

# **The Islamic State has regrouped in Somalia - and has global ambitions**

BALIDHIDIN, Somalia — The dead Islamic State fighter was sprawled out on the ridge, bloodstains darkening in the sun, as a line of heavily armed Somali soldiers snaked down the mountainside to a fortified cave — their camouflage uniforms marking a new front line in the fight against the global terrorist group.

The Somali branch has become the Islamic State's new operational and financial hub, according to U.S. Africa Command (Africom), and local officials estimate there are as many as 1,000 militants under its command. Large numbers of foreign fighters have flowed into Somalia, establishing a formidable force that now threatens Western targets. The group has also become a key source of funding for other Islamic State affiliates around the world, which have killed thousands of people, including U.S. soldiers, according to U.N. investigators.

The struggle to contain this rising threat has fallen to forces in Puntland, a remote, semiautonomous region in one of the world's poorest, weakest nations. Puntland's soldiers are now locked in a grinding fight — one with major international implications, but without Western support.

More than a month into their largest offensive against the group, Puntland officials say they have recaptured about 50 Islamic State outposts and small bases and killed more than 150 fighters, nearly all of them foreign. But the toll on their side is growing, too, and there are fears here about how much longer they can sustain the fight.

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