

# POLICY UPDATE

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## **Turkey-Africa Relations: Spotlight on Somalia**

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On 30 September, 2017, the Turkish government opened its largest military base abroad in the Somalian capital of Mogadishu. The ceremony was attended by the Turkish Military Chief of Staff, Hulusi Akar. This policy update gives an overview of the significance of the military base and Turkey's continuous engagements in Africa.

The opening of the \$50 million base continues Turkey's growing relationship with Somalia. Even though Turkish-Somalia relations dates back to the Ottoman Empire, the opening of the military base portrays how far the two countries have come in terms of their relations under current Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Erdoğan has visited Somalia twice, first in 2011 as the first non-African leader and recently in 2016.

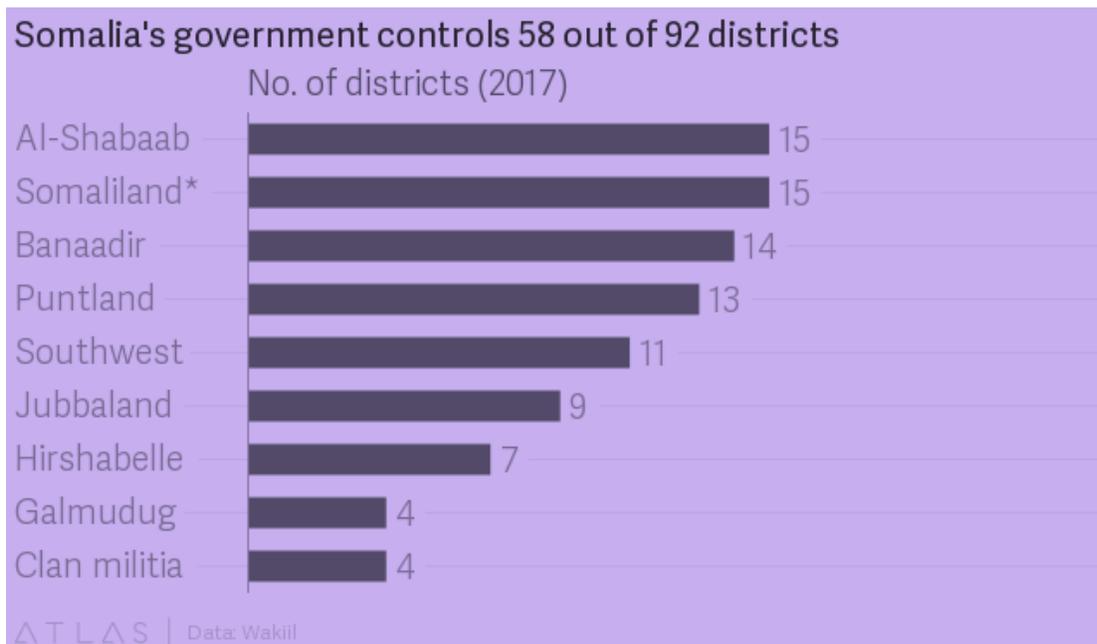
Turkey's relations with Somalia rose to prominence through its aid pursuant to the 2011 Somalian famine that killed 250,000 people. Besides that, it has contributed in the building of schools, hospitals and infrastructure as well as the provision of scholarships to many Somalis to study in Turkey. Somalia has also witnessed Turkish private sector participation in its economy with Turkish exports to the former totaling \$5.1 million in 2010. Bilateral trade between Somalia and Turkey rose to \$72.3 million in 2015; this figure increased to \$123 million at the end of 2016. Furthermore, Turkey built an embassy in Mogadishu which signifies an onward growth in the diplomatic relations of both countries. Additionally, Turkey has risen to fifth place as Somalia's largest source of imports, it was 20th in 2012.

It is anticipated that over 10, 000 Somali soldiers will be given training by Turkish officers at the military base. It must however, be indicated that Somalia's government has a number of foreign backers for instance, United Nations, the African Union and the United States, all assisting in building a functional national army capable of fighting against the militant Al-shabaab group.

The Al-shaab militant group was driven out of Mogadishu in 2010, their fatal attacks however, manifest as one of the key hindrances to stability in Somalia. For instance, on 14 October, 2017 a truck bomb attack blamed on the Al-shabaab militant group killed over 300 people with over 200 injured in what is recorded as Somalia’s worst terror attack in history.

The establishment of this military base is strategic in four-folds: first, it gives the Somalian government a boost in its efforts to institutionalize and restructure the police and military services – essentially, at the opening ceremony, Somali Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire outlined that the base would assist his government in reconstructing its national force independent of clan affiliations or place one comes from – thus, a unified well-trained Somali force representing the Somali people. A unified force would be instrumental in Somalia’s fight against Al-shabaab militants.

Second, the military base through its assistance in the training of Somali police and military forces will inextricably help stretch Somali government’s authority into more towns and regions. Currently Somalia's government controls 58 out of 92 districts.



**Figure Source: Abdi Latif Dahir, Quartz Africa – This shows the number of Somalian districts in 2017.**

Third, the new military base ushers in a non-negotiable relevance as the 2020 withdrawal deadline for the 22,000 African Union multinational force draws nearer. Should the anticipated target of the base be met, Somalia will be in a competent position to replace the efforts of the AU multinational force.

Finally, this military base portrays the significance Turkey attaches to Africa despite its regional and national problems. Africa has thus, remained a policy priority for Ankara since 2005. Turkey has increased its diplomatic missions in Africa from 12 to 39 and Turkish airlines is expected to operate 52 routes by the end of 2017. It currently flies to 14 African cities.

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