



Donald Trump A president suing himself? Why did Trump fire Pam Bondi? Inside Trump's quiet plan to 'take' Cuba Has Trump failed to sell the Iran war to the world >

News | Conflict

# Under Trump, US strikes on Somalia have doubled since last year. Why?

As Trump hits the Horn of Africa, experts caution against drone strikes, saying the US needs to invest in long-term peacebuilding.

Save Share

Add Al Jazeera on Google



A US military plane conducts routine flight operations from aircraft carrier USS Harry S Truman, in a handout picture released on February 1, 2025 [US Africa Command (AFRICOM) Public Affairs/Handout via Reuters]

**You rely on Al Jazeera for truth and transparency**

We and our 991 partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting Allow all enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject all or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Manage preferences link on the bottom of the webpage. Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [To learn more, please view our Cookie Policy.](#)

**We and our partners process data to provide:**

Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development. [List of Partners \(vendors\)](#)

Allow all Reject all [Manage preferences](#)



## RECOMMENDED STORIES

- **'Somalia is dangerous': Former US deportees struggle with fear, uncertainty**
- **Is Trump planning an 'Africa visa ban'?**
- **Why are humanitarian crises in African countries so ignored?**

In the time since, the US has provided weapons and support to Israel in its wars in Gaza and across the Middle East; it has launched strikes on Yemen; and even attacked Iran's nuclear facilities. At the same time, in the Horn of Africa, US strikes have more than "doubled" since last year, [according to](#) US Africa Command (AFRICOM).

AFRICOM, which oversees US military operations on the continent, has carried out at least 43 air strikes in Somalia in 2025, according to think tank [New America](#), which tracks strikes using AFRICOM data. More than half of those, which are conducted in coordination with Somalia's federal government, targeted IS-Somalia, the ISIL affiliate in northeast Puntland state, while the remainder targeted al-Shabab.

The uptick in US air strikes targeting IS-Somalia appears to be linked to growing concerns that the group has become a hub for regional and global ISIL affiliates in terms of financing and attacks, [according to US officials](#).

Advertisement

**You rely on Al Jazeera for truth and transparency**

We and our 991 partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting Allow all enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject all or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Manage preferences link on the bottom of the webpage. Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [To learn more, please view our Cookie Policy.](#)

**We and our partners process data to provide:**

Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development.



A June 2010 file photo shows a US Predator unmanned drone armed with a missile that has been used against targets from Afghanistan to Somalia [File: Massoud Hossaini/AP Photo]

## American intervention in Somalia: A failure since the start?

“Ever since Black Hawk Down, Somalia was a no-go zone for the US,” said Abukar Arman, a Somali analyst and former special envoy to the US, referring to the failed [1993 US military intervention](#) in Somalia during which 18 US troops and thousands of Somali civilians were killed.

“That changed after 9/11 when Somalia became one of the key theatres of so-called GWOT [global war on terror]. That political facade has three objectives: It justifies US sustained lethal drone attacks in the public psyche; it enables the US to guard its geopolitical interests in the Horn of Africa; [and] it enables American predatory capitalists to engage in economic exploitation,” Arman told Al Jazeera.

In 2007, Somalia became the first country on the African continent to fall victim to a US air strike in the post 9/11 era as part of its so-called “war on terror”. In the decades that followed, US aerial bombardment of the country has not only persisted but intensified.

Get instant alerts and updates based on your interests. Be the first to know when big stories happen.



Yes, keep me updated

During the combined 16 years under former presidents George W Bush and Barack Obama, there were more than 50 US air strikes on Somalia, while Trump’s first term alone saw a staggering 219 strikes, according to New America. With dozens more strikes just five months into his second term, analysts say if it continues at this rate, Trump is sure to surpass the 51 strikes the Biden administration conducted during its entire four years in office.

### You rely on Al Jazeera for truth and transparency

We and our 991 partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting Allow all enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject all or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Manage preferences link on the bottom of the webpage. Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [To learn more, please view our Cookie Policy.](#)

### We and our partners process data to provide:

Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development.

Advertisement

“So, what you see now is a spike in drone activity, but without any corresponding investment in long-term peacebuilding or governance support,” he explained.

Norman also highlighted how infighting within the Trump White House on policy direction in Somalia played a role in the massive uptick in US strikes.

“There were also competing camps within his [Trump’s] administration. Some pushed hard for kinetic engagement in Somalia and Yemen, while others argued that counterterrorism was a distraction from great-power rivalry with China.

“That policy push and pull [between spectacle and strategy] helps explain why air strikes surged even as Trump talked about ending forever wars,” he said.

#### You rely on Al Jazeera for truth and transparency

We and our 991 partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting Allow all enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject all or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Manage preferences link on the bottom of the webpage. Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [To learn more, please view our Cookie Policy.](#)

#### We and our partners process data to provide:

Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development.



A man sits beside the wreckages of burned military supply vehicles used by suspected ISIL fighters in Cal Miskaad mountain range in Bari, Puntland region, Somalia, in January 2025 [File: Feisal Omar/Reuters]

## Al-Shabab gains

Some analysts suggest that another reason for the uptick in US strikes could be al-Shabab's unprecedented counteroffensive this year. In it, the armed group reversed most of the Somali government's territorial gains and seized [dozens of towns](#) and villages in the Middle Shabelle region of the semi-autonomous Hirshabelle state – the home base of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud.

Complicating matters further is that during this counteroffensive, al-Shabab was able to advance on the capital and set up checkpoints on main roads leading in and out of Mogadishu. This shows not only the deep structural weakness within the Somali security forces but also the resilience of the armed group as they inched closer to the seat of power in Mogadishu, experts say.

"These [recent US strikes] appear to relate more closely to conditions on the battlefield – and in particular, the perceived threat from an al-Shabab offensive that has reversed some of the gains of prior Somali government offensives," said David Sterman, the deputy director of the Future Security programme at New America.

"There may also be other factors, including a greater interest in targeting senior al-Shabab leaders," he added.

As the Trump administration continues its bombing campaign, some argue this will likely only empower the same armed groups it claims to be fighting.

"The current drone diplomacy would continue to help al-Shabab. These attacks kill civilians, destroy properties and livestock. Ensuing grievances are utilised by armed groups that take advantage of these sentiments," said Arman, the Somali analyst, who also noted a "lack of a comprehensive

### You rely on Al Jazeera for truth and transparency

We and our 991 partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting Allow all enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject all or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Manage preferences link on the bottom of the webpage. Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [To learn more, please view our Cookie Policy.](#)

### We and our partners process data to provide:

Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development.

Advertisement

The situation hit its climax in 2019 when Amnesty International accused the US of committing “[possible war crimes](#)” in Somalia as a result of its drone war. None of the victims of US drone strikes were ever compensated despite calls for accountability by rights groups and US lawmakers.

“The consistent lack of accountability for civilian victims of US air strikes, particularly under the previous [Trump] administration, speaks volumes. It reveals a profound lack of transparency that is deeply concerning,” said Eva Buzo, the executive director of Victims Advocacy International, an organisation seeking accountability for victims of human rights abuses in conflict zones across the globe.

“The US acknowledges harm to civilians and has allocated funds yet continues to avoid making these crucial payments,” she said, adding that what’s needed is willingness to “genuinely communicate with impacted communities, to better understand the true consequences drone strikes have on their lives, and what can be done to acknowledge this impact tangibly”.

Meanwhile, adding to the complexity in the battle space in Somalia is that groups like al-Shabab often live and operate among the civilian population. This provides concealment but also means those at war with the armed groups rarely differentiate between civilians and fighters when striking targets.

US strikes often rely on patchy human intelligence in the rural countryside where al-Shabab is most present and where clan rivalries, informal economies and shifting loyalties are all factors that tend to be overlooked by the US. Experts say this not only complicates accurate targeting but also increases the chance of harming non-combatants.

#### You rely on Al Jazeera for truth and transparency

We and our 991 partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting Allow all enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject all or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Manage preferences link on the bottom of the webpage. Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [To learn more, please view our Cookie Policy.](#)

#### We and our partners process data to provide:

Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development.

“Drone strikes without accountability can actually create the conditions for the very insurgencies they’re meant to eliminate to thrive,” he added.

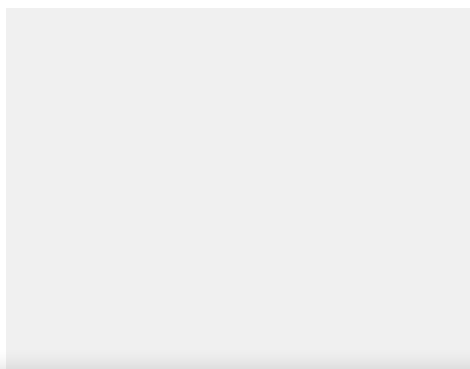


A general view shows the scene of an explosion by a suspected member of al Qaeda-linked al-Shabab, at a shop selling tea near a security checkpoint on a road leading to the parliament and the president’s office, in Mogadishu, Somalia, in September 2023 [File: Feisal Omar/Reuters]

### **Adding fuel to the fire?**

After nearly two decades of US aerial bombardment, many analysts agree that air strikes alone cannot defeat an armed movement embedded in the fabric of Somali society, its social networks and those who thrive off consecutive foreign interventions. This makes the prospects of taming these armed groups, let alone defeating them, difficult.

“There are interesting parallels to Afghanistan; local forces struggle to hold territory, US strikes fill the vacuum temporarily, but the long-term trajectory remains bleak. Airpower can suppress, but it does not transform,” said Norman.



#### **You rely on Al Jazeera for truth and transparency**

We and our 991 partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting Allow all enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject all or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Manage preferences link on the bottom of the webpage. Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [To learn more, please view our Cookie Policy.](#)

#### **We and our partners process data to provide:**

Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development.

“That gap between US rhetoric and Somali reality is precisely where al-Shabab thrives. The group actively weaponises these moments, portraying itself as the only actor willing to stand up for Somali lives.

“In this sense, the loss of legitimacy is not abstract; it shapes local decisions, fuels recruitment, and weakens prospects for genuine partnership between Somali civilians and international actors.”

If the Trump administration continues its aerial bombardment of Somalia, analysts say it will only add fuel to the fire by empowering the same foe it claims to be fighting. At the same time, they say, the cost of drones and missiles to fight a boogeyman halfway across the globe is a waste of US taxpayer money.

Experts on US military and counterterrorism policies say the likelihood of a military solution to armed groups in Somalia is slim.

“It is unlikely that the US and its Somali partners can fully eliminate al-Shabab given its demonstration of resilience over time, and doing so would require a different approach than what these strikes appear to be. IS-Somalia does not have quite the same record of resilience,” said Sterman, the New America deputy director.

“There is, of course, the question of what defeat and destruction actually means for a non-state group,” he noted.

“That said, US objectives are likely more limited than the defeat or destruction of these groups – focusing [more] on containment or the elimination of specific capabilities or network connections.”

In the meantime, what is for sure, experts say, is that the more the US leans on drones without investing in local legitimacy and supporting grassroots reconciliation, the more groups like al-Shabab and IS-Somalia will thrive and grow among a new generation of disenfranchised Somalis.

About ▾

Connect ▾

Our Channels ▾

Our Network ▾

#### You rely on Al Jazeera for truth and transparency

We and our 991 partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting Allow all enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject all or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Manage preferences link on the bottom of the webpage. Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [To learn more, please view our Cookie Policy.](#)

#### We and our partners process data to provide:

Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development.

#### **You rely on Al Jazeera for truth and transparency**

We and our 991 partners store and access personal data, like browsing data or unique identifiers, on your device. Selecting Allow all enables tracking technologies to support the purposes shown under we and our partners process data to provide. Selecting Reject all or withdrawing your consent will disable them. If trackers are disabled, some content and ads you see may not be as relevant to you. You can resurface this menu to change your choices or withdraw consent at any time by clicking the Manage preferences link on the bottom of the webpage. Your choices will have effect within our Website. For more details, refer to our Privacy Policy. [To learn more, please view our Cookie Policy.](#)

#### **We and our partners process data to provide:**

Use precise geolocation data. Actively scan device characteristics for identification. Store and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development.