

Rethinking military intervention in Somalia: Towards a multi-scalar approach to conflict transformation

Kerry Muhati^{1*}
Steve Ouma Akoth²

^{1*}beckskelly2015@gmail.com

^{1,2}Tangaza University, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Military operations in Somalia have continued for more than three decades without achieving durable stability. This paper argues that traditional state-centred approaches to security have been ineffective because they operate at a single scale, disconnected from the local, national and regional interrelations that sustain the conflict cycle. Drawing on Multi-Level Conflict Theory, Human Security Theory and the Hybrid Peace Framework, the paper examines the disjuncture between externally led military activity and indigenous governance structures, civilian welfare, and the long-term capacity of Somali institutions. It adopts a qualitative, desk-based research design, analysing secondary literature, institutional reports and policy documents through thematic and comparative content analysis organised around the three theoretical lenses. The review shows that structural marginalisation, clan-based inequality, and the geopolitics of the Horn of Africa combine to reproduce violence, and those customary xeer institutions and clan elders offer alternative sources of legitimacy that external actors routinely bypass. Findings indicate that sustainable conflict transformation requires vertically integrated strategies linking grassroots reconciliation, national institution-building and regional diplomacy, together with horizontal coordination across security, development and governance interventions. The paper proposes a multi-scalar intervention model that combines formal and informal security sector reform, privileges procedural justice over tactical advantage, and centres Somali agency in designing peace pathways that address the causes rather than only the symptoms of violence. The paper concludes with recommendations directed at three audiences. Troop-contributing missions should reorient their operational mandates toward multi-scalar coordination, establish community liaison structures staffed by Somali cultural advisors, and institutionalise independent accountability mechanisms for civilian harm. The Federal Government of Somalia should sequence territorial recapture with the deployment of clan-balanced security forces, the rapid restoration of local administration and justice services, the formal integration of xeer institutions and elder councils into security-sector oversight, and conflict-sensitive economic reconstruction. Regional and international actors should operationalise an IGAD-anchored coordination protocol among troop-contributing and neighbouring states, and reorient donor evaluation frameworks and funding cycles away from short-term tactical metrics toward indicators of human security, institutional legitimacy and procedural justice.

Keywords: Customary Peace Mechanisms, Hybrid Governance; Human Security; Multi-Scalar Intervention; Somalia Conflict Transformation

I. INTRODUCTION

The protracted civil conflict in Somalia is one of the most complex humanitarian and security crises in Africa, spanning more than three decades. Since the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, the country has experienced clan-based civil war, state collapse, famine and the rise of transnational militant Islamism, developments that have repeatedly drawn external military intervention (Civins, 2010; Menkhaus, 2014). Military interventions, from Operation Restore Hope in 1992 through the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM), the Ethiopian intervention of 2006–2009, and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and its successor, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), have relied predominantly on externally designed, state-centred security arrangements that privilege tactical victory over systemic transformation (Williams, 2018). The Ethiopian-led intervention of 2006–2007, for example, was presented publicly as a counterterrorism operation against the Union of Islamic Courts, yet its political and military consequences reverberated well beyond that stated objective: it hardened Somali nationalist sentiment and supplied a foreign-occupation narrative that Al-Shabaab has exploited for recruitment ever since (Civins, 2010; Samatar, 2007). While these interventions have periodically degraded the operating capacity of Al-Shabaab and other armed groups, they have also produced unintended consequences: civilian harm, displacement, the erosion of local governance structures, and deepening mistrust between communities and intervening forces.

Mogadishu embodies these contradictory dynamics. From independence in 1960 until the outbreak of civil war in the late 1980s, the city was widely known as the White Pearl of the Indian Ocean, prized for its Italianate architecture, palm-lined boulevards and role as a thriving Indian Ocean trading port; that prosperity collapsed with the state itself

after 1991 (Menkhaus, 2014). Today the capital instead reflects the tension between militarised stabilisation and localised peacebuilding, as international actors pursue security agendas that are rarely aligned with the clan politics, resource competition and historical grievances that shape conditions on the ground (Menkhaus, 2014; Stewart, 2008). This gap between externally designed intervention and locally rooted conflict dynamics is not incidental. It reflects a deeper pattern in which Somalia's crisis operates simultaneously at the clan (micro), state (meso) and regional or international (macro) levels, with the reinforcing dynamics between these levels typically left unaddressed by military strategies calibrated to a single scale (Ramsbotham et al., 2016).

The costs of this mismatch are well documented. Successive troop drawdowns, including the phased ATMIS transition of 2022–2023, have repeatedly been followed by the resurgence of Al-Shabaab in districts vacated by peacekeeping forces, underscoring that territorial control secured militarily has rarely translated into durable governance (International Crisis Group, 2012). At the same time, civilian casualties attributed to air strikes and ground operations conducted by international and allied forces have generated significant grievance within affected communities, feeding recruitment narratives that intervening forces are ostensibly working to defeat (Amnesty International, 2019). Interventions have also frequently bypassed indigenous governance structures, including the customary *xeer* system and councils of clan elders, forfeiting a source of legitimacy that no external actor can readily replace (Gundel, 2006; Hansen, 2013).

The guiding question of this paper is therefore direct but consequential: how can military interventions in Somalia be reconceptualised through a multi-scalar approach that integrates local, national and regional levels of conflict transformation? To answer this question, the paper draws on three distinct but complementary theoretical traditions: Multi-Level Conflict Theory, Human Security Theory and the Hybrid Peace Framework to explain the interlocking forces that sustain the conflict and to identify pathways toward comprehensive transformation. The paper proceeds as follows: Section II reviews the theoretical and empirical literature; Section III sets out the study's qualitative, desk-based methodology; Section IV presents findings and discussion organised around the study's three objectives; and Section V concludes with recommendations for troop-contributing missions, the Federal Government of Somalia, and regional and international actors.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite three decades of continuous military engagement from Operation Restore Hope in 1992, through UNOSOM, the Ethiopian-led intervention of 2006–2009, and AMISOM/ATMIS, Somalia remains a fragile state confronted by cyclical insurgency, clan-based violence and recurrent humanitarian crisis. This persistent security gap is not primarily a function of insufficient force, but of a structural mismatch between externally designed, state-centric military strategies and the multi-layered realities of Somali conflict, which operate simultaneously at the clan (micro), state (meso) and regional or international (macro) levels. Existing scholarship and policy practice have tended to treat these levels in isolation, privileging tactical gains such as territorial recapture and leadership decapitation over the political, social and economic transformation required for durable peace (Williams, 2018; Menkhaus, 2014). This narrow operational focus has produced short-term security gains that erode rapidly upon troop drawdown, as illustrated by the resurgence of Al-Shabaab in districts vacated during the 2022–2023 ATMIS transition. Interventions have also frequently bypassed indigenous governance structures such as the *xeer* customary system and clan elder councils, undermining local legitimacy and inadvertently reinforcing the grievances that fuel extremist recruitment (Gundel, 2006; Hansen, 2013). The problem this study addresses is, therefore, the absence of a coherent, evidence-informed, multi-scalar framework capable of integrating grassroots reconciliation, national institution-building and regional diplomatic coordination into a single, mutually reinforcing architecture of conflict transformation, rather than a fragmented sequence of externally driven security operations.

1.2 Research Objectives

- (i) Analyse the multi-scalar dimensions of conflict perpetuation in Somalia.
- (ii) Evaluate how military intervention strategies align with or contradict local peace mechanisms.
- (iii) Develop an integrated framework linking security sector reform with community reconciliation and regional stability.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The complexity of the Somali conflict requires analytical frameworks that move beyond single-level analysis. This paper draws on three overlapping theoretical frames which, read together, illuminate the structural, operational and relational dimensions of conflict transformation.

Table 1*Summary of Theoretical Frameworks Guiding the Study*

Theory	Core Focus	Key Sources
Multi-Level Conflict Theory	Explains how conflicts operate simultaneously across micro (local), meso (national) and macro (regional/international) scales, with dynamics at each level reinforcing or contradicting others.	Ramsbotham et al. (2016); Miall (2004)
Human Security Theory	Shifts the referent of security from the state to the person, emphasising freedom from fear and want, and addressing root causes rather than symptoms of insecurity.	UNDP (1994); Paris (2001)
Hybrid Peace Framework	Recognises that sustainable peace emerges from blending formal state institutions with informal customary governance systems, respecting local agency and legitimacy.	Mac Ginty (2011); Boege et al. (2009)

2.1.1 Multi-Level Conflict Theory

Multi-Level Conflict Theory supplies the macro line of reasoning for the study. It holds that effective intervention must be coordinated vertically across local, national and international levels, and horizontally across political, economic and social domains (Ramsbotham et al., 2016). In Somalia, local clan conflicts are intertwined with national state-building challenges and with regional security concerns involving Ethiopia, Kenya and the Gulf states. A closely related insight concerns relational legitimacy: military operations that violate local norms and clan sensitivities disaffirm legitimacy at the community level. When communities perceive that intervening forces are advancing the interests of neighbouring states rather than Somali interests, cooperation collapses and extremist groups gain space to present themselves as defenders of Somali sovereignty against foreign occupation.

2.1.2 Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory foregrounds the lived experience of Somali communities. Human security denotes protection of the freedoms that are essential to life, encompassing freedom from fear and freedom from want (UNDP, 1994). Military interventions that subordinate civilian safety to tactical objectives are self-defeating, since they jeopardise the very security they claim to build. Civilian deaths resulting from air strikes or night raids conducted by ATMIS troops or allied forces generate grievance and feed recruitment into Al-Shabaab (Amnesty International, 2019).

2.1.3 Hybrid Peace Framework

The Hybrid Peace Framework captures the meso-level reality of Somali governance, which operates as a two-tier system spanning the Federal Government of Somalia and traditional clan elders, religious authorities and business networks organised around the xeer system (Menkhaus, 2014). Military interventions that circumvent these informal structures tend to establish parallel governance arrangements that collapse once external support is withdrawn. Read together, the three theories indicate that Somalia requires vertically integrated strategies linking grassroots reconciliation with national institution-building and regional diplomacy, and horizontally integrated strategies linking security, development and governance interventions.

2.2 Empirical Review

This section reviews existing empirical and policy evidence organised around the study's three research objectives, drawing on institutional reporting, conflict scholarship and comparative peacebuilding research.

2.2.1 Multi-Scalar Dimensions of Conflict Perpetuation

Empirical accounts of the Somali conflict consistently describe a system in which grievances at one scale reinforce dynamics at another. Stewart (2008) work on horizontal inequalities demonstrates that group-based exclusion rather than individual deprivation is a stronger predictor of sustained conflict, a pattern documented among Somalia's inter-riverine and Bantu communities, who face compounded exclusion from clan-based politics and from national resource allocation. Menkhaus (2014) extends this analysis to the meso level, characterising Somalia as a 'mediated state' in which sovereignty is exercised jointly by international actors and elite networks whose economic interests are served by continued instability rather than resolution. At the macro level, Williams (2018) shows that AMISOM's troop-contributing arrangements were driven as much by the bilateral security interests of contributing states — Uganda, Burundi, Kenya and Ethiopia — as by a coherent regional peace strategy, producing a security architecture whose priorities frequently diverge from Somali national needs. Taken together, this evidence confirms that conflict perpetuation in Somalia cannot be explained by reference to any single scale, and that interventions targeting only one level, typically the tactical–military level, leave the reinforcing dynamics at other levels untouched.

2.2.2 Alignment Between Military Strategy and Local Peace Mechanisms

A second body of evidence examines the degree to which military strategy has been compatible with, or corrosive of, indigenous peace mechanisms. Amnesty International's (2019) documentation of civilian casualties attributed to United States air strikes and allied operations in the Lower Shabelle region shows a persistent accountability deficit, with few cases resulting in acknowledgement or redress. This matters because, as Tyler (2006) and Jackson and Albrecht (2018) demonstrate in comparative security-sector contexts, procedural justice — the perceived fairness of how force is used — predicts civilian cooperation more reliably than military capability itself. Where operations bypass or undermine customary justice processes and elder authority, as documented by Gundel (2006), they forfeit a source of legitimacy that no external actor can easily replace. Williams (2018) further shows that AMISOM's concentration on securing urban centres left rural populations exposed to both Al-Shabaab predation and state neglect, a geographic pattern that has tended to entrench, rather than resolve, the very grievances that sustain the insurgency. The empirical record therefore indicates a persistent misalignment between the operational logic of military intervention and the relational logic of Somali peacebuilding.

2.2.3 Toward an Integrated Framework Linking SSR, Reconciliation and Regional Stability

A smaller but instructive body of evidence points to what integration might look like in practice. In Somaliland, Hoehne (2013) documents sustained collaboration between police and elder councils in dispute resolution, producing a degree of legitimacy and order that has proven more durable than the externally driven security-sector reform pursued in south-central Somalia. Healy (2011) shows that the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) has, at various points, provided a platform for coordinating the security interests of troop-contributing neighbours, though this coordination has remained inconsistent and has rarely been linked systematically to community-level reconciliation. The International Crisis Group (2012) documents how the Somali National Army's persistent under-resourcing, a direct consequence of AMISOM/ATMIS absorbing the principal combat role, has left national institution-building perpetually subordinate to external military tempo rather than integrated with it. These cases suggest that an integrated framework is empirically plausible, but that it has so far existed only in fragments — hybrid policing in Somaliland, intermittent regional coordination through IGAD, and localised reconciliation supported by agencies such as Interpeace (2008) — rather than as a coherent, mutually reinforcing model spanning all three scales.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative, desk-based research design, structured as a systematic and interpretive literature review. Given that the research questions concern the conceptual and structural relationships between military intervention, governance and conflict transformation across multiple scales, a document-based, theory-driven design is appropriate: it enables triangulation of scholarly, institutional and policy sources without requiring direct field access to an active conflict setting, which was beyond the scope and resources available for this study. The design is explicitly conceptual and comparative rather than experimental: it does not test a single hypothesis, but instead synthesises existing evidence through the three theoretical lenses set out in Section 2.1 in order to build an integrated, multi-scalar framework.

3.2 Sources of Data

The study relies exclusively on secondary data drawn from three categories of sources. The first comprises peer-reviewed academic literature on Somali conflict dynamics, security-sector reform, hybrid governance and peacebuilding theory, retrieved primarily from academic databases and publisher platforms. The second comprises institutional and policy reports produced by organisations directly engaged in monitoring or implementing intervention in Somalia, including Amnesty International, the International Crisis Group, the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme. The third comprises historical and country-context sources addressing the colonial, post-colonial and clan-political history of Somalia. Sources were selected purposively for their direct relevance to the study's three research objectives, their methodological credibility, and, where possible, their currency, while foundational theoretical and historical texts were retained regardless of publication date because they remain the standard references in the field.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using qualitative thematic content analysis. Sources were first read and coded according to the scale of analysis they addressed — micro (local/clan), meso (national/state) or macro (regional/international) — consistent with Multi-Level Conflict Theory. Within each scale, material was further coded against the study's three research objectives and against recurring themes identified inductively during the review, including structural grievance, relational legitimacy, procedural justice, hybrid governance and regional geopolitics. Themes were then compared

across sources to identify areas of convergence, divergence and evidentiary gaps, informing the empirical and normative gaps. This comparative, cross-scale coding process allowed the study to move from a fragmented set of single-level accounts toward an integrated, multi-scalar synthesis, which is presented as the analytical contribution of Sections IV and V.

3.4 Limitations and Directions for Methodological Innovation

As a desk-based conceptual review, this study does not incorporate original field data from Somali communities, security personnel or elders, and its findings should be read as a synthesis of existing evidence rather than as new primary evidence. Future research would benefit from mixed-methods designs that combine quantitative conflict-event data with qualitative, ethnographically grounded fieldwork, offering a depth of insight that neither approach delivers alone. Participatory action research, in which Somali communities act as co-researchers rather than research subjects, would help to democratise knowledge production and ensure that findings more accurately reflect lived experience (Johnson et al., 2009). Despite constrained resources, Somali universities have already produced valuable research that has often been overlooked by international actors. The establishment of a Somalia Research Consortium, linking Somali institutions with regional universities, would help pool expertise, harmonise methodology, and ensure that Somali voices shape the research agenda going forward.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Multi-Scalar Dimensions of Conflict Perpetuation

The first finding is that conflict in Somalia is sustained by mutually reinforcing dynamics operating simultaneously at the clan, national and regional scales, and that interventions addressing only one scale typically the tactical–military level leave the reinforcing dynamics at other levels intact. This finding is consistent with Multi-Level Conflict Theory (Ramsbotham *et al.*, 2016) and is corroborated empirically by Stewart's (2008) account of horizontal inequality, Menkhaus's (2014) characterisation of Somalia as a mediated state, and Williams's (2018) analysis of AMISOM troop-contribution politics. Where the literature diverges is on emphasis: security-studies scholarship (Williams, 2018) tends to foreground the macro/regional scale, while governance scholarship (Menkhaus, 2014; Gundel, 2006) foregrounds the meso and micro scales. The thematic review in Section 2.2 suggests these are not competing explanations but complementary layers of the same phenomenon: structural grievance at the local level is reproduced through elite bargaining at the national level and reinforced through geopolitical competition at the regional level. This supports the study's first objective and indicates that any credible intervention model must be explicitly vertical in design, rather than treating local, national and regional action as separate workstreams.

4.1.2 Alignment and Contradiction between Military Strategy and Local Peace Mechanisms

The second finding is that military intervention strategies in Somalia have, on balance, contradicted rather than reinforced local peace mechanisms, primarily through three pathways: civilian harm without accountability (Amnesty International, 2019), the crowding-out of customary xeer processes and elder authority (Gundel, 2006), and the geographic concentration of security provision in urban centres at the expense of the rural areas where customary governance is strongest (Williams, 2018). This finding aligns with procedural-justice research from other conflict and security-sector contexts (Tyler, 2006; Jackson & Albrecht, 2018), which shows that perceived fairness in the use of force, rather than force itself, predicts civilian cooperation. It is worth noting an important exception within the Somali case: Somaliland's experience of police–elder collaboration (Hoehne, 2013) demonstrates that alignment between formal security provision and customary authority is achievable within Somali contexts, suggesting that the contradiction identified elsewhere reflects a design choice in how interventions have been structured, rather than an inherent incompatibility between statutory and customary systems. This nuance is significant for the study's second objective: it indicates that the relevant policy question is not whether military strategy can be reconciled with local peace mechanisms, but under what institutional conditions exemplified by Somaliland such reconciliation becomes possible.

4.1.3 Toward an Integrated Multi-Scalar Framework

The third finding, responding directly to the study's third objective, is that the elements of an integrated framework linking security sector reform, community reconciliation and regional stability already exist in fragmented form within the existing literature and practice, but have not been assembled into a coherent model. Somaliland's hybrid policing (Hoehne, 2013), IGAD's intermittent coordination role (Healy, 2011), and Johnson et al., (2009) locally negotiated settlements each demonstrate a component of viable practice at one scale, without being systematically linked to the others. Building on this evidence, the study proposes a three-tier integrated model:

Local tier: formal recognition of xeer institutions and elder councils within security-sector oversight mechanisms, with explicit safeguards for gender-inclusive participation, addressing the gender gap identified in Table 2. National tier: sequencing military gains with the immediate deployment of Somali National Army units recruited on a clan-balanced basis, alongside rapid delivery of local government services and access to justice, so that territorial recapture is followed by governance rather than a security vacuum. Regional tier: an IGAD-anchored coordination protocol requiring troop-contributing states to disclose and reconcile bilateral security interests with the ATMIS mandate, reducing the perception that intervention serves neighbouring states' interests rather than Somali interests. This model operationalises the study's theoretical framework: it is vertically integrated in the sense required by Multi-Level Conflict Theory, it privileges civilian welfare and procedural justice in the manner required by Human Security Theory, and it embeds customary governance within formal institutions in the manner required by the Hybrid Peace Framework.

4.2 Extended Policy Agenda

4.2.1 Integrating Multi-Scalar Frameworks into Security Operations

ATMIS should transition from a predominantly military operation to a more structured peacebuilding mission, with multi-scalar coordination made explicit within its mandate. Locally, ATMIS should establish community liaison arrangements in every operating region, engaging Somali cultural advisors capable of navigating clan politics and ensuring that operations do not violate customary norms. Nationally, ATMIS activity should be tied more closely to the Somali Transition Plan, so that military gains are immediately followed by the deployment of Somali National Army units, rapid establishment of local government services, and presence of the justice sector. Regionally, ATMIS should work through IGAD to develop protocols through which troop-contributing states coordinate their Somalia policies (Healy, 2011), requiring Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti and others to align bilateral interests with the ATMIS agenda rather than pursue parallel agendas that produce confusion and fragmentation.

4.2.2 Hybrid Security Governance and Economic Justice

Somalia's security architecture requires a framework that merges state institutions with traditional governance. Neither the Somali Police Force nor the Somali National Army can achieve legitimacy or operational effectiveness if they are perceived as forces operating against, rather than within, Somali communities. Security-sector reform should incorporate traditional elders into oversight mechanisms, ensure clan balance in recruitment, and adopt culturally attuned approaches to community engagement. Effective models already exist within Somalia: police in Somaliland engage closely with elder councils to resolve disputes and maintain order, generating a degree of legitimacy that remains largely absent in south-central Somalia (Hoehne, 2013).

Security reform must be accompanied by economic reconstruction. Durable peace requires an economic foundation that provides credible alternatives to conflict economies. The Federal Government, in partnership with the international community, should pursue integrated economic policies: formalising livestock exports, developing fisheries to give coastal communities an alternative to piracy, rehabilitating riverine agriculture through secure land tenure, and supporting the nascent private sector in Mogadishu (World Bank, 2018). Economic programming must be conflict-sensitive, distributing benefits to communities rather than reinforcing patterns that concentrate gains among elites and generate resentment.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The long-standing conflict in Somalia is not simply a security crisis to be suppressed through military force; it is a multi-level crisis of governance, authority, historical grievance, regional instability and economic devastation. Military action, while necessary in specific circumstances to protect civilians and counter terrorism, has repeatedly proven inadequate and at times counterproductive where it has not been combined with complementary strategies for conflict transformation. Multi-Level Conflict Theory shows that sustainable peace requires vertical integration between local reconciliation, national institution-building and regional diplomacy. Human Security Theory redirects priority toward protecting communities rather than merely defeating an enemy, recognising that durable security follows from meeting basic needs and safeguarding fundamental freedoms. The Hybrid Peace Framework recognises that Somali customary governance carries a legitimacy that external state-building efforts frequently lack, and that durable institutions emerge from the interplay of formal and informal authority.

The way forward requires a fundamental re-orientation: toward multi-scalar strategies rather than single-level interventions; toward Somali ownership of process rather than externally imposed design; toward long-term transformation rather than short-term stabilisation; toward centring women and youth rather than treating them as peripheral; toward accommodating legitimate regional interests rather than imposing external ones; and toward supporting, rather than displacing, indigenous peacebuilding mechanisms. As Somali scholar Abdi Ismail Samatar has observed, Somalis have demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability throughout a difficult recent history; what

the international community owes them is not charity or military occupation, but partnership as equals in finding their own solutions. Rethinking military intervention through a multi-scalar lens does not mean abandoning legitimate security requirements. It means recognising that sustainable security is not achieved when force is treated as primary, but when external assistance empowers rather than displaces local agency, and when peace is understood not as the mere absence of Al-Shabaab, but as the presence of legitimate governance, economic opportunity and social integrity that renders violent extremism irrelevant.

5.2 Recommendations

ATMIS and troop-contributing missions should reorient their operational mandate to emphasize multi-scalar coordination that integrates local, national, and regional security efforts rather than focusing predominantly on territorial control. Such an approach would strengthen collaboration among Somali institutions, regional actors, and local communities while improving the sustainability of stabilization initiatives. Community liaison structures staffed by Somali cultural advisors should be established in every operational area to enhance trust, facilitate communication, and improve context-sensitive decision-making. Additionally, independent and transparent accountability mechanisms for investigating civilian harm should be institutionalized, providing credible redress pathways that reinforce public confidence, strengthen legitimacy, and promote adherence to international humanitarian standards.

The Federal Government of Somalia should ensure that territorial recapture is immediately followed by the deployment of clan-balanced Somali National Army units alongside the rapid restoration of local administration, justice systems, and essential public services to prevent governance vacuums. Traditional governance institutions, including xeer mechanisms and elder councils, should be formally integrated into security-sector oversight while guaranteeing meaningful participation of women and historically marginalized clans. Furthermore, the government should adopt conflict-sensitive economic policies by formalizing livestock exports, expanding coastal fisheries, and strengthening secure land tenure for riverine agriculture. These initiatives would create sustainable livelihoods and reduce dependence on conflict-driven economic activities.

Regional and international actors should strengthen collective coordination by operationalizing an IGAD-led framework requiring troop-contributing and neighbouring states to disclose and reconcile bilateral interests with the broader ATMIS mandate. Donors should shift evaluation frameworks beyond tactical achievements, such as territory reclaimed or militant leaders eliminated, toward indicators emphasizing human security, institutional legitimacy, and procedural justice. Sustainable peacebuilding also requires replacing short-term funding cycles with multi-year investments supporting grassroots reconciliation, inclusive governance, and institutional capacity development. Additionally, greater investment should be directed toward Somali-led research through initiatives such as a regional Somalia Research Consortium to enhance locally driven evidence generation and policy formulation.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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