operational doctrine, and the nature of external alignment.

Somalia's case demonstrates that military weakness is both a reflection and a catalyst of state fragility. Following the 1991 collapse of centralized authority, the professional army established under Siad Barre disintegrated, giving rise to clan-based militias and fragmented security structures. Although international partners have

invested heavily in rebuilding the military, progress has been constrained by the lack of unified command, limited institutional capacity, politicized leadership, incoherent doctrines, and continued dependence on external support.

While progress has been made in developing elite units like **Danab** and **Gorgor**, the Somali National Army remains structurally fragmented, poorly coordinated, and vulnerable to internal political dynamics. More importantly, the military has yet to become a cohesive instrument of national sovereignty and public legitimacy. Strategic leadership remains fluid and often politicized; doctrine is externally imported and inconsistently applied; and institutional systems for recruitment, training, logistics, and command lack national integration.

The Somali case thus reinforces the broader finding that **military effectiveness in fragile states is inseparable from state-building**. A military that lacks political legitimacy, institutional sustainability, and internal coherence cannot perform its core security functions, nor can it serve as a vehicle for national integration and post-conflict stabilization.

Strategic Recommendations

To enhance military effectiveness in Somalia and by extension in similar fragile states the following strategic interventions are recommended:

1. Institutional Reform and Integration

- Prioritize **national ownership** of the security sector through integrated command structures under a unified Ministry of Defense.
- Establish and capacitate **military service commissions** to oversee recruitment, promotions, and discipline on a merit-based and non-clan basis.
- Develop robust **human resource and payroll systems** to reduce corruption, improve morale, and prevent force fragmentation.

2. National Doctrine and Strategic Planning

- Formulate and adopt a **Somali-led national military doctrine**, aligning foreign-trained forces with common operational standards and rules of engagement.
- Create a **joint strategic planning center** to coordinate inter-agency security efforts and long-term defense policy.

3. Leadership Development and Civil-Military Balance

- Invest in professional military education by establishing a **national defense college** focused on leadership, ethics, and civil-military relations.
- Introduce civilian oversight mechanisms, including parliamentary committees and civil society input, to enhance transparency and democratic accountability.

4. Coordinated External Assistance

- Create a **donor coordination mechanism** under Somali leadership to harmonize foreign military support with national priorities and doctrines.
- Gradually transition from donor-dependence to **self-sustaining funding models**, supported by increased national budget allocation to defense.

5. Political Reconciliation and Security Sector Legitimacy

- Embed military reform within broader **political reconciliation processes**, ensuring inclusive representation of all Federal Member States (FMS) in national security planning.
- Promote the military as a symbol of **national unity**, not a tool of factional or clan-based power.

By pursuing these strategic priorities, Somalia can transform its security apparatus from a fragmented and externally propped entity into a **functional, legitimate, and nationally accountable military institution** a critical prerequisite for durable peace, state consolidation, and regional stability.

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