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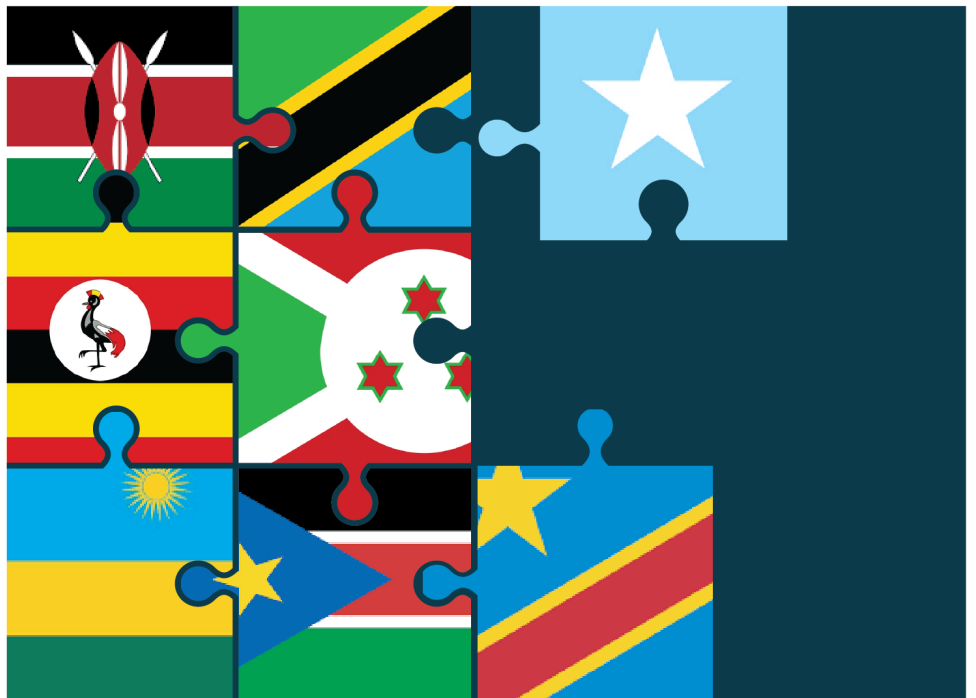
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STATE OF SOMALIA

2023 REPORT



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1. Executive summary

The State of Somalia (SOS) report focuses on the main developments and key trends in politics, security, the economy, social services and the role of external actors in 2023. This annual report documents key events that shaped Somalia throughout the year and provides analysis and context for policymakers, academics, and the general public to support peace and state-building.

In 2023, the National Consultative Council (NCC) reached an agreement to fundamentally reshape Somalia's political system. The agreement proposed transitioning from a parliamentary to a presidential system and a shift from the current 4.5 clan power-sharing system to a one-person-one-vote electoral model. This would start with the local council elections in June 2024, followed by regional and federal elections. However, the decision was not without controversy. The absence of Puntland from the NCC proceedings raised questions about its legitimacy. The de facto one-year extension granted to regional leaders through the NCC's proposed electoral roadmap also drew criticism. While endorsed by the cabinet, as of 31 December it had not been formally presented to parliament for consideration and ratification. There is no doubt this will be a key issue that will dominate politics in 2024.

The Federal Member States (FMS) all experienced internal political dynamics in 2023 that centered around election-related disputes, power sharing, and leadership conflicts. Puntland faced escalating tensions and violence over proposed electoral reforms calling for a one-person, one-vote system in the 2024 elections. Hirshabelle experienced internal disputes arising from discontented Hawadle communities regarding the state's power-sharing arrangement. Galmudug witnessed a power struggle between president Ahmed Abdi Kaariye "QoorQoor" and vice president Ali Dahir Eid. Meanwhile, Jubbaland's president Ahmed Madoobe encountered strong internal dissent from authorities of the Gedo region based in Garbahaarey. They objected to his appointment of a new administration in Gedo, with a new bloc of opposition groups amplifying local authorities' objections. Southwest saw relative political stability following federal parliament speaker Sheikh Adan Madoobe's mediated reconciliation between the opposition and the government. However, there was dissatisfaction from the opposition about the NCC's proposed election timeline.

On the economic front, Somalia achieved notable progress, particularly in the realm of debt relief and integration with international financial institutions. A significant milestone was achieved in December 2023 with the securing of \$4.5 billion in debt forgiveness from international financial institutions and creditors. Somalia's admission to the East African Community (EAC) after months of negotiations opened up potential new avenues for regional trade and economic cooperation. The opening of Ziraat Katilim Bank, a Turkish government institution, in Mogadishu marked a return of foreign banks to Somalia after a five-decade absence.

Somalia's humanitarian situation remained precarious in 2023. An estimated 4.3 million people continued to experience acute food insecurity, stemming from a complex interplay of persistent climate shocks and ongoing conflict. The situation was exacerbated by El Niño rains in October and November, resulting in devastating floods which displaced nearly 1.2 million people. An estimated 1.5 million children experienced acute malnutrition, according to the United Nations World Food Program (WFP).

Somalia's offensive against al-Shabaab, launched in August 2022, continued throughout 2023 with mixed results. Progress slowed compared to initial momentum due to logistical issues, insufficient funds, the renewal of clan feuds, and a lack of manpower to hold onto and stabilize captured territories. As a result, al-Shabaab recaptured strategic towns such as Oswein, Ceel Dheer and Galcad. Government forces suffered significant casualties including the loss of Major Hassan Mohamed Osman (Hassan Tuure), the deputy commander of the famed Danab commandos brigade. One positive development was the lifting of the 30-year UN Security Council arms embargo on Somalia in December. This could significantly enhance the government's military capabilities and long-term counter-insurgency efforts.

January saw developments in the planned drawdown of the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), the first hand over of an ATMIS Forward Operating Base (FOB). Security responsibilities for Villa Somalia, the presidential palace, transitioned to Somali security forces in December.

2. National developments

Politics

Internal political divisions at both the federal and regional levels continued. Meetings of the NCC, a body that comprises the president, the prime minister, the deputy prime minister, federal member state presidents, and the mayor of Mogadishu/governor of the Banadir region, one in Baidoa in March and the other in Mogadishu in May, exemplified the ongoing national conundrum. The NCC reached agreements on crucial issues in Baidoa on 18 March which included finalizing the national security architecture, establishing fiscal federalism principles, and creating vital agencies like the National Revenue Authority.¹ However, the absence of the president of Puntland had a significant impact. On 9 January, Puntland declared it was “now acting as an independent government,” citing FGS’ disinterest in a consensus-based constitution-making process and in the dismantling of the federal model.²

1. See “Somali Leaders Reach Agreements on National Security and Fiscal Federalism Principles,” Hiiraan Online, March 18, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Mar/190379/somali_leaders_reach_agreements_on_national_security_and_fiscal_federalism_principles.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

2. See “Somalia: Puntland State Dissociates Itself from Mogadishu,” Africanews, January 11, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.africanews.com/2023/01/11/somalia-puntland-state-dissociates-itself-from-mogadishu/>.

Meanwhile, the Mogadishu NCC meeting in May reached an agreement to restructure the country's political system.³ The leaders unanimously approved a transition from the existing parliamentary system to a presidential one which included the direct election of presidents and vice presidents. The NCC leaders also agreed to implement one-person-one-vote elections as early as 2024, replacing the existing 4.5 clan-based system. This ambitious proposal ignited controversy over its legitimacy and potential to extend the terms of regional presidents. High-profile figures including former presidents and prime ministers strongly opposed the agreements made by the NCC.⁴ Puntland, which was absent from the meeting, later rejected the outcome, citing lack of consultation. This intensified concerns about consensus and inclusivity gaps in the NCC's decision-making.⁵ This strong opposition could obstruct the NCC's agreement as it moves through the legislative approval process. Though the Somali Council of Ministers approved the NCC agreement,⁶ the crucial steps of legislative approval are yet to be taken, and its timeline remained uncertain at the end of 2023.⁷

On May 2, Somalia announced its first comprehensive population count in nearly 50 years. The count is expected to take two years and will kick off in October 2024.⁸ This census is significant in light of the NCC's proposal to transition to one-person-one-vote elections. The accuracy of representation hinges on the census findings, which will lay the groundwork for Somalia's shift toward a more inclusive and democratic electoral process, especially if the NCC's proposal clears the legislative approval process.

Security

In 2022, the federal government initiated the first phase of a military offensive against al-Shabaab, mainly in Galmudug and Hirshabelle,⁹ pushing the militants from over 215 locations in districts, towns and villages.¹⁰ The government was supported by clan militias popularly known as Macawiisley as well as US and Turkish air support in roughly 60 percent of the offensive operations.¹¹

However, despite the initial success of the offensive, challenges soon emerged. Logistics problems, resource gaps to finance the campaign, renewed clan feuds, and lack of manpower to hold and stabilize captured territories were among key challenges.¹²

3. See "Somali Leaders Reach Landmark Political Agreement" VOA, May 28, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-leaders-reach-landmark-political-agreement/7112409.html>

4. See "Former Somali Leaders Reiterate Rejection of NCC's Political System Reform Agreements," Hiiraan Online, October 19, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Oct/193443/former_somali_leaders_reiterate_rejection_of_ncc_s_political_system_reform_agreements.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

5. See "Somalia: Puntland Rejects Result of the NCC Forum in Mogadishu," Garowe Online, May 30, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/puntland/somalia-puntland-rejects-result-of-the-ncc-forum-in-mogadishu>.

6. See "Somali Council of Ministers Approves NCC's Election Agreement amidst Opposition," Hiiraan Online, June 8, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Jun/191705/somali_council_of_ministers_approves_ncc_s_election_agreement_amidst_opposition.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

7. See "Baarlamaanka Soomaaliya Oo Loo Gudbiyay Heshiiskii Golaha Wadatashiga Qaran," Jowhar News, June 11, 2023. Accessed at: <https://jowhar.com/baarlamaanka-soomaaliya-oo-loo-gudbiyay-heshiiskii-golaha-wadatashiga-qaran/>.

8. See "Somalia Launches First Census in Nearly 50 Years," Voice of America, May 2, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-launches-first-census-in-nearly-50-years/7075678.html>.

9. See "Somalia's President Vows 'Total War' against Al-Shabab," Voice of America, August 24, 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-s-president-vows-total-war-against-al-shabab/6714508.html>.

10. See "Somalia: Counterinsurgency Operation Gains Regional Support in Phase Two as al-Shabaab Attacks and Political Differences Persist," ACLED, April 2023. Accessed at: <https://acleddata.com/2023/04/21/somalia-situation-update-april-2023-counter-insurgency-operation-gains-regional-support-in-phase-two-as-al-shabaab-attacks-and-political-differences-persist/>

11. Ibid.

12. See "A year on, Somalia is keen to wrap up 'all-out' offensive against Al-Shabaab in Galmudug," Somali Signal, August 3, 2023. Accessed at: <https://somalisignal.com/a-year-on-somalia-is-keen-to-wrap-up-all-out-offensive-against-al-shabaab-in-galmudug/>

Capitalizing on this, al-Shabaab launched a complex counter offensive, regaining control of strategic territories including Wabxo, Cosweyne, Budbud,¹³ Ceel Dheer and Galcad.¹⁴

These setbacks exposed vulnerabilities in the government's ability to counter the group's surprise attacks and led to delays in launching phase two of the offensive, Operation Black Lion which was to begin in June 2023. It aimed to extend military operations against al-Shabaab in Jubbaland and Southwest with the support of Kenya, Djibouti and Ethiopia.¹⁵ Instead, the government focused on targeting areas in the central regions of Mudug and Galgadud that were still under al-Shabaab, with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud temporarily relocating to Dhuusamareeb to oversee the operations and revive clan support.¹⁶

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) announced in December that it had lifted the longstanding arms embargo which had been in place since 1992.¹⁷ The decision was welcomed by federal government leaders as a critical step toward enhanced security capabilities and counterterrorism efforts.¹⁸ The breakaway region of Somaliland warned that removing the embargo "would have detrimental ramifications for Somaliland, the Horn of Africa region, and the international community".¹⁹ Meanwhile, Puntland's interior minister, Abdi Farah Juha, said that lifting the embargo was a "grave mistake".²⁰

The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) sent 9,000 army recruits for training in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Egypt and Uganda in early 2023, with the government stating that it aimed to train up to 15,000 soldiers in 2023.²¹ This initiative is key in preparing the Somali security forces to assume security responsibilities from ATMIS ahead of its planned withdrawal in December 2024.²² ATMIS has been gradually handing over forward operating bases in line with the Somali Transition Plan, with the first phase completed in June with the transfer of Xaaji Cali, Mirtugo, Cadale, Arbaco, Gerileey, and Jaziira One to Somalia.²³ Three other bases, Biyo Cadale, Raga Ceel, and Qorilloow, were handed over in September, October and December respectively.²⁴

13. See "Galmudug frontline is collapsing: Al-Shabaab recaptured Wabho," The Somali Digest, August 28, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomalidigest.com/galmudug-frontline-is-collapsing-al-shabaab-recaptured-wabho/>

14. See "Al-Shabaab Captured El Dher and Gal'ad," The Somali Digest, August 28, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomalidigest.com/breaking-al-shabaab-captures-el-dher/>

15. See "Somalia Relaunches Efforts to Eliminate Al-Shabab," Voice of America, November 9, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voaafrica.com/a/somalia-relaunches-efforts-to-eliminate-al-shabab/7348240.html>

16. See "Hassan Sheikh returns to central Somalia as clans mobilize against Al-Shabaab," Garowe Online, August 6, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/hassan-sheikh-returns-to-central-somalia-as-clans-mobilize-against-al-shabaab>

17. See "Security Council Lifts Arms Embargo on Federal Government of Somalia, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2714 (2023)" UN Press, December 2023. Accessed at: <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15511.doc.htm#:~:text=Recognizing%20the%20benchmarks%20reached%20on,the%20Federal%20Government%20of%20Somalia>

18. See "Somalia Celebrates as UN Security Council Lifts Decades-Long Arms Embargo," Hiiraan Online, December 2, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/4/2023/Dec/193996/somalia_celebrates_as_un_security_council_lifts_decades_long_arms_embargo.aspx

19. See "Somalia gains on arms purchase pose new burden on EAC peers," December 6, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/somalia-gains-on-arms-purchase-pose-new-burden-on-eac-peers--4455652>

20. See "Reactions to the Lifting of Somalia's Arms Embargo," December 2, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomalidigest.com/reactions-to-the-lifting-of-somalias-arms-embargo/>

21. See "Exclusive: Somalia Sends Thousands of Army Recruits Abroad for Training," Voice of America, January 31, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/exclusive-somalia-sends-thousands-of-army-recruits-abroad-for-training-/6941868.html>

22. See "Update on the Situation in Somalia and Activities of ATMIS," Amani Africa, September 13, 2023. Accessed at: <https://amaniafrica-et.org/update-on-the-situation-in-somalia-and-activities-of-atmis/>

23. See "ATMIS Officially Hands Over Forward Operating Bases To The Federal Government Of Somalia," July 9, 2023. Accessed at: <https://atmis-au.org/atmis-officially-hands-over-forward-operating-bases-to-the-federal-government-of-somalia/>

24. See "ATMIS hands over Qorilow military base to Somali Security Forces," December 20, 2023. Accessed at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/atmis-hands-over-qorilow-military-base-somali-security-forces#:~:text=Before%20the%20pause%20two%20Forward,over%20six%20Forward%20Operating%20Bases>

ATMIS also gave security responsibility for the presidential palace and the federal parliament to the Somali army in December, having managed the security of the FGS' institutional headquarters for the last 16 years.²⁵

Somalia derived most of its security support, both lethal and non-lethal, from partners including the United States, the United Nations, ATMIS, the United Kingdom, Turkey, the European Union, Qatar, Eritrea, Djibouti, and the United Arab Emirates. The US provided critical air support to the Somali military, including air strikes backing the Danab unit, a specialized force within the army that is trained by the US.²⁶ The number of US aerial and drone attacks against al-Shabaab targets was largely unchanged (18 in 2022 and 19 in 2023).²⁷ The strikes targeted al-Shabaab hideouts and high-level terrorists, as well as reacted to complex attacks by al-Shabaab, and supported SNA offensives.²⁸ Similarly, Turkey's drones provided air support to the government's offensive operations, and the Turkish-trained Gorgor forces were instrumental in leading offensive in many towns.²⁹

Economy

In 2023, Somalia achieved considerable milestones in its economic recovery efforts, such as the completion of debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, securing admission to the East Africa Community (EAC), and strengthening domestic revenue generation.

On the macro-fiscal context, Somalia experienced a relative growth uptick of 2.8 percent GDP in 2023, up from 2.4 percent in 2022. However, this growth fell short of initial projections by 0.25 percent, primarily due to ongoing drought conditions and declining remittances.³⁰ The country's nominal GDP is estimated at \$8.7 million in 2023, primarily propelled by private consumption, remittances, and official grants. Compared to neighboring countries, Somalia's GDP growth rate is lower than that of Ethiopia (5.3 percent), Kenya (5.5 percent) and Djibouti (3.7 percent).³¹ A poor business environment, recurrent climate-induced shocks, and political and security volatility impeded the prospect of a higher growth trajectory. Somalia's economy lacks diversification and relies mainly on subsistence agriculture and a moderate service sector, meaning the economy has yet to witness a structural transformation. A challenging macroeconomic situation hindered poverty alleviation, with 54.4 percent of Somalis still living below the poverty line.³²

25. See "Somali Army Assumes Security of Presidential Palace after 16 Years of ATMIS Protection." Somali National News Agency, December 17, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/somali-army-assumes-security-of-presidential-palace-after-16-years-of-atmis-protection/>.

26. See "Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab." Crisis Group, March 21, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b187-sustaining-gains-somalias-offensive-against-al-shabaab>.

27. See "Context Assessment: Heightened Political Violence in Somalia." ACLED, March 3, 2023. Accessed at: <https://acleddata.com/2023/03/03/context-assessment-heightened-political-violence-in-somalia/>.

28. See "The Three Kinds of Declared U.S. Strikes in Somalia in 2023," New America, January 4, 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.newamerica.org/future-security/blog/the-three-kinds-of-declared-us-strikes-in-somalia-in-2023/>.

29. See "PM Hamza Inspects TurkSom Military Academy, Praises Contributions to Somalia's Security" Radio Dalsan, August 2, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/pm-hamza-inspects-turksom-military-academy-praises-contributions-to-somalias-security/>.

30. See "Somalia: Fifth Review under the Extended Credit Facility Arrangement, Requests for Waiver of Nonobservance of a Performance Criterion, Modification of Performance Criteria and Indicative Target, and Interim Assistance—Debt Sustainability Analysis." IMF Staff Country Reports 2023, no. 187 (May 31, 2023). Accessed at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2023/05/31/Somalia-Fifth-Review-Under-the-Extended-Credit-Facility-Arrangement-Requests-for-Waiver-of-533980>

31. AFDB, 2023. East Africa Economic Outlook. Access at <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/east-africa-economic-outlook-2023>

32. See "SOMALIA POVERTY REPORT 2023" Somalia National Bureau of Statistics, December 2023. Accessed at: <https://nbs.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Somalia-Poverty-Report-2023.pdf>.

Somalia has been suffering from serious fiscal challenges including a persistent fiscal deficit emanating from low domestic revenue with relatively low tax collection and high recurrent expenditure. In 2023, the FGS domestic revenue increased to \$329 million, up from \$263 million in 2022.³³ This revenue surge came after the FGS took prompt tax reform measures including cabinet approval for new standardized tariffs and licensing regulations for the electricity sector.³⁴ In July, the government introduced the Turnover Tax Appropriation Act, targeting small enterprises with annual revenues below \$50,000. This tax is collected quarterly, with a fixed amount of \$150 to be paid for turnover under \$10,000 and a 1.5 percent rate for turnover between \$10,000 and \$50,000.³⁵

Beyond traditional tax measures, the government is also exploring innovative strategies to diversify revenue sources. One successful example is the country's aviation sector which upgraded its airspace from class "G" to class "A". While class "G" meant the "aircraft navigated based on visual flight rules, without any air traffic control", class "A" means the country's aviation has now full functional air traffic service attracting more international flights.³⁶ While falling slightly short of the 2022 target of \$15.74 million, air traffic revenue still soared 34.2 percent compared to 2021, reaching \$15.11 million.³⁷ With increased traffic and improved airspace management, even higher revenue is expected for Somalia's aviation sector in the coming years.

Although the increase in tax collection boosted domestic revenue in 2023, it did not fully meet the expenditure requirements of the FGS and fell short of capital and social sector spending. Expenditure on public service wages and administrative costs dominated the government's overall budget and there was limited spending on socioeconomic development. However, Somali members of parliament voted to increase their monthly salaries to \$5,300 which sparked controversy as critics complained their priorities were misplaced.³⁸

Somalia's inflation rate, measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), decreased from 6.9 percent in January to 6.60 percent in December. The price of food and non-alcoholic beverages declined by 2.24 percent, contributing to a year-on-year inflation decrease of 2.11 percent. In contrast, housing, water, electricity, and gas remained stable month-to-month but showed a year-on-year increase of 15.98 percent. Key contributors to inflation included communication, tobacco and Khat, domestic rent, and electricity. Food and non-alcoholic beverage prices had the most significant negative impact on inflation.³⁹

33. See "Somalia Financial Governance Report, 2023. Harnessing Financial Governance for Economic Development and Statebuilding. Ministry of Finance, March 6, 2024. Accessed at: <https://mof.gov.so/sites/default/files/Publications/Somalia%20FGR%20%28English%29%20-%20FINAL%20Small.pdf>

34. See "Tariff and Licensing -Regulations." Ministry of Energy & Water Resources. July 13, 2023. Accessed at: <https://mof.gov.so/index.php/publications/somalia-financial-governance-report-2023>; https://moewr.gov.so/ova_doc/tariff-and-licensing-regulations/.

35. See "XEER-NIDAAMIYAH CANSHUURTA GEDIS-LAYDA' (TURNOVER TAX)" Ministry of Finance, July 23, 2023. Accessed at: <https://mof.gov.so/publications/xeer-nidaamiyaha-canshuurta-gedis-layda-turnover-tax>.

36. See "Somalia's Air Traffic Revenue Soars after Class a Airspace Upgrade." Radio Dalsan, May 21, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/somalias-air-traffic-revenue-soars-after-class-a-airspace-upgrade/>.

37. See "Federal Government of Somalia Ministry of Finance End-Year Budget Fiscal Performance Report for Fiscal Year 2022" March 2023. Accessed at: https://mof.gov.so/sites/default/files/Publications/2022%20End-Year%20Budget%20Performance%20Report_1.pdf.

38. See "Somali MPs Approve Over \$5,000 Monthly Salaries Amidst Humanitarian Crisis." Radio Dalsan, December 10, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/somali-mps-approve-over-5000-monthly-salaries-amidst-humanitarian-crisis/>.

39. See "Consumer Price Index (CPI) December 2023." Somali National Bureau of Statistics, January 15, 2024. Accessed at: <https://nbs.gov.so/consumer-price-index-cpi-december-2023/>.

Amid Somalia's poor economic situation, one monumental development stands out—the securing of the historic \$4.5 billion debt relief agreement in December. Somalia can now access new external funding such as grants, foreign investment and concessional loans to finance its development agenda. This includes investment in social sectors and infrastructure development, which has the potential to improve living standards, reduce poverty, and bolster Somalia's economic growth, contributing to a more stable and secure future. However, realizing this potential necessitates decisive actions, as outlined in the National Economic Council's inaugural post-debt relief State of the Economy Report, which focuses on strengthening fiscal management, building a robust economic development framework, and avoiding future debt burden.⁴⁰

In December 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a three-year Extended Credit Facility (ECF) arrangement, injecting \$40 million into the FGS budget.⁴¹ Notably, 2023 witnessed a 10.8 percent increase in Somalia's budget, which rose from \$973.9 million in 2022 to \$1.079 billion. However, the country's heavy reliance on foreign grants, which constitute 73 percent of the targeted fiscal budget, remains a pressing concern. This dependence leaves the country susceptible to political tensions and shifting donor priorities and is further compounded by Somalia's meagre domestic revenue contribution, estimated at only 27 percent of the fiscal target in 2022.⁴²

In March 2023, the Central Bank of Somalia (CBS) adopted International Bank Account Numbers (IBAN) to facilitate inter-bank transactions using a national payment system.⁴³ The Turkish-owned Ziraat Katlim Bank opened a branch in Mogadishu in October,⁴⁴ after CBS granted licenses to Banque Misr from Egypt and Ziraat Katlim in July 2022.⁴⁵ The financial sector liberation policy put in place by the CBS is expected to help the re-engagement with global financial markets and offer a range of banking services for Somalia, especially providing credit to businesses and helping the transfer of money for international partners.⁴⁶

In September, the FGS officially launched its first national identification card – a digital identity card for Somalis.⁴⁷ The new ID system offers a significant opportunity for the government to enhance security, support democratization initiatives, and facilitate public service provision. In addition, establishing digital ID will help the financial sector by using know-your-customer identification requirements and curbing money laundering and financing for terrorism.

40. See National Economic Council (2023). State of the Economy Report 2023 - Volume 1. NEC Publications, Federal Republic of Somalia. Accessed at: https://nec.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/State-of-the-economy-13-Dec-23_.pdf.

41. See "IMF Executive Board Approves US\$100 Million under a New Extended Credit Facility (ECF) Arrangement for Somalia," IMF December 19, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2023/12/19/pr23463-somalia-imf-executive-board-approves-usd100-million-under-new-ecf-arrangement>.

42. See "Central Bank of Somalia (CBS) Policy Brief: May 2023 Mogadishu – Somalia" Accessed at: <https://centralbank.gov.so/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CBS-Policy-Brief-0032023-.pdf>.

43. See "IBAN adoption signals Somalia's reentry into global financial system," Hiiraan Online, March 28, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2023/Mar/190543/iban_adoption_signals_somalia_s_reentry_into_global_financial_system.aspx

44. See "Türkiye's Ziraat Bank 1st International Bank to Open Branch in Somalia in 50 Years," Anadolu News Agency, October 30, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkiye-s-ziraat-bank-1st-international-bank-to-open-branch-in-somalia-in-50-years/3038148>.

45. See "Somalia - Licensing of First Two Foreign Banks since 1970," UNCTAD, Investment Policy Hub. July 3, 2022. Accessed at: <https://investmentpolicy.unctad.org/investment-policy-monitor/measures/3996/licensing-of-first-two-foreign-banks-since-1970#:~:text=On%203%20July%202022%2C%20the,the%20board%20endorsed%20their%20applications>.

46. See "Somalia: Fifth Review under the Extended Credit Facility Arrangement, Requests for Waiver of Nonobservance of a Performance Criterion, Modification of Performance Criteria and Indicative Target, and Interim Assistance—Debt Sustainability Analysis," IMF Staff Country Reports 2023, no. 187 (May 31, 2023). Accessed at: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2023/05/31/Somalia-Fifth-Review-Under-the-Extended-Credit-Facility-Arrangement-Requests-for-Waiver-of-533980>

47. VOA, 2023. Somalia's Digital ID Revolution: A Journey from Standstill to Progress. Accessed at <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-s-digital-id-revolution-a-journey-from-standstill-to-progress/7271250.html>

President Mohamud promised to fight corruption and mismanagement of public funds. The government started campaign to arrest prominent government officials accused of corruption and put them on trial in Benadir regional courts.

Nevertheless, corruption continues to be widespread. Politicians and public officers mismanage government funds intended for social services. Transparency International reported that Somalia ranked at the bottom (180th) of the world's most corrupt countries, scoring an 11 out of 100, indicating pervasive public sector corruption.⁴⁸

Humanitarian concerns

On 11 April, UN Secretary-General António Guterres visited Baidoa, the interim capital of Somalia's Southwest state, to raise global awareness about the scale of the humanitarian crisis in the country and urged massive international support to avert the looming famine.⁴⁹ This visit came after the release of a joint report by the UN and Somali government which estimated that the protracted drought of 2022 had claimed the lives of more than 43,000 people, half of them children.⁵⁰

The famine was averted⁵¹ but heavy rains caused by El Nino hit Somalia in October. A UNICEF humanitarian report said, "Somalia walked back from the brink of famine due to devastating drought, considered the worst in decades, and only a few months later faced the worst floods in generations."⁵² The Somali Disaster Management Agency reported the number of people affected by floods "to be 2.48 million, including 1.2 million displaced from their homes and about 118 deaths". Most affected areas were inaccessible, which necessitated the use of helicopters and boats to rescue those trapped by flooding.⁵³

The UN agency OCHA reported 8.25 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance as of December;⁵⁴ an estimated 4.3 million people were facing crises-level food insecurity; and 1.5 million children were projected to be suffering from acute malnutrition.⁵⁵ Climate-induced disasters, conflict, and insecurity remain the core drivers of displacement. A UNHCR report recorded 2.9 million internal displacements across the country, primarily due to flooding (57 percent), conflict or insecurity (22 percent), and drought (18 percent).⁵⁶

48. See "Somalia" Transparency.org, January 30, 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/somalia>.

49. See "Activities of Secretary-General in Somalia", United Nations, April 19, 2023. Accessed at: <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sgt3348.doc.htm#:~:text=United%20Nations%20Secretary-General%20Ant%C3%B3nio,of%20Somalia%2C%20Abshir%20Omar%20Jama>.

50. See "Somalia Drought May Have Killed 43,000 in 2022, Half under 5: UN," Al Jazeera, March 20, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/20/somalia-drought-may-have-killed-43000-in-2022-half-under-5-un#:~:text=Somalia%27s%20ongoing%20record%20drought%20may,government%20and%20United%20Nations%20agencies>.

51. See "Somalia: The Cost of Inaction, July 2023 - Somalia," ReliefWeb, July 10, 2023. Accessed at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-cost-inaction-july-2023>.

52. See Somalia HNRP 2024 | Humanitarian Action," February 23, 2024. Accessed at: <https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1180/article/somalia-hnrp-2024#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20Somalia%20walked%20back,the%20worst%20floods%20in%20generations.rp-2024#:~:text=In%202023%2C%20Somalia%20walked%20back,the%20worst%20floods%20in%20generations>.

53. See "Somalia: Helicopters and Boats Bring Life-Saving Aid amid Devastating Floods" ReliefWeb, December 11, 2023. Accessed at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-helicopters-and-boats-bring-life-saving-aid-amid-devastating-floods>.

54. See "Somalia: Humanitarian Dashboard, January - December 2023," ReliefWeb, January 30, 2024. <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-humanitarian-dashboard-january-december-2023#:~:text=The%202023%20Somalia%20Humanitarian%20Response,of%20humanitarian%20assistance%20in%20Somalia>.

55. See "WFP Somalia Country Brief, November 2023," ReliefWeb, December 26, 2023. Accessed at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/wfp-somalia-country-brief-november-2023>.

56. See "East and Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes Region October" UNHCR, December 2023. Accessed at: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/106870>

Conflict and insecurity have also caused the humanitarian situation to deteriorate in some regions as well as in the town of Laascaanood.⁵⁷ A hospital there reported 299 deaths, with 1,913 injured and more than 200,000 displaced.⁵⁸ Humanitarian assistance is also inaccessible to vast areas controlled by al-Shabaab⁵⁹, forcing people living in those areas to flee in search of humanitarian aid.

In September, the development news service Devex released a confidential UN report on aid theft in Somalia. It highlighted the “widespread and systematic” aid diversion,⁶⁰ specifically on cash-based transfers to local actors including camp owners, local authorities, humanitarian workers and members of the security forces. The EU temporarily suspended their funding to the World Food Programme.

Cash-based transfers represent one-third of all assistance provided by the World Food Programme, the largest humanitarian agency in the world.⁶¹ The executive director of the WFP posted on X: “In Somalia, WFP has been forced to end life-saving aid for 2.6 million people. This is what a funding crisis means: no \$\$, no food.”⁶²

Three months before, widespread diversion of aid was reported in Ethiopia, resulting in the suspension of food aid by USAID. However, a USAID official described the aid diversion in Ethiopia as different from the one in Somalia and they are not planning to pause food assistance in the latter.⁶³ The Somali government said it would investigate the UN findings but noted that the current aid delivery system operates outside government channels.

External relations

After being re-elected in May 2022, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud said his foreign policy priorities were to enhance collaboration with regional and international partners who were supporting Somalia in its counterterrorism efforts.⁶⁴ This was exemplified by the restoration of relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE)⁶⁵ which became strained in 2018 after Somali authorities seized nearly \$10 million from an Emirati plane in Mogadishu, after which the UAE suspended its military cooperation and aid operations. The Somali government at the time said the funds were intended to influence politicians and destabilize the country, while the UAE ambassador maintained they were salaries for Somali troops.⁶⁶ Mohamud’s attempt to renew ties with the Gulf country culminated in a security agreement signed in July.⁶⁷

57. See “Conflict in disputed Las Anod dims Somaliland’s diplomatic dreams” Al Jazeera May 10, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2023/5/10/conflict-in-disputed-las-anod-dims-somalilands-diplomatic-dreams>

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. See Reuters Exclusive: EU temporarily holds back food aid in Somalia after UN finds widespread theft. Accessed: <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-temporarily-holds-back-food-aid-somalia-after-un-finds-widespread-theft-2023-09-18/>

61. See Reuters Somalia aid theft - a daily reality for country’s most vulnerable. Accessed: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somalia-aid-theft-daily-reality-countrys-most-vulnerable-2023-09-19/>

62. See ftl Somalia” WFP Stops Life-Saving Aid for over 2.6 Million Somalis

63. See Reuters Exclusive: EU temporarily holds back food aid in Somalia after UN finds widespread theft. Accessed: <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-temporarily-holds-back-food-aid-somalia-after-un-finds-widespread-theft-2023-09-18/>

64. See “PILLAR 6: SOMALIA at PEACE with the WORLD” Office of the Prime Minister of Somalia, December 27, 2022. Accessed at: <https://opm.gov.so/en/pillar-6-somalia-at-peace-with-the-world/>

65. See “Return of the Sheiks: What next for Somalia and the United Arab Emirates?” - The Africa Report, June 24, 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.theafricareport.com/215018/return-of-the-sheiks-what-next-for-somalia-and-the-united-arab-emirates/>

66. See “Somalia Seizes Nearly \$10M from UAE Plane in Mogadishu.” Voice of America, April 8, 2018. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-united-arab-emirates-money-seizure/4337888.html>

67. See “Somalia, UAE Strike Security Deal in Push to Mend Fences.” Aa.com.tr, January 5, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-uae-strike-security-deal-in-push-to-mend-fences/2780549>

Somalia maintained relations with Qatar which has funded the construction of the Mogadishu-Jawhar and Mogadishu-Afgooye roads⁶⁸ as well as supporting Somalia on humanitarian and other development-related issues.⁶⁹

A host of European and non-European countries named new ambassadors to Somalia, including France, the Netherlands, Slovakia,⁷⁰ the UK,⁷¹ and Italy⁷², as well as Djibouti and Canada. The EU also sent a new ambassador to Somalia. Relations with Cuba were restored in April 2023 after being severed in 1977 during the Ogaden War between Somalia and Ethiopia, in which Havana backed Addis Ababa.⁷³

At the regional level, Somalia's relations with its neighbors have seen both cooperation and contention. The current administration's relationship with Kenya has improved but remains complex.⁷⁴ In July, reports emerged that Kenyan president William Ruto may be interested in mediation to potentially revisit the ruling on the maritime dispute between the countries, which was settled by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in October 2021. This initiative was rejected by Somalia which reaffirmed its commitment to the ICJ verdict and emphasized Somali sovereignty.⁷⁵ In 2023, the two nations agreed to reopen three border crossings at Beled-Hawa – Mandera, Liboi- Garissa and Ras Kamboni – Lamu which had been closed since 2011 due to al-Shabaab attacks.⁷⁶ However, an al-Shabaab attack on 13 June which killed eight Kenyan police officers in Garissa and another less than 10 days later in Lamu led to the suspension of the plan.⁷⁷

In 2023, the two nations exchanged ambassadors with Somalia appointing Jabril Abdulle as the ambassador to Kenya and Kiringo Kubai as the ambassador to Somalia.⁷⁸ Kenya Airways announced the resumption of direct flights from Nairobi to Mogadishu, starting 14 February 2024.⁷⁹ This move followed the bilateral air services agreement signed in August that opened the airspace of both countries for direct flights.⁸⁰

68. See "The Peninsula Qatar." The Peninsula Newspaper, May 22, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/editorial/22/05/2023/qatar-somalia-ties>.

69. See "Qatar is our true friend, says Somalia PM Hamza Abdi Barre," Garowe Online, September 11, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/qatar-is-our-true-friend-says-somalia-pm-hamza-abdi-barre>

70. See "President Mohamud receives credentials from newly appointed ambassadors to Somalia," Hiiraan Online, January 15, 2023. Accessed at: https://hiiraan.com/news/4/2023/Jan/189500/president_mohamud_receives_credentials_from_newly_appointed_ambassadors_to_somalia.aspx

71. See "Change of His Majesty's Ambassador to Somalia: Michael Nithavrianakis," April 17, 2023, GOV.UK. Accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/change-of-his-majestys-ambassador-to-somalia-michael-nithavrianakis#:~:text=17%20April%202023-,Mr%20Michael%20Nithavrianakis%20MVO%20has%20been%20appointed%20His%20Majesty's%20Ambassador,his%20appointment%20during%20May%202023>.

72. See "President Hassan Sheikh Receives Credentials of New Italian Ambassador to Somalia," SONNA, December 7, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/president-hassan-sheikh-receives-credentials-of-new-italian-ambassador-to-somalia/>

73. See "Somalia, Cuba Resume Diplomatic Relations after 46 Years," VOA News, April 4, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-cuba-resume-diplomatic-relations-after-46-years/7035852.html>.

74. See "Somalia President Visits Kenya amid Recent Tensions," Voice of America, July 15, 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-president-visits-kenya-amid-recent-tensions-/6660729.html>.

75. See "Maritime Dispute: Somalia Rejects Mediation 'Offer,'" The East African, July 25, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/maritime-dispute-somalia-rejects-mediation-offer-4315018>.

76. See "Kenya Agrees to Reopen Somalia Border after 12-Year Closure," The East African, May 15, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/kenya-agrees-to-reopen-somalia-border-after-12-year-closure-4235656>.

77. See "Kenya Delays Reopening Border with Somalia: All the Details," Al Jazeera, July 6, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/6/kenya-delays-reopening-border-with-somalia-all-the-details>.

78. See "Jabril Ibrahim Abdulle Presents Credentials as Somalia's New Ambassador to Kenya," Hiiraan Online, December 7, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/4/2023/Dec/194095/jabril_ibrahim_abdulle_presents_credentials_as_somalia_s_new_ambassador_to_kenya.aspx.

79. See "Kenya Airways to Resume Direct Flights to Mogadishu in February 2024," Hiiraan Online, November 29, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/4/2023/Nov/193950/kenya_airways_to_resume_direct_flights_to_mogadishu_in_february_2024.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

80. See "Somalia, Kenya Sign Aviation Agreement to Boost Connectivity," The Somali Digest, August 10, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomalidigest.com/somalia-kenya-sign-aviation-agreement-to-boost-connectivity/>.

Somalia's engagement with Ethiopia initially seemed promising with the establishment of the Somalia-Ethiopia Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) and the inking of trade agreements promising mutual benefits, especially for Somali businesses accessing Ethiopia's vast market.⁸¹ However, rumors that Ethiopia was determined to seek access to the sea through negotiations or the use of force caused uneasiness and the specter of a fresh conflict in the region, including in Somalia.⁸²

In November, Somalia's accession to the EAC was formally announced by the heads of state at a meeting in Arusha, Tanzania.⁸³ The EAC is a regional organization promoting economic integration and currently comprises eight members: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda, Tanzania, and Somalia. Mogadishu officially joined the regional bloc in December 2023 by signing the Treaty of Accession in Entebbe, Uganda, becoming the eighth member.⁸⁴

The resumption of diplomatic relations with Eritrea in 2018 was further cemented with the appointment of Somalia's first ambassador to Eritrea, Omar Idris.⁸⁵ Since his re-election, Mohamud has visited Eritrea multiple times to inspect Eritrean-trained Somali troops as the federal government looks to increase its troops ahead of ATMIS' planned exit in December 2024.⁸⁶ Djibouti's ongoing commitment to Somalia was underscored by President Ismail Omar Guelleh's facilitation of talks between Somalia and Somaliland in December.⁸⁷

3. Banadir

Mogadishu's security markedly improved in 2023 due to the FGS offensive that pushed out al-Shabaab's from regions adjacent to the capital such as Hirshabelle. However, the city continued to experience security challenges. In January, al-Shabaab militants attacked the Banadir Regional Administration's headquarters, detonating a bomb and launching an assault. The attack resulted in the tragic loss of at least five civilian lives and left 16 others injured.⁸⁸

In April, Mohamud announced a directive banning the carrying of heavy weapons in public and the use of heavily armed military vehicles in Mogadishu. This decision revealed a nuanced approach to national security which involved promoting a sense of safety and normalcy within the capital by limiting the display of such arms, despite the ongoing threats from al-Shabaab.⁸⁹

81. See "First Ethiopia-Somalia Joint Ministerial Commission Meeting Held in Mogadishu," Garowe Online, September 8, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/first-ethiopia-somalia-joint-ministerial-commission-meeting-held-in-mogadishu>.

82. See "Ethiopia PM Abiy seeks to quell neighbours' concerns over invasion," Reuters, October 26, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ethiopia-pm-abiy-seeks-quell-neighbours-concerns-over-invasion-2023-10-26/>

83. See "Somalia Officially Joins East Africa Trade Bloc," Al Jazeera, November 24, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/24/somalia-officially-joins-east-africa-trade-bloc>.

84. See "Somalia Joins East Africa Trade Bloc," Voice of America, December 16, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-joins-east-africa-trade-bloc/7401027.html>.

85. See "Somalia Appoints First Ever Envoy to Eritrea," Garowe Online, November 19, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-appoints-first-ever-envoy-to-eritrea/>.

86. See "President Hassan Sheikh Visits Somali Forces Training in Eritrea," Somali National News Agency, October 10, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/president-hassan-sheikh-visits-somali-forces-training-in-eritrea/>.

87. See "Historic Dialogue Initiated between Somalia and Somaliland with Djibouti as Mediator," Somali National News Agency, December 29, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/historic-dialogue-initiated-between-somalia-and-somaliland-with-djibouti-as-mediator/>.

88. See "At Least Five Killed in Bomb, Gun Attack in Somalia's Mogadishu," Al Jazeera, January 22, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/22/several-injured-after-blast-at-mayors-office-in-mogadishu>.

89. See "Somalia Bans Guns from Streets of Mogadishu," Voice of America, April 7, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somalia-bans-guns-from-streets-of-mogadishu/7041505.html>.

However, the enforcement of this ban faced challenges. Banadir police chief Abdi Hassan Ahmed Said accused politicians of disregarding the directive.⁹⁰

In June, Mogadishu witnessed a devastating attack targeting the Pearl Beach hotel and restaurant, a popular spot at Lido Beach. Nine people were killed and 10 others injured.⁹¹ Just two weeks later, explosions hit the Heliwaa district and locations near Aden Adde International Airport.⁹² In July a suicide bombing at the Jaalle Siyaad Military Academy killed 25 soldiers and 70 others were wounded. An al-Shabaab infiltrator posing as a soldier/recruit was responsible for the attack. The speaker of parliament called the security breaches an inside job.⁹³ Fourteen officers were arrested and accused of facilitating this attack.⁹⁴

The National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) ordered that CCTV cameras be installed in commercial quarters of the city. Al-Shabaab targeted businesses complying with government orders with violence and explosions.⁹⁵ Government efforts to pacify the city continued throughout 2023. In September, the security forces instituted night patrols and operations,⁹⁶ as muggings by youth had become a problem in some parts of the city. The government also deployed a new military police unit tasked with tackling the threat posed by al-Shabaab but also confronting the menace of youth gangs known as “Ciyaal Weero.”⁹⁷ These gangs were terrorizing residents through robbery, extortion, and acts of violence.⁹⁸

Beyond direct security measures, the government also implemented a traffic management plan to address congestion in Mogadishu. As part of this plan, the importation of Bajaj auto-rickshaws and motorcycles was banned in March.⁹⁹ The Banadir Regional Administration marked existing Bajaj taxis with alternating day permits to streamline traffic flows.¹⁰⁰

4. Galmudug

In 2023, the security efforts against al-Shabaab in Galmudug significantly altered the state's dynamics. The Somali government intensified its military campaign against al-Shabaab, extending operations into Galmudug.¹⁰¹

90. See “Banadir Police Chief Accuses Politicians of Ignoring Somali President’s Weapons Ban,” Hiiraan Online, April 15, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/4/2023/Apr/190852/banadir_police_chief_accuses_politicians_of_ignoring_somali_president_s_weapons_ban.aspx.

91. See “9 Killed in Militant Attack on Beachfront Hotel in Somalia,” Voice of America, June 10, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/killed-in-militant-attack-of-beachfront-hotel-in-somalia/7131440.html>.

92. See “Somalia: Blasts in Mogadishu on June 25,” Crisis24, June 25, 2023. Accessed at: <https://crisis24.garda.com/alerts/2023/06/somalia-blasts-in-mogadishu-on-june-25>.

93. See “Somali Parliament Speaker Suspects ‘Traitors’ May Have Facilitated Bombing,” Voice of America, July 25, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-parliament-speaker-suspects-traitors-may-have-facilitated-bombing/7195982.html>.

94. See “Somalia’s Govt Arrests 14 Soldiers, Officers Accused of Facilitating Suicide Attack,” Somali Guardian, July 29, 2023. Accessed at: <https://somaliguards.com/news/somalia-news/somalias-govt-arrests-14-soldiers-officers-accused-of-facilitating-suicide-attack/>.

95. See “Mogadishu Businesses Face Terrorism Threats over CCTV Camera Installation,” Halqabsi News, December 5, 2023. Accessed at: <https://halqabsi.com/2023/12/businesses-face-terrorism/>.

96. See “Security Forces Conduct Night Operations to Fortify Mogadishu,” Halqabsi News, September 6, 2023. Accessed at: <https://halqabsi.com/2023/09/security-forces-conduct-night-operations-to-fortify-mogadishu/>.

97. See “New Batch of Uganda-Trained Somali Soldiers to Bolster Mogadishu Security,” SomaliSignal, April 8, 2023. Accessed at: <https://somalisignal.com/new-batch-of-uganda-trained-somali-soldiers-to-bolster-mogadishu-security/>.

98. See “Mogadishu Is Now Safer than Ever due to the Security Developments,” Somali National News Agency, September 19, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/mogadishu-is-now-safer-than-ever-due-to-the-security-developments/>.

99. See “Somali Government Bans Importation of Bajaj Auto-Rickshaws and Motorcycles,” Hiiraan Online, March 31, 2023. Accessed at: https://hiiraan.com/news/4/2023/Mar/190601/somali_government_bans_importation_of_bajaj_auto_rickshaws_and_motorcycles.aspx.

100. See “Maamulka G/Banadir Oo Laba Qeyb Ka Dhigay Bajaajta Muqdisho Iyo Bajaajley La Xiray,” Goobjooge.net, April 23, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.goobjooge.net/maamulka-g-banadir-oo-laba-qeyb-ka-dhigay-bajaajta-muqdisho-iy-bajaajley-la-xiray/>.

101. See “Somalia Situation Update: March 2023 | Conflict Expands to Galmudug State,” ACLED, March 24, 2023. Accessed at: <https://acleddata.com/2023/03/24/somalia-situation-update-march-2023-conflict-expands-to-galmudug-state/>.

In August, the offensive in Galmudug entered a new phase with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud relocating to Dhuusamareeb. This decision was prompted by challenges encountered earlier in the year, including clan disputes that resurfaced and a notable lack of coordination between federal and state authorities.¹⁰² Mohamud's relocation was intended to expedite the second phase of the military offensive and to promote enhanced cooperation. Subsequently, Prime Minister Hamsa Abdi Barre announced the second phase of the offensive, deploying approximately 10,000 soldiers to eliminate al-Shabaab from the central regions including Galmudug.¹⁰³

Mohamud's two-month stay in Dhuusamareeb proved pivotal. There were significant territorial gains made through coordinated operations with Somali forces, clan militias, and international partners. These gains included the capture of key towns such as Xarardheere, a strategic coastal town previously considered al-Shabaab's last major stronghold in the region. Additionally, the capture of Galcad further disrupted the militant group's operations and logistic networks.¹⁰⁴ However, the most significant victory came with the capture of Ceelbuur, the militants' main stronghold in the central regions.¹⁰⁵ These successes represented important milestones in the campaign to liberate Galmudug from al-Shabaab.

On 15 September, a suicide car bomb attack on a camp in Laas-Gacamey village in the Mudug region directly targeted Galmudug President Ahmed Abdi Karie "Qoor-Qoor" and other high-level officials. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for this attack, which resulted in the death of several individuals including Galmudug presidential guards who sacrificed their lives and stopped the vehicle carrying the explosives by using their car. The explosion also resulted in injuries to two Somali federal parliamentarians.¹⁰⁶ Al-Shabaab's swift recapture of Cosweyne in Galgaduud shortly after its liberation highlighted the ongoing difficulty in retaining control over reclaimed territories. Additionally, on August 28th the militant group captured Ceeldheer and Galcad, strategically important towns flanking Ceelbuur.¹⁰⁷

The recapture of Galcad in particular was not only a strategic setback but also a significant loss of leadership and expertise in the fight against al-Shabaab. The recapture resulted in the death of the deputy commander of the Danab brigade, Major Hassan Mohamed Osman (Hassan Tuure).¹⁰⁸ Recognizing his gallantry, the Somali military renamed a Danab training facility in his honor.¹⁰⁹

102. See "Avoiding a New Cycle of Conflict in Somalia's Galmudug State," Crisis Group, September 25, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/b193-avoiding-new-cycle-conflict-somalias-galmudug-state>.

103. See "Somalia Launches Second Phase of Anti-al Shabab Operations in Galmudug, Hirshabelle," Hiiraan Online, August 6, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Aug/192519/somalia_launches_second_phase_of_anti_al_shabab_operations_in_galmudug_hirshabelle.aspx.

104. See "Somali Forces Capture Two Towns from Militants," VOA News, January 16, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-forces-capture-two-towns-from-militants/6920089.html>.

105. See "Somali Forces Capture Major al Shabaab Militia Stronghold," Reuters, August 25, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somali-forces-capture-major-al-shabaab-militia-stronghold-2023-08-25/>.

106. See "Somalia's Galmudug President Escapes Unhurt, Lawmakers Injured in Car Bomb in Mudug Region," Hiiraan Online, September 15, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Sept/193028/somalia_s_galmudug_president_escapes_unhurt_lawmakers_injured_in_car_bomb_attack_in_mudug_region.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

107. See "Al-Shabaab Captured El Dher and Gal'ad," The Somali Digest, August 28, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomalidigest.com/breaking-al-shabaab-captures-el-dher/>.

108. See "Danab Deputy Commander Killed in al Shabaab Attack in Gal'ad District," Hiiraan Online, January 20, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Jan/189565/danab_deputy_commander_killed_in_al_shabaab_attack_on_gal_ad_district_military_base.aspx.

109. See "Danab Training Facility Renamed Hassan Ture Academy in Honour of Fallen Commander," Hiiraan Online, February 8, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Feb/189850/danab_training_facility_renamed_hassan_ture_academy_in_honour_of_fallen_commander.aspx.

On 28 August, Somali government troops withdrew from Wabxo near Ceelbuur. Its capture by al-Shabaab not only signified a tactical advantage for the group but also posed a direct threat to government forces stationed in Ceelbuur.¹¹⁰ The Somali government has arrested several military officers responsible for withdrawing forces from frontlines, which led to setbacks in the offensive. Legal proceedings aiming to ensure accountability within the ranks were announced.¹¹¹

5. Hirshabelle

Politics

Hirshabelle grappled with internal political disputes and ongoing security challenges in 2023. The Hawadle clan consultation conference in Nairobi in February revealed deep-rooted dissatisfaction with the current power-sharing arrangements in Hirshabelle.¹¹² This discontent within the Hawadle clan, predominant in the Hiiraan region, traces its origins back to the state's formation and subsequent political developments. The establishment of Hirshabelle in 2016, Somalia's last federal member state, faced initial reluctance from some clans, particularly in Hiiraan, one of the two regions which combined to form Hirshabelle. The other region was Middle Shabelle. The rushed formation process, aimed at enabling participation in the 2016 elections, laid a shaky foundation for the state in terms of governance and stability. Power-sharing concerns were unaddressed, leading to ongoing tensions.¹¹³

The removal of Hiiraan governor, Ali Jeyte Osman, by Hirshabelle's president Ali Gudlawe on 17 June exacerbated existing tensions.¹¹⁴ The removal was prompted by Jeyte's rejection in April of the proposal to have Hirshabelle's finance ministry centralize the collection of taxes from Hiiraan. The governor cited concerns about resource allocation for the fight against al-Shabaab.¹¹⁵ Jeyte declared Hiiraan's secession from Hirshabelle in June,¹¹⁶ a move that gained support from some federal and local lawmakers from Hiiraan.¹¹⁷ While not officially recognized by the federal government, Jeyte was elected by community representatives in Hiiraan, including federal MPs, as the interim president of the newly declared Hiiraan state administration.¹¹⁸

110. See "Al-Shabaab Militants Reclaim Wabho District after Somali Government Troop Withdrawal." Radio Dalsan, August 29, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/al-shabaab-militants-reclaim-wabho-district-after-somali-government-troop-withdrawal/>.

111. See "President Mohamud Takes Action: Military Officers Face Court over Frontline Retreat in Galgaduud Region," Hiiraan Online, September 6, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Sept/192919/president_mohamud_takes_action_military_officers_face_court_over_frontline_retreat_in_galgaduud.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

112. See "Hawadle Clan Concludes Conference in Nairobi, Issues Communiqué on Country's Situation," Hiiraan Online, February 18, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Feb/189980/hawadle_clan_concludes_conference_in_nairobi_issues_communique%C3%A9_on_country_s_situation.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

113. See "Hirshabelle's Political Settlement: Opportunities for Meaningful and Inclusive Political Processes." Rift Valley Institute, 2023. Accessed at: <https://riftvalley.net/publication/hirshabelles-political-settlement-opportunities-for-meaningful-and-inclusive-political-processes/>.

114. See "Hirshabelle Leader Dismisses Hiiraan Governor, Raising Concerns about the Anti-Al-Shabab Efforts," Hiiraan Online, June 17, 2023.

Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/jun/191850/hirshabelle_leader_dismisses_hiiraan_governor_raising_concerns_about_the_anti_al_shabab_efforts.aspx.

115. See "Hiiraan Governor Opposes Hirshabelle Centralized Tax Collection Plan," Hiiraan Online, April 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Apr/190799/hiiraan_governor_opposes_hirshabelle_centralized_tax_collection_plan.aspx.

116. See "Hirshabelle Governor Ousted: Ali Jeyte Declares Hiiraan an FMS and Bans Hirshabelle Officials," Hiiraan Online, June 18, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/jun/191860/hirshabelle_governor_ousted_ali_jeyte_declares_hiiraan_an_fms_and_bans_hirshabelle_officials.aspx.

117. See "Xildhibaan Ka Tirsan Baarlamaanka Soomaaliya Oo Ku Taageeray Cali Jeyte Dhimaha Maamulka Hiiraan State," Hiiraan Online, June 19, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2023/jun/wararka_maanta19-184638.htm.

118. See "Former Hiiraan Governor Ali Jeyte Osman Elected Interim President," Hiiraan.com, June 27, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/jun/192009/former_hiiraan_governor_ali_jeyte_osman_elected_interim_president.aspx.

The federal government reportedly attempted to engage in dialogue to resolve the situation, but these efforts were unsuccessful.¹¹⁹ In October, the Hawadle clan withdrew from the Jowhar district council formation in protest of their insufficient representation.¹²⁰ Recognizing the pressing need for solutions, Mohamud visited Jowhar, the capital of Hirshabelle, in late October to address the political standoff.¹²¹

Security

The Somali government forces, alongside local clan militias led by Jeyte, launched phase two of their offensive against al-Shabaab in Hiiraan in April, targeting the southern town of Baladweyne.¹²² However, while initial gains were promising, progress slowed due to several interwoven factors such as lack of holding forces, inter-clan feuds, and logistical challenges. Al-Shabaab launched retaliatory attacks including a devastating truck bomb attack in Baladweyne in September, claiming the lives of at least 18 people and injuring 40 others.¹²³

On 30 October, Mohamud appointed Jeyte as the commander of the community defence forces known as the Macawiisley.¹²⁴ Jeyte's appointment was likely aimed at leveraging his expertise, clan ties, and leadership qualities to bolster local operations. Additionally, Mohamud's meeting with Hawadle leaders resulted in a crucial agreement to intensify military operations in Hiiraan.¹²⁵

On 5 November, Hirshabelle's parliament speaker, Luqmaan Haji Muhammad, was attacked near Jowhar airport, reportedly by government troops, the Danab forces, who were tasked with securing the area.¹²⁶ There were multiple casualties, including injuries among parliamentarians and fatalities among security personnel.

Humanitarian situation

Hirshabelle faced dire humanitarian challenges as severe flooding affected the region. The overflow of the Shabelle river impacted the lives of the local population, their livelihoods, and infrastructure. The Somali Disaster Management Agency (SoDMA) and UN agencies such as the UN's OCHA indicated that nearly a quarter of a million people were displaced from their homes. SoDMA and OCHA sent out urgent appeals to address the extensive displacement caused by the floods.¹²⁷

119. See "Former Hiran Governor Declines Mogadishu Talks Invitation: Somalia," Radio Dalsan, June 29, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/former-hiran-governor-declines-mogadishu-talks-invitation-somalia/>.

120. See "Hawadle Community Elders in Middle Shabelle Region Oppose Jowhar Local Council Formation Process," Hiiraan Online, October 28, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Oct/193543/hawadale_community_elders_in_middle_shabelle_region_oppose_jowhar_local_council_formation_process.aspx.

121. See "Somalia's President Arrives in Jowhar Town amid Escalating Rift between Local Officials," Somali Guardian, July 18, 2023. Accessed at: <https://somaliguadian.com/news/somalia-news/somalias-president-arrives-in-jowhar-town-amid-escalating-rift-between-local-officials/>.

122. See "Governor Jeyte Leads Campaign against Al-Shabaab in Southern Somalia," Hiiraan Online, April 6, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Apr/190697/governor_jeyte_leads_campaign_against_al_shabaab_in_southern_somalia.aspx.

123. See "Deadly Truck Explosion Hits Checkpoint in Central Somali Town," Al Jazeera, September 23, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/23/deadly-truck-explosion-hits-checkpoint-in-central-somali-town>.

124. See "President Hassan Sheikh Appoints Ali Jeyte as Chief Liaison in the Office of the President," Somali National News Agency, October 29, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/president-hassan-sheikh-appoints-ali-jeyte-as-chief-liaison-in-the-office-of-the-president/>.

125. See "Somali President and Hawadle Community Leaders Agree to Re-Start Anti-Al-Shabab Operations," Hiiraan Online, September 6, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Sept/192920/somali_president_and_hawadle_community_leaders_agree_to_re_start_anti_al_shabab_operations.aspx.

126. See "Danab Forces Fight Hirshabelle Forces," The Somali Digest, November 5, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomalidigest.com/danab-forces-fight-hirshabelle-forces/>.

127. See "Somalia: Floods Force Nearly Quarter of a Million to Flee," Deutsche Welle, May 17, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.dw.com/en/somalia-floods-force-nearly-quarter-of-a-million-to-flee/a-65664839>.

The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Hirshabelle state government called for urgent assistance to address immediate needs for food, water, and shelter and to prevent disease outbreaks.¹²⁸ Heavy rains led to the closure of Ugas Khalif Airport in Baladweyne on 20 October and all flights were suspended due to water accumulation.¹²⁹ According to local news reports, the rains claimed the lives of at least eight people.¹³⁰

6. Jubbaland

In 2023, Jubbaland faced political tensions, security issues, further compounded by humanitarian crises. In August, President Ahmed Madobe's term expired. This sparked concerns among critics, particularly within the Jubbaland opposition, about the potential for a power vacuum that could deepen internal divisions and destabilize the state.¹³¹ However, in May, leaders of Somalia's NCC revealed a revised electoral timetable. This updated schedule entailed a one-year extension of the terms for all presidents of member states except Puntland, extending Madobe's tenure to 2024.¹³² In June, Madoobe's appointment of a new Gedo administration backfired.¹³³ Defying Madobe's new picks, airport authorities in Garbahaarey, Gedo's capital, blocked the plane carrying the appointees from landing.¹³⁴ The governor of the Gedo region, Ahmed Buule Garad, emboldened by the political uncertainty, even hinted at claiming the Jubbaland presidency, further straining relations.¹³⁵

Jubbaland presidential candidates formed a common platform in Nairobi with the aim of challenging Madobe's rule, including his appointment of a new Gedo administration.¹³⁶ They called themselves the Union of Presidential Candidates (UPC) and accused Madobe and the federal government of acting unlawfully, manipulating the political landscape in Gedo, and of pressuring local Gedo authorities to collaborate with the newly appointed administration. The former vice president of Jubbaland, Abdullahi Fartag, accused the Jubbaland leadership of withholding salaries as a tool of intimidation.¹³⁷

128. See "Urgent Assistance Is Needed to Help Communities Affected by Historic Shabelle River Flooding in Somalia," FAO in Somalia, May 19, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.fao.org/somalia/news/detail-events/en/c/1639951/>.

129. See "Beledweyne Airport Shuts down due to El Niño Heavy Rains," Hiiraan Online, October 20, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Oct/193456/beledweyne_airport_shuts_down_due_to_el_ni%C3%B1o_heavy_rains.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

130. See "Shabelle River Flooding Kills Eight People in Beledweyne," Hiiraan Online, November 15, 2023. Accessed at: https://hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Nov/193744/shabelle_river_flooding_kills_eight_people_in_beledweyne.aspx.

131. See "Jubbaland Presidential Candidates Addressed Urgent Election Issues," The Somali Digest, September 14, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomalidigest.com/jubbaland-presidential-candidates-address-urgent-election-issues/>.

132. See "Somali Leaders Reach Landmark Political Agreement," VOA News, May 28, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-leaders-reach-landmark-political-agreement/7112409.html>.

133. See "Jubbaland President Names New Governor for the Disputed Gedo," Shabelle Media Network, June 7, 2023. Accessed at: <https://shabellemedia.com/jubbaland-president-names-new-governor-for-the-disputed-gedo/>.

134. See "Two Planes Forced to Turn from Garbaharey after Shots Fired for Ignoring Landing Prohibition," Halqabsi News, June 13, 2023. Accessed at: <https://halqabsi.com/2023/06/two-planes-forced-to-turn-from-garbaharey-after-shots-fired-for-ignoring-landing-prohibition/>.

135. See "Gedo Governor, Federal Lawmakers Oppose Appointment of New Gedo Region Administration," Hiiraan Online, June 9, 2024. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Jun/191714/gedo_governor_federal_lawmakers_oppose_appointment_of_new_gedo_region_administration.aspx.

136. See "Jubbaland Politicians Form Union of Presidential Candidates in Nairobi," Hiiraan Online, July 9, 2024. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/July/192166/jubbaland_politicians_form_union_of_presidential_candidates_in_nairobi.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

137. See "Jubbaland Politicians Form Union of Presidential Candidates in Nairobi," Hiiraan Online, July 9, 2024. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/July/192166/jubbaland_politicians_form_union_of_presidential_candidates_in_nairobi.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

There was initial concern over the UPC's detrimental impact on counterterrorism efforts,¹³⁸ however, the politicians met with Madobe in December and pledged to provide support in the fight against al-Shabaab.¹³⁹

On 2 March, Mohamud announced the commencement of the second phase of the war against al-Shabaab, which would include Jubbaland.¹⁴⁰ However, al-Shabaab's recapture of the Janaay Cabdalle base, which it lost to the army just months prior, illustrated the terror group's counteroffensive capacity.¹⁴¹

In July, al Shabaab again overran the Giriley military camp in Gedo, highlighting the government forces' vulnerability¹⁴² and raising concerns about ATMIS's withdrawal and fears of leaving a vacuum that could be exploited by al-Shabaab.¹⁴³

While the Somali government, with the support of clan militias and international partners, succeeded in driving al-Shabaab out of significant parts of Galmudug and Hirshabelle, Jubbaland pursued a distinctive approach. It firmly rejected mobilizing clan militias, citing concerns over potential security threats and destabilization.¹⁴⁴ However, Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre, during his latest visit to Kismaayo in November, urged residents to rally behind the government's efforts to liberate remaining areas from al-Shabaab.¹⁴⁵ In December, days after the PM's visit to Kismaayo, Jubbaland's minister of security announced plans for an offensive.¹⁴⁶ The question remains whether Jubbaland will mobilize clan militias in future offensives against al-Shabaab or maintain its cautious approach.

In the humanitarian arena, Jubbaland faced significant challenges due to climate change, particularly heavy rainfall that led to extensive flooding and displacement in the Gedo region. As documented in UNFPA's Somalia Situation Report from March, more than 140,000 individuals were displaced, primarily in the Baardheere district of the Gedo region.¹⁴⁷ In November, the prime minister led an international delegation to assess the situation of flood-affected people.¹⁴⁸ Adding to the humanitarian plight, many parts of Jubbaland ravaged by the floods lay under al-Shabaab's control, significantly impeding access by the government and aid agencies.

138. See "Opinion: Unresolved Political Impasse in Jubbaland Politics a Recipe for Cross-Border Conflict," Talk Africa, February 11, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.talkafrica.co.ke/opinion-unresolved-political-impasse-in-jubbaland-politics-a-recipe-for-cross-border-conflict-and-spike-in-insurgency/>.

139. See "Opposition Unites with President Madobe in Jubaland's Fight against Al-Shabaab," Radio Dalsan, August 22, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/opposition-unites-with-president-madobe-in-jubalands-fight-against-al-shabaab/>.

140. See "Somalia Launches Final Decisive Offensive to Crush Al-Shabaab in Southwest and Jubbaland States," Somali National News Agency, March 2, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/somalia-launches-final-decisive-offensive-to-crush-al-shabaab-in-southwest-and-jubbaland-states/>.

141. See "Somalia's al-Shabaab Recaptures Base It Lost to Military Offensive," Reuters, March 7, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somalias-al-shabaab-recaptures-base-it-lost-military-offensive-2023-03-07/>.

142. See "Updated: Al-Shabaab Captures Giriley Military Base in Gedo Region," The Somali Digest, July 13, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomalidigest.com/breaking-al-shabaab-captures-giriley/>.

143. See "Concerns Mount over ATMIS Withdrawal as Al-Shabaab Attacks Giriley Base," The Somali Digest, July 5, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomalidigest.com/concerns-mount-over-atmis-withdrawal-as-al-shabaab/>.

144. See "Somalia: Jubaland Rejects Use of Clan Militia in Al-Shabaab War," Garowe Online, March 21, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-jubaland-rejects-use-of-clan-militia-in-al-shabaab-war>.

145. See "Somali Prime Minister Calls for Support in Ongoing Anti-Al-Shabab Operations," Hiiraan Online, November 28, 2024. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Nov/193925/somali_prime_minister_calls_for_support_in_ongoing_anti_al_shabab_operations.aspx.

146. See "Jubbaland Security Minister Announces Offensive against Al-Shabaab," Hiiraan Online, December 11, 2024. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Dec/194157/jubbaland_security_minister_announces_offensive_against_al_shabaab.aspx.

147. See "Somalia Situation Report - March 2023," UNFPA Somalia, April 22, 2023. Accessed at: <https://somalia.unfpa.org/en/publications/somalia-situation-report-march-2023>.

148. See "PM Hamza Arrives in Kismayo to Inspect the Humanitarian Situation," Somali National News Agency, November 26, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/pm-hamza-arrives-in-kismayo-to-inspect-the-humanitarian-situation/>.

In Saakow district, Middle Juba, an estimated 60,000 flood victims faced further hardship due to restricted access and limited resources.¹⁴⁹

In terms of development initiatives, Barre launched three EU-funded development projects during his visit to Jubbaland, known as XALDOON, NEGAAD, and SEPOW. These projects aim to combat the impact of climate change and poverty in Jubbaland and Southwest and focus on alleviating challenges faced by internally displaced persons, promoting sustainability and climate adaptation, and enhancing women's involvement in socioeconomic development.¹⁵⁰

7. Puntland

Politics

The year 2023 was pivotal for Puntland and was marked by political turmoil, electoral disputes, security challenges, and notable economic developments. The region faced internal strife amid the anticipation of parliamentary and presidential term expiration, set for 8 January 2024. In fact, the entire year began and ended with heightened political campaigns and debates over disputed presidential and parliamentary electoral processes. The opposition groups accused President Said Abdullahi Deni of scheming for a term extension and of potential election rigging. Deni, however, insisted on a direct election. Opposition and other observers on the other hand said that there would be no sufficient time to organize one person one vote as Deni commenced the process late – months before his mandate ended in mid 2023. The opposition, on the other hand, insisted that to avoid term extension the Puntland government and parliament needed to declare an indirect electoral process as has been the case in previous elections. Eventually, at the end of December, Puntland president accepted the indirect election.

Amendments to Puntland's constitution, debates over electoral laws, and the role of the Puntland parliament in extending its term and that of the government all underscored the legal and constitutional challenges in Puntland in 2023. Various efforts for dialogue were made—including those led by different groups among the traditional elders,¹⁵¹ international partners,¹⁵² and other religious, political, and civil society figures—aimed at resolving the electoral deadlock and ensuring a peaceful political dispensation.

149. See “Rapid Assessment for Flash Flooding Situation in South West State, Somalia (Duration: 12 to 15 November 2023)” ReliefWeb. November 24, 2023. Accessed at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/rapid-assessment-flash-flooding-situation-south-west-state-somalia-duration-12-15-november-2023>.

150. See “PM Hamza Unveils Three Key Projects in Jubbaland, Southwest States.” Somali National News Agency, November 27, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/pm-hamza-unveils-three-key-projects-in-jubbaland-southwest-states/>.

151. Suldaan Siciid Maxamed Garaase “Nugaal yaan laga shaqayn wax keena ku fiddii”; 17 June 2023; <https://www.facebook.com/100063872297271/videos/suldaan-siciid-maxamed-garaasenugaal-yaan-laga-shaqayn-wax-keena-ku-fiddii/231679528524211/>.

152. On First Garowe Visit, New UN Special Representative Hails Recent ‘One Person, One Vote’ District Elections in PUNTLAND; 10 June 2023; <https://unsom.unmissions.org/first-garowe-visit-new-un-special-representative-hails-recent-one-person-one-vote-district>

Puntland also witnessed deadly clashes in 2023, including confrontations between the government forces and opposition politicians, and between revolting military units and clan militias in Garowe in June, which resulted in the deaths of 26 people and another 30 injured as well as heightened insecurity.¹⁵³ This and subsequent clashes and the fear of election-related violence resulted in sporadic displacements.¹⁵⁴

Likewise, election-related uncertainties and tensions weakened overall government control of the security forces. Key opposition figures were armed and forces in revolt, led by a general, took positions in Garowe and blocked roads at will throughout the second half of 2023. In Boosaaso, the business hub of the state, ISIS extorted business people and burned their businesses. Puntland security forces captured more than 20 foreign members of ISIS.¹⁵⁵

January in Puntland was marked by palpable anticipation of the electoral battles slated for 2024. Opposition candidates publicly declared their intentions to contest the upcoming elections.¹⁵⁶ These early declarations, happening in the first week of January, were a strategic move aimed at galvanizing support and setting the stage for a year filled with tension and political maneuvering. In response to these burgeoning political activities, the Puntland government imposed a ban on unauthorized gatherings in the Bari region on 3 January.¹⁵⁷ This move, ostensibly for maintaining public order, was perceived by candidates as an attempt to curb their voices and as signaling the beginning of a crackdown on dissent. Some opposition figures began arming themselves and others enlisted clansmen in the security forces. Opposition politicians started close collaboration to face off against Deni.

Amid this tense atmosphere, the policy of one person, one vote became a central political platform for the incumbent leader, Deni.¹⁵⁸ By mid-January, debates and tensions around processes and procedures for the upcoming election as well as the need for electoral reform (or the lack thereof) underscored deep divisions, not only within Puntland's political class but also among traditional elders, citizens, and the FGS politicians from Puntland.¹⁵⁹

The policy, packaged as fostering a more democratic and inclusive electoral process, was met with skepticism by factions wary of its implications for power dynamics within the state. The controversy surrounding this policy highlighted the complexities of implementing electoral reforms in a context marked by intricate clan politics and longstanding rivalries.

153. Dozens killed in Somalia's Puntland after parliament debate; 20 June 2023; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/20/fight-erupts-in-somalias-puntland-region-after-parliament-debate>.

154. See "Somalia: Tension Rises in Puntland as President Mobilizes Troops," Garowe Online, November 20, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/puntland/somalia-tension-rises-in-puntland-as-president-mobilizes-troops>.

155. ISIS leaders captured in Somalia's Puntland; 27 June 2023 <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/puntland/isis-leaders-captured-in-somalia-s-puntland>.

156. YouTube; DEG; Garowe oo logu dhawaaqay midowga musharaxiinta Puntland, Saciid Deni oo digniin lodiray; 3 January 2023; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_suYvnw6qc.

157. Maamulka Gobolka Bari Oo Mamnuucay Shirar Aysan Dowladdu Fasixin; 3 January 2023; <https://puntlandpost.net/2023/01/03/maamulka-gobolka-bari-oo-mamnuucay-shirar-aysan-dowladdu-fasixin/>

158. Opinion: President Deni's Ambitious Goal Faces Roadblocks and Controversy; 19 June 2023; <https://hornobserver.com/articles/2274/Opinion-President-Deni-Ambitious-Goal-Faces-Roadblocks-and-Controversy>.

159. Although elections in Puntland are always charged, this year things were more tense as the incumbent, who also managed and dominated a federal election, sought reelection and had many politicians with axes to grind.

In early February, Deni's appointment of Ahmed Taaran as Attorney General became a focal point of political contention.¹⁶⁰ The appointment was scrutinized for its potential impact on the administration of justice and the rule of law amid an increasingly politicized climate and particularly in an election year when a bipartisan civil servant was needed. Concurrently, warnings issued in late February regarding the district-level electoral registration process further exacerbated the tense atmosphere, raising concerns about the integrity and fairness of the upcoming local and state elections.

Unpaid salaries for government employees and unpaid bills for the security apparatus were reported in March. Delayed salary payments for several months resulted in periodic revolts and roadblocks by the Puntland military.¹⁶¹ In March, Puntland issued a series of media statements rejecting steps taken by the federal government, including the rejection of fisheries-related FGS directives.¹⁶² In April, Puntland began opposing the federal government's levies on telecom companies.¹⁶³ This opposition was not just in dispute over fiscal policy but a statement on Puntland's broader aspirations for autonomy within the federal framework of Somalia. A terror attack in Boosaaso on 6 April 2023 resulted in a massive blaze that destroyed a wholesale store (Al Macruuf) and closed businesses. ISIS was said to be the culprit.¹⁶⁴ The terror group is said to have wanted to extort money from businesses,¹⁶⁵ highlighting the ongoing threat of terrorism in the state.

In May, public denunciations by FGS leaders and the Puntland president saturated media as both the FGS Prime Minister Hamza Barre and the FGS president engaged in verbal spats with Deni.¹⁶⁶ Puntland's traditional elders, members of the civil society, and others in Mogadishu continued their calls for mediation between Puntland and the federal government and within Puntland itself. Puntland also accused FGS leaders of meddling, destabilizing, and sponsoring the armed opposition and presidential candidates as well as politicizing aid.¹⁶⁷ The controversy centered on a proposed constitutional amendment in Puntland passed by Deni. Civil society and politicians alike opposed his ostensibly partisan moves that were said to railroad political stakeholders.¹⁶⁸

160. Axmed Taaran Oo Loo Magacaabay Xeer Ilaaliyaha Guud Ee Puntland; 26 February 2023; <https://puntlandpost.net/2023/02/06/axmed-taaran-oo-loo-magacaabay-xeer-ilaaliyaha-guud-ee-puntland/>.

161. Xukuumadda Puntland Oo Ku Fashilantay Bixinta Mushaharka Shaqaalaha Iyo Ciidamada; 8 January 2023; <https://puntlandpost.net/2023/01/08/xukuumadda-puntland-oo-ku-fashilantay-bixinta-mushaharka-shaqaalaha-iyoo-ciidamada/>; Also see: Soldiers stage mutiny in Somalia's Puntland state Soldiers seize security checkpoint and close key highway connecting Garowe and Bosaso over unpaid salaries, says official; 9 May 2023; <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/soldiers-stage-mutiny-in-somalia-s-puntland-state/2893047>.

162. Puntland oo ka hortimid in hay'adaha caalamiga ah ay deyn siiyaan dowladda Soomaaliya; 15 March 2023; https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2023/mar/wararka_maanta15-183889.htm; Also see: Puntland State contradicts Somalia's blue economy strategy; 14 March 2023; https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/puntland-rejects-somalia-blue-economy-policy-4158242#google_vignette.

163. Puntland oo ka hortimid khidmado dowlada Soomaaliya ku soo rogtay shirkadaha Isgaarsiinta; 3 April 2023; <https://www.somaliaonline.com/community/topic/251178-puntland-oo-ka-hortimid-khidmado-dowlada-soomaaliya-ku-soo-rogtay-shirkadaha-igarsiinta/>.

164. Somalia: Daesh terror group closes down businesses in Bosaso over extortion money; 13 April 2023; <https://hornobserver.com/articles/2088/Somalia-Daesh-terror-group-closes-down-businesses-in-Bosaso-over-extortion-money>.

165. ISIS Extortion Threats Force Business Closures in Bosaso, Somalia; 18 June 2023; <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/puntland/isis-extortion-threats-force-business-closures-in-bosaso-somalia>.

166. Ra'iisul Wasaare Xamza oo si kulul u dhaliilay Puntland; 9 May 2023; <https://www.voasomali.com/a/ra-iisul-wasaare-xamza-oo-si-kulul-u-dhaliilay-puntland-/7084720.html>; also see: Puntland oo ku eedeysay madaxweyne Xasan Sheikh inuu abaabulay weerar xalay ka dhacay Garowe; 16 May 2023; https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2023/May/wararka_maanta16-184366.htm?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=WararkaMaantaFront.

167. Puntland Minister accused Somali government of politicizing aid; 10 August 2023; <https://thesomaliidigest.com/puntland-minister-accused-somali-government-of-politicizing-aid/>.

168. War ay wada jir u soo saareen Cabdiweli Cali Gaas iyo Cumar Cabdirashiid; Xalka Khilaafka Puntland; 11 July 2023; <https://horseedmedia.net/war-ay-wada-jir-u-soo-saareen-cabdiweli-cali-gaas-iyoo-cumar-cabdirashiid-xalka-khilaafka-puntland-380434>.

At the end of May, for the first time since 1969, polls opened for district council election in 33 Puntland districts.¹⁶⁹ Voting was postponed due to security concerns in only three districts—including in the Puntland capital of Garowe – due to security concerns as armed opposition vowed to prevent the election.¹⁷⁰ June was marked by intensified political tensions as Puntland and the region conducted one-person-one-vote district elections in most districts, edging closer to electoral milestones. The early part of the month saw Puntland authorities, amalgamated presidential candidates, and allied mutinying soldiers clashing in Garowe. The two-day-long fighting was sparked by parliament's change to the constitution instituting a popular vote for president as opposed to the existing system under which the 66-member local parliament elects the regional president.¹⁷¹

By July, the electoral dispute among Puntland politicians raged on as the government passed an election law and parliament aligned with it and changed the constitution on 25 July¹⁷² to facilitate popular election of the president and vice president by citizens. General Jimale Jama Takar, who opposed the president and backed opposition figures from Garowe, announced the end of the unilateral cease-fire.¹⁷³

On the economic front, Puntland officials announced that the expansion of the Boosaaso port by DP World would conclude at the end of 2023.¹⁷⁴ In 2017, the Dubai-based port management firm received a 30-year lease agreement and have reportedly invested more than \$360 million on expanding the port. Also in August, Puntland established the Puntland Economic Development Council (PDEC), which was tasked with overseeing projects funded by international partners, attracting foreign direct investment, and shoring up donor confidence through transparent and proper management of contracts for donor-funded projects.¹⁷⁵

In September, the prevailing uncertainties surrounding Puntland's elections continued. Political analysts and local media frequently highlighted the lack of consensus or clarity regarding the electoral roadmap as the month progressed. In early September, parliament announced an election commission,¹⁷⁶ which opposition candidates denounced by December as partisan.¹⁷⁷

169. 33 degmo oo katirsan Puntland oo saakay looga dareeray doorashooyin qof iyo cod ah; 25 May 2023; https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2023/may/wararka_maanta25-184443.htm.

170. See "Puntland Election Commission Postpones Voting in Three Districts due to Security Concerns," Hiiraan Online, May 24, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2023/May/191466/puntland_election_commission_postpones_voting_in_three_districts_due_to_security_concerns.aspx.

171. Dozens killed in Somalia's Puntland after parliament debate Clashes broke out after opposition groups accused Puntland's leader of seeking constitutional changes to extend his term in office; 20 July 2023; <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/20/fight-erupts-in-somalias-puntland-region-after-parliament-debate>.

172. Qodobada wax laga beddely dastuurka Puntland oo faahfaahsan; 25 July 2023; <https://horseedmedia.net/qodobada-wax-laga-beddely-dastuurka-puntland-oo-faahfaahsan-380860>.

173. Puntland's political landscape heats up as Danab Command ends unilateral cease-fire; 1 August 2023; https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2023/Aug/192459/puntland_s_danab_command_ends_unilateral_cease_fire_threatens_response_to_regional_leader_s_actions.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

174. Dubai's DP World Will Finish \$366 Million Somali Port Expansion This Year; 17 August 2023; <https://news.yahoo.com/dubai-dp-world-finish-366-095004317.html>.

175. Puntland Government Establishes Economic Development Council to Manage International Grants and Projects; 8 August 2023; <https://horseedmedia.net/puntland-government-establishes-economic-development-council-to-manage-international-grants-and-projects-381318>.

176. Baarlamaanka Puntland Oo Maanta Ansixiyay Xubnaha Guddiga Doorashooyinka Pec; 5 September 2023; <https://puntlandpost.net/2023/09/05/baarlamaanka-puntland-oo-maanta-ansixiyay-xubnaha-guddiga-doorashooyinka-pec/>.

177. Mucaaradka Puntland oo kalsoonida kala noqday Gudiga Xalinta Khilaafaadka doorashada Puntland; 28 December 2023; <https://radiorisala.com/mucaaradka-puntland-oo-kalsoonida-kala-noqday-gudiga-xalinta-khilaafaadka-doorashada-puntland/>

Relations between Puntland and the FGS worsened as Puntland's finance ministry ended collaboration with the federal government on a number of intergovernmental processes, such as taxation harmonization and revenue mobilization, that were prerequisites for Somalia's debt forgiveness.¹⁷⁸

In October, Puntland found itself more deeply embroiled in political and election-related disputes as the state inched closer to the 8 January 2024, election deadline. Early in the month, the government outlined election procedures for local council (mayoral) leadership for the recently elected district councils.¹⁷⁹ On 3 October, the planning minister accused the federal president of fostering inter-clan fighting in Mudug, which underscored the deteriorating relations between the FGS and Puntland.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, the Puntland president continued to insist on holding one person, one vote elections, signaling a disinterest in compromising with the opposition and elders who all called for utilizing the traditional informal election process. It was clear to independent observers that there was neither time nor resources for popular voting as the technical preparations and legal processes were not in place.

November saw traditional leaders stepping forward with decisive interventions in the electoral dispute, deciding on the informal election process. On 2 November, the Isimo (traditional elders) issued a set of resolutions.¹⁸¹ The last two months of 2023 also witnessed increased international involvement, with the British ambassador visiting Garowe in early December to facilitate dialogue and seek a resolution to the electoral impasse.¹⁸²

Despite these efforts, the political atmosphere remained charged, with the government expressing alarm over perceived federal interference in its internal affairs. On 14 November, the opposition unveiled a unilateral election timetable, further complicating the political landscape and highlighting the deep divisions within Puntland's political sphere.¹⁸³

December witnessed significant developments, with the president announcing a shift to indirect elections.¹⁸⁴ This announcement, coupled with the Puntland parliament's sudden decision to extend its term by two years,¹⁸⁵ heralded a tumultuous phase in the region's electoral planning and raised questions about the prospect of a peaceful election. Legal and constitutional debates reached a climax when the Puntland Constitutional Court overturned the parliament's decision, highlighting the tensions between different branches of government.

178. Puntland suspends intergovernmental processes, citing failure of dialogue with FGS; 1 September 2023; <https://thesomalidigest.com/puntland-suspends-intergovernmental-processes-citing-failure-of-dialogue-with-fgs/>

179. Puntland Ministry clarifies local council procedures; 2 October 2023; <https://thesomalidigest.com/puntlands-ministry-clarifies-local-council-procedures/>.

180. Puntland accuses President Mohamud of inter-clan fighting in Mudug; 3 October 2023; https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Oct/193244/puntland_accuses_president_mohamud_of_inter_clan_fighting_in_mudug.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

181. Qaar Kamid Ah Isimada Puntland Oo Go'aanno Ka Soo Saaray Doorashada PUNTland EE 2024; 2 November 2023; <https://puntlandpost.net/2023/11/02/qaar-kamid-ah-isimada-puntland-oo-go'aanno-ka-soo-saaray-doorashada-puntland-ee-2024/>.

182. UK Steps in to Resolve Puntland Election Dispute, Ambassador Nithavrianakis Leads Talks; 2 December 2023; <https://halqabsi.com/2023/12/uk-steps-in-to-resolve-puntland/>.

183. Mucaaridka Puntland Oo Shaaciyay Jadwal Doorasho Oo Hal Dhinac AH; 14 November 2023; <https://puntlandpost.net/2023/11/14/mucaaridka-puntland-oo-shaaciyay-jadwal-doorasho-oo-hal-dhinac-ah/>.

184. Puntland President Announces Shift to Indirect Elections; 6 December 2023; <https://thesomalidigest.com/puntland-president-announces-shift-to-indirect-elections/>.

185. See "Baarlamaanka Puntland Oo Sameystay Muddo Kororsi Hal Sano Ah Xili Maanta Lagu Waday in Lakala Diro," Hiiraan Online, December 7, 2023. https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2023/Dec/wararka_maanta7-185985.htm.

The year 2023 was characterized by a complex interplay of political and legal controversies between the FGS and FMS, security challenges, and economic initiatives. As the region navigated through electoral disputes, governance challenges, and efforts to enhance economic development, its institutions—both formal and informal (i.e., elders)—as well as security were tested. Although the year ended with a peaceful election, the ramifications of such multiple and multifaceted contests will be seen in 2024.

Other notable developments included the establishment of the Economic Development Council¹⁸⁶ to manage international grants and projects alongside investments in major infrastructure projects such as port expansions and road constructions aimed at bolstering the region's economic landscape. The year also saw Puntland grappling with humanitarian issues, including floods in Gaalkacyo in November that prompted emergency response and underscored the vulnerability of the region to climatic and environmental crises.¹⁸⁷

8. Somaliland

Politics

The year 2023 began with Somaliland, the breakaway and unrecognized region, facing two significant internal challenges: an election-related dispute among the core political parties which led to conflict and a debilitating internal schism;¹⁸⁸ and a major challenge in the form of conflict, revolt, a devastating humanitarian situation, and a military defeat in the Sool region in eastern Somaliland.

The conflict and subsequent detachment of the Sool region from Somaliland started in Laascaanood, the region's capital, with a series of assassinations and culminated with the killing of a prominent businessman/politician at the end of December 2022. This killing sparked sustained protests during which 10 people were killed and 50 injured, according to doctors at the scene.¹⁸⁹

Segments of the Dhulbahante and Fiqishinni clans which inhabit Laascaanood were also unhappy with the secession from Somalia. The Dhulbahante clans are related to the Darod clans in Puntland which administered Laascaanood previously but was captured by Somaliland in October 2007.¹⁹⁰ After days of violent clashes between city residents and Somaliland security personnel, Somaliland leaders announced they had removed security forces from the city and instructed them to camp in the mountains surrounding the city.¹⁹¹

186. Puntland Government Establishes Economic Development Council to Manage International Grants and Projects; 8 August 2023; <https://horseedmedia.net/puntland-government-establishes-economic-development-council-to-manage-international-grants-and-projects-381318>.

187. See "Somalia Floods: Bodies Unearthed and Bridges Swept Away," BBC News, November 16, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67426065>.

188. See "Somaliland's Renewed Stalemate: The Consequence of Extensions," Horn Diplomat, June 5, 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.horndiplomat.com/2022/06/05/somalilands-renewed-stalemate-the-consequence-of-extensions/>.

189. See "Ethnic Clashes Hit Somaliland ahead of This Year's Elections," The East African, January 7, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/ethnic-clashes-hit-somaliland-ahead-of-this-year-elections-4078772>.

190. See "What's Driving Conflict in the Disputed Somali City of Las Anod?" Al Jazeera, February 20, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/20/whats-driving-conflict-in-the-disputed-somali-city-of-las-anod>.

191. See "Somaliland Withdraws Troops from Disputed Town to Halt Violence," Voice of America, January 6, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somaliland-withdraws-troops-from-disputed-town-to-halt-violence/6907540.html>.

On 8 January, traditional leaders of the Dhulbahante and Fiqishinni clans met in Laascaanood and demanded Somaliland leave the Sool region and called for a community-wide conference.¹⁹² On 23 January, Garaad Jama Garaad Ali, the supreme chief of the Dhulbahante clans, returned to Laascaanood after 15 years of exile.¹⁹³ On 6 February, after two weeks of consultations in Laascaanood, Sool-region clan elders declared autonomy from Somaliland and appointed a 45-member local council to lead the new administration.¹⁹⁴ A violent conflict between the community and Somaliland forces ignited the same day resulting in widespread death and destruction.¹⁹⁵

By early March, more than 200 people had been killed and nearly 700 wounded, according to the mayor of Laascaanood who joined the resisting residents and accused the Somaliland government of genocide.¹⁹⁶ Somaliland accused Puntland and al-Shabaab terrorists of being part of the revolt in Laascaanood,¹⁹⁷ though the international community also repeatedly called for a cessation of hostilities and for a peaceful and negotiated settlement between the authority in Somaliland and the residents and clans in Laascaanood.¹⁹⁸

As the fighting raged during the months of February and March, calls for ending the conflict and reports of the harrowing experience of civilians continuously dominated the headlines. Ceasefires were called, accepted by the warring sides, but did not hold. Speaker of Somaliland parliament who hails from SSC-Khatumo accused the government of committing war crimes against its own people.¹⁹⁹ Additionally, most politicians from the Sool region—particularly the mayor of Laascaanood and local councilors in the city have took a strong stand in support of their community.²⁰⁰

Somaliland claimed that Somalia, Puntland, al-Shabaab, and the Somali region of Ethiopia were conspiring against it and were jointly waging the war.²⁰¹ Nevertheless, the UN reported that 185,000 were displaced by the fierce Laascaanood war.²⁰² The US State Department, on the other hand, on March 30, 2023, released a long statement titled “Instability and Democratic Backsliding in Somaliland” and called for a ceasefire and for opening humanitarian access for the beleaguered civilians.²⁰³

192. See “Elders Want Somaliland Troops out of Sool” Somali Dispatch, January 9, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.somalidispach.com/latest-news/elders-want-somaliland-troops-out-of-sool/>.

193. See “Garaad Jaamac: Soomaaliland Dhulkayaga Hanagoo Baxaan Innagaa U Tashanayna,” Hiiraan Online, January 23, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2023/Jan/wararka_maanta23-183452.htm.

194. See “SSC-Khatumo Elders and Leaders Declare Autonomy from Somaliland,” SomalilandCurrent.com, February 6, 2023. SSC-Khatumo is the name the new administration assumed; Accessed at: <https://www.somalilandcurrent.com/ssc-khatumo-elders-and-leaders-declare-autonomy-from-somaliland/>.

195. See “Dozens Killed in Eastern Somaliland Clashes,” Voice of America, February 7, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/dozens-killed-in-eastern-somaliland-clashes/6952345.html>.

196. See “Somalia: Death Toll in Las Anod Conflict Surpasses 200 amid Calls for Ceasefire,” Garowe Online, March 2, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-death-toll-in-las-anod-surpasses-200-amid-calls-for-ceasefire>.

197. See “Somaliland Claims Victory in Clash with SSC-Khatumo Forces on Las Anod Outskirts,” Hiiraan Online, March 2, 2023.

Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Mar/190150/somaliland_claims_victory_in_clash_with_ssc_khatumo_forces_on_las%2%A0anod%2%A0outskirts.aspx.

198. See “International Partners Joint Statement on the Situation in Laascaanood and Somaliland Elections,” EEAS, April 17, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/somalia/international-partners-joint-statement-situation-laascaanood-and-somaliland-elections_en?s=153.

199. See “Somaliland Army Accused of War Crimes in Las Anod, Says Parliament Speaker,” Hiiraan Online, February 26, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Feb/190095/somaliland_army_accused_of_war_crimes_in_las_anod_says_parliament_speaker.aspx.

200. See “Las Anod Mayor Demands Somaliland Withdrawal as Fighting Enters Third Consecutive Day,” Hiiraan Online, February 8, 2023.

Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Feb/189844/las_anod_mayor_demands_somaliland_withdrawal_as_fighting_enters_third_consecutive_day.aspx.

201. See “Somaliland and Ethiopia Faceoff over Las Anod Jeopardizes Regional Cooperation,” Ethiopia Insight, March 20, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.ethiopia-insight.com/2023/03/20/somaliland-and-ethiopia-faceoff-over-las-anod-jeopardizes-regional-cooperation/>.

202. See “185 Thousand Somalis Flee Home: OCHA Report,” VOA Africa, February 17, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voaafrica.com/a/thousand-somalis-flee-home-ocha-report-/6967149.html>.

203. See “Instability and Democratic Backsliding in Somaliland” United States Department of State, March 30, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.state.gov/instability-and-democratic-backsliding-in-somaliland/>.

On April 2, the FGS appointed Abdikarim Hussein Guled as the country's special envoy for Somalia-Somaliland negotiations; the Somaliland president welcomed the appointment.²⁰⁴ On April 20, Amnesty International said in a press statement: "More than 100 people killed, over 600 injured, and tens of thousands displaced. Indiscriminate shelling has caused significant damage to homes, hospitals, schools, and mosques."²⁰⁵ A few days earlier, on April 17, diplomats from fifteen Western democracies, including the United States and the United Nations, met Muse Bihi, the leader of Somaliland, and told him there must be an immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities and separation of forces.²⁰⁶ After weeks of a lull in late April, fighting reignited in the second week of May.²⁰⁷ In June, the UN Security Council condemned the loss of life in the Laascaanood fighting and called on Somaliland "to withdraw its forces" from the city.²⁰⁸ Also in June, Somaliland's speaker of parliament quit Somaliland and joined the SSC-Khatumo administration.²⁰⁹ Somaliland's attorney general threatened to charge the speaker with treason.²¹⁰

Fighting raged on in July, and the SSC-Khatumo administration took shape. In the first week of August, the central committee and the executive arm of the self-administering region were established by the clan elders.²¹¹ On 16 August, a prominent poet, Jama Kadiye Elmi, died as a result of a Somaliland mortar attack on Laascaanood, resulting in widespread condemnation among Somalis.²¹² By 26 August, SSC-Khatumo staged a counteroffensive against Somaliland forces pushing them out of Laascaanood.²¹³

Election-Related Dispute in Somaliland

In addition to the political and security upheaval Somaliland faced in its eastern regions, an election dispute among existing and aspiring Somaliland political parties also raged throughout 2023.²¹⁴

The terms of both the president and three political parties, which by law must be renewed every 10 years, were expiring in November and December, respectively. President Muse Bihi Abdi was first elected on 21 November 2017 for a five-year term that was supposed to end in November 2022.

204. See "President Muse Bihi Welcomes the New Envoy for the Talks between Somalia, Somaliland," Somali National News Agency, April 3, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/president-muse-bihi-welcomes-the-new-envoy-for-the-talks-between-somalia-somaliland/>.

205. See "Somaliland: Urgent Investigation Needed as Fighting Takes Heavy Toll on Civilians in Las Anod," April 20, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/somaliland-urgent-investigation-needed-fighting-takes-heavy-toll-civilians-las-anod>.

206. See "International Partners Joint Statement on the Situation in Laascaanood and Somaliland Elections," EEAS, April 17, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/somalia/international-partners-joint-statement-situation-laascaanood-and-somaliland-elections_en?s=153.

207. See "Somaliland: Deadly Clashes Resume in Las Anod," Somalidispatch.com, May 16, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.somalidispatch.com/latest-news/somaliland-deadly-clashes-resume-in-las-anod/>.

208. See "Security Council Press Statement on Situation in Somalia," UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, June 7, 2023. Accessed at: <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15313.doc.htm>.

209. See "Somaliland Parliament Speaker Resigns, Joins SCC-Khatumo Administration," Hiiraan Online, June 12, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/4/2023/Jun/191756/somaliland_parliament_speaker_resigns_joins_scc_khatumo_administration.aspx.

210. See "Somaliland: Attorney General Issues Prosecution Notice of Former Speaker to Chief Justice," SomalilandSun, June 7, 2023. Accessed at: <https://somalilandsun.com/2946745-2/>.

211. See "Somalia: SSC Council Elects Chairman of Executive Council in Las'anod," Horseed Media, August 5, 2023. Accessed at: <https://horseedmedia.net/somalia-ssc-council-elects-chairman-of-executive-council-in-lasanod-381212>.

212. See "Somali Politicians Unite in Condemning Killing of Celebrated Somali Poet in Las Anod Mortar Attack," Hiiraan Online, August 17, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/4/2023/Aug/192655/somali_politicians_unite_in_condemning_killing_of_celebrated_somali_poet_in_las_anod_mortar_attack.aspx.

213. See "The Fall of Goojaadde and the Victory of SSC-Khatumo Forces," Kormeeraha Magazine, August 27, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.kormeeraha.com/2023/08/26/the-fall-of-goojaadde-and-the-victory-of-ssc-khatumo-forces/>.

214. See "Somaliland: Opposition warns of further violence if elections are delayed," Somali Dispatch, March 13, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.somalidispatch.com/latest-news/somaliland-opposition-warns-of-further-violence-if-elections-are-delayed/>.

At any given time, only three parties exist in Somaliland. In 2023 they were the ruling Kulmiye party and the Wadani and UCID opposition parties. By the summer of 2022, Bihi and the electoral commission seemed to be coordinating an extension for the government to force the parties' primary elections to take place ahead of the presidential elections. The opposition were unhappy as in June 2021 they had won the majority of parliamentary and municipal seats and expected to defeat the ruling Kulmiye party in the upcoming presidential contest.²¹⁵

If the parties were forced to hold primaries, which would include around two dozen upstart political associations, the existing opposition might not get re-elected as parties—through government machinations. Various groups such as a committee established by religious scholars and a committee made up of the top business leaders in Somaliland tried to mediate and put forth compromise proposals.²¹⁶ However, opposition parties organized a series of demonstrations throughout Somaliland cities in the summer of 2022. Bihi's government used force to suppress them, and the protests turned deadly.²¹⁷

In January, election disputes accompanied by low-level violence raged in both Hargeisa and other parts of Somaliland among the dominant Isaaq clans and their political parties (Kulmiye, Wadani and UCID). On 5 February, anti-Somaliland government protests spread to Ceel Afweyn, causing fatalities. Somaliland lawmakers from Sanaag criticized the government for using excessive force.²¹⁸ The situation intensified further in the summer of 2023 as armed soldiers and militia from the Garxajis clans (who mostly backed the two opposition parties) engaged in a mutiny, fought with government forces, and blocked roads in the Gacan Libaax mountain.²¹⁹

This happened as the conflict between Somaliland and SSC-Khatumo was also raging. Two weeks after the Gacan Libaax mutiny, on 25 August, Somaliland forces in the Sool region were defeated in Laascaanood in the infamous Battle of Goojacade where about 400 soldiers were taken captive, including the general Faisal Botan who had led the siege of the city in the preceding months.²²⁰

On 27 August, elders of Habar Jeclo, one of the main Isaaq clans on which Bihi counted for support, unilaterally decreed that the political party and presidential elections would take place concurrently on 13 November 2024 and that only the existing three parties would contest the presidential election.²²¹ Bihi and some of the political associations welcomed the decision.²²²

215. See "Somaliland: Freedom in the World 2023 Country Report." Freedom House, 2023. Accessed at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/somaliland/freedom-world/2023>.

216. See "Somaliland, Government, Opposition Agree to Open Dialogue." SomiTribe, August 30, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.somitribune.com/2022/07/06/somaliland-government-opposition-agree-to-open-dialogue/>.

217. See "Somaliland: Freedom in the World 2023 Country Report." Freedom House, 2023. Accessed at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/somaliland/freedom-world/2023>.

218. See "Protest against Separatist Authorities Erupt in Second Somaliland Town." Somali Guardian, February 5, 2023. Accessed at: <https://somaliguardsian.com/news/somalia-news/protest-against-separatist-authorities-erupt-in-second-somaliland-town/>.

219. See "Somaliland Forces and 'Garhajis Militia' Clashed Again in Togdheer." The Somali Digest, August 1, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomalidigest.com/somaliland-garhajis-militia-bihi/>.

220. See "The Fall of Goojaadde and the Victory of SSC-Khatumo Forces." Kormeeraha Magazine, August 27, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.kormeeraha.com/2023/08/26/the-fall-of-goojaadde-and-the-victory-of-ssc-khatumo-forces/>.

221. See "Hoggaanka Beesha Habar-Jeclo Oo Go'aan Kasoo Saaray Jabhada Buurta Gacanlibaax," Hiiraan Online, August 27, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news/2023/Aug/wararka_maanta27-185202.htm.

222. See "Somaliland Political Associations Express Support for Electoral Commission's Revised Election Timelines." Somaliland.com, July 18, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.somaliland.com/news/somaliland-political-associations-express-support-for-electoral-commissions-revised-election-timelines/>.

The Habar Jeclo clan was assumed to support and ally the embattled president, whose powerful interior minister hails from Habar Jeclo. This decision by the Habar Jeclo clan angered the dozen other aspiring political associations who expected to graduate to parties.²²³

In September, the Somaliland government extended amnesty to the Gacan Libaax militia, which stopped fighting.²²⁴ In the meantime, with the domestic schism stemming from the election schedule dispute generally resolved, Somaliland focused on containing and reversing the defeat in the Sool region. More troops were deployed to the new frontiers between Somaliland and SSC-Khaatumo, with Oog becoming the frontline for Somaliland, and Guumeys for SSC-Khaatumo.²²⁵ However, SSC-Khaatumo became more buoyant as it welcomed streams of assorted visitors, well-wishers, media, and even planeloads of federal ministers and members of parliament.²²⁶

On 1 October, the Somaliland parliament approved the amalgamated presidential and political elections,²²⁷ and Khaatumo leaders arrived in Mogadishu to seek recognition of SSC-Khaatumo by the FGS.²²⁸ Somaliland authorities condemned the FGS's designation of SSC-Khaatumo as an interim administration and future FMS.²²⁹ In the meantime, political activities began in the Awdal region in western Somaliland, adjacent to Djibouti and Ethiopia. Community activists, armed men, diaspora-based intellectuals, and politicians within the FGS have said for decades that communities in this region, particularly the Samaroon or Gadabursi clans in the region, are not separatists but a community that faces imposed secessionism.²³⁰ The Awdal people's resistance ebbed at times and emerged louder at others. In the meantime, throughout the summer, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed floated the idea that Ethiopia needed access to the sea, and on 13 October in a televised speech to Ethiopia's lawmakers he mentioned Zeila in Awdal as one of the ports he was eyeing.²³¹

On 29 December, Somalia and Somaliland leaders met in Djibouti. After a two-day negotiation mediated by President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti, they issued a comprehensive roadmap for Somalia-Somaliland talks.²³²

223. See "Hillaac Rejects the Bullying of Chieftains & Their Proposed Joint Election," SII, August 31, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sii1991.org/hillaac-rejects-the-bullying-of-chieftains-their-proposed-joint-election/>.

224. See "Somaliland Government Grants Amnesty to Armed Militia in Ga'an Libah Mountains," Somaliland.com, September 6, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.somaliland.com/news/somaliland-government-grants-amnesty-to-armed-militia-in-gaan-libah-mountains/>.

225. See "Somaliland Deploys More Forces to Oog, Announces Military Action against SSC-Khaatumo," Horn Observer, September 6, 2023. Accessed at: <https://hornobserver.com/articles/2437/Somaliland-deploys-more-forces-to-Oog-announces-military-action-against-SSC-Khaatumo>.

226. See "Federal Delegation Visits Las Anod to Assess the Situation and Promote Unity," Somali National News Agency, September 15, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/federal-delegation-visits-las-anod-to-assess-the-situation-and-promote-unity/#:~:text=The%20delegation%20visited%20the%20homes, and%20stability%20in%20the%20region>.

227. See "Somaliland Parliament Approves Election Law Ending Months-Long Electoral Dispute," Hiiraan Online, October 1, 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Oct/193217/somaliland-parliament-approves-election-law-ending-months-long-electoral-dispute.aspx>.

228. See "Somali Prime Minister Receives SSC-Khaatumo Leader in Mogadishu," Shabelle Media, October 7, 2023. Accessed at: <https://shabellemedia.com/somali-prime-minister-receives-ssc-khaatumo-leader-in-mogadishu/>.

229. See "Somaliland Objects to Mogadishu's SSC-Khaatumo Recognition," The Somali Digest, October 20, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomalidigest.com/somaliland-objects-to-mogadishu-ssc-khaatumo-recognition/>.

230. See "Awdal State Movement: Communiqué," WardheerNews, September 6, 2023. Accessed at: <https://wardheernews.com/awdal-state-movement-communicue/>.

231. See "Feature: 'A population of 150 million can't live in a geographic prison' – PM Abiy Ahmed," Addis Standard, October 14, 2023. Accessed at: <https://wp.me/p7BpQh-a0b>.

232. See "Historic Dialogue Initiated between Somalia and Somaliland with Djibouti as Mediator," Somali National News Agency, December 29, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/historic-dialogue-initiated-between-somalia-and-somaliland-with-djibouti-as-mediator/>.

Economy

In March, DP World, a UAE-based port management company, and the Somaliland government inaugurated the Berbera Economic Zone, an integrated maritime, logistics, and industrial hub near the port of Berbera.²³³ The UAE already had a stake in the Berbera port.²³⁴ In March, Taiwanese officials held discussions on oil and mineral cooperation with officials in Somaliland's Ministry of Mineral Resources.²³⁵ The two sides had signed a cooperation agreement regarding these sectors in 2022.²³⁶ In April 2023, the Somaliland cabinet cut their salaries to support the Laascaanood war efforts.²³⁷ In April, Khaatumo-SSC banned commercial relations with Somaliland, cutting the road that connects the port of Berbera and the rest of Somalia, particularly Laascaanood.²³⁸ The duty and tariff charges of the Berbera port were cheaper than at Bosaso port in northern Puntland so Somaliland had significant trade interest in the rest of Somalia and Laascaanood was the gateway to such imports as well as livestock export destined to Berbera port.

In May, Somaliland announced that Genel Energy, a British company, had commenced oil drilling in the Togdheer region.²³⁹ In December 2022, Somalia had dismissed Somaliland's granting of drilling licenses as null and void.²⁴⁰ In August, with an investment of \$100 million, Dahabshiil opened an oil storage terminal in Berbera intended to allow ships to offload oil and fuel, including jet fuel, for the region and beyond.²⁴¹ In September, the owner of World Remit accused the Somaliland Central Bank of printing new currency. However, Somaliland authorities denied the bank had flooded the market with new money and caused inflation.²⁴² In October, the Somaliland livestock minister announced that Saudi Arabia had stopped the exportation of livestock from Somaliland. The BBC reported that Saudi Arabia required certification of livestock from the FGS.²⁴³

233. See "DP World and Somaliland Government Open Berbera Economic Zone." DP World, March 3, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.dpworld.com/news/releases/dp-world-somaliland-open-berbera-economic-zone/>.

234. See "DP World Signs Deal with Ethiopia to Develop Berbera Port." Port Today, March 5, 2018. Accessed at: <https://port.today/dp-world-signs-deal-ethiopia-develop-berbera-port/>.

235. See "Taiwan and Somaliland Hold First Joint Energy & Mineral Resources Cooperation Working Group Meeting." Taiwan Representative Office in the Republic of Somaliland, March 16, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.roc-taiwan.org/smd_en/post/824.html.

236. See "Somaliland and Taiwan Sign a Two Point Agreement to Develop Petroleum, Minerals and Energy Sectors." Somaliland Current, May 23, 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.somalilandcurrent.com/somaliland-and-taiwan-sign-a-two-point-agreement-to-develop-petroleum-minerals-and-energy-sectors/>.

237. See "Somaliland Cabinet Ministers Take Pay Cuts amid Economic Woes over Las Anod Conflict." Hiiraan Online, April 10, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Apr/190760/somaliland_cabinet_ministers_face_salary_cuts_amid_economic_struggles_and_lasanood_conflict.aspx.

238. See "Somalia: SSC-Khaatumo Announces Ban on Somaliland." Garowe Online, April 12, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-ssc-khatumo-announces-ban-on-somaliland>.

239. See "Somaliland Ministry of Energy Unveils the Drilling of Oil Well TOOSAN 1 in Xood District." Horn Diplomat, May 10, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.horndiplomat.com/2023/05/10/somaliland-ministry-of-energy-unveils-the-drilling-of-oil-well-toosan-1-in-xood-district/>.

240. See "Somalia Rejects Genel Energy's 'Illegal Claim' to Oil Permits." Reuters, December 28, 2022. Accessed at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/somalia-rejects-genel-energys-illegal-claim-oil-permits-2022-12-28/>.

241. See "Somaliland: Dahabshiil Oil Terminal Opens in Berbera to Serve Horn of Africa." SomTribune, August 22, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.somtribune.com/2023/08/22/somaliland-dahabshiil-oil-terminal-opens-in-berbera-to-serve-horn-of-africa/>.

242. See "World Remit Founder Accuses Central Bank of Somaliland of Currency Devaluation." BNN, September 27, 2023. Accessed at: <https://bnnbreaking.com/finance-nav/currencies/world-remit-founder-accuses-central-bank-of-somaliland-of-currency-devaluation/>.

243. See "Sidee Ayay Somaliland U Saameyneysaa Hakinta Dhoofka Xoolaha Ee Sacuudiga?." BBC News Somali, October 4, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.bbc.com/somali/articles/c6p5zl4jgdno>.

9. Southwest

Politics

2023 started with the federal parliament's lower house speaker, Sheikh Adan Mohamed Nur Madoobe, calling for a reconciliation conference between President Abdiiaziz Laftagareen and key opposition figures within the state.²⁴⁴ Violent confrontation had taken place weeks before between the government and opposition figures. The reconciliation process commenced in late January, with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud attending the opening ceremony of the first phase.²⁴⁵ The initial phase of reconciliation centered on resolving the issues arising from the December clashes, including providing compensation to the families affected by the violence.²⁴⁶

In February, Mohamud returned to Baidoa to oversee the second phase of the reconciliation conference.²⁴⁷ State leaders reached an agreement to schedule regional assembly elections for November and December and speaker of the house and presidential elections in January 2024. The Ministry of Internal Affairs was entrusted with overseeing and facilitating these electoral processes.²⁴⁸ However, in May, the NCC leaders unveiled a revised electoral process and schedule which stipulated a one-year extension of the terms for all FMS presidents, except Puntland's. This new timeline featured local council elections on 30 June 2024, followed by regional parliamentary and regional leadership elections on 30 November 2024.²⁴⁹ This change marked a departure from the previously agreed-upon timeframe in the reconciliation conference. In response, opposition leaders took proactive steps to push for regional presidential elections to be held as outlined in the February 2023 agreement. However, their efforts have not succeeded in altering the electoral timeline.²⁵⁰

Southwest continued its efforts towards decentralization and strengthening local governance. In 2022, notable strides were taken to establish district councils in various regions, including Wajid, Dinsor, Hudur, Bardale, and Barawe. This effort extended into 2023, with notable progress in Burhakaba district, Bay region, where the formation of a district council in Buurhakaba was officially initiated by Laftagareen in June.²⁵¹

244. See "Laftagareen and Southwest Opposition Leaders Agree to a Reconciliation Meeting on January 5," Hiiraan.com, December 2022. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2022/Dec/189289/laftagareen_and_southwest_opposition_leaders_agree_to_a_reconciliation_meeting_on_january_5.aspx.

245. See "President Mohamud to Open Baidoa Reconciliation Conference," Hiiraan.com 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Jan/189511/president_mohamud_to_open_baidoa_reconciliation_conference.aspx.

246. See "Southwest State and Opposition Leaders Reach Settlement over Baidoa Clash," Hiiraan.com 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Jan/189705/southwest_state_and_opposition_leaders_reach_settlement_over_baidoa_clash.aspx.

247. See "President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud Arrives at Baidoa to Participate in the 2nd Phase of the South West Reconciliation Conference," Mustaqbal Media, February 2023. Accessed at: <https://mustaqbalmedia.net/en/president-hassan-sheikhmohamud-arrives-at-baidoa-to-participate-in-the-2nd-phase-of-the-south-west-reconciliation-conference/>.

248. See "What Was the Outcome of the South West Reconciliation Conference in Baidoa?" Mustaqbal Media, February 2023. Accessed at: <https://mustaqbalmedia.net/en/what-was-the-outcome-of-the-south-west-reconciliation-conference-in-baidoa/>.

249. See "Somali Leaders Reach Landmark Political Agreement," VOA News, May 28, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/somali-leaders-reach-landmark-political-agreement/7112409.html>.

250. See "Opposition Leaders of South West State Push for Regional Elections," The Somali Digest, September 26, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomaldigest.com/opposition-leaders-of-south-west-state-push-for-regional-elections/>.

251. See "District Council Formation in Burhakaba, Somalia Launched with Emphasis on Inclusion," Finn Church Aid, June 13, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/en/latest-news/news/district-council-formation-in-burhakaba-somalia-launched-with-emphasis-on-inclusion/>.

Security

Al-Shabaab remained a major threat. The government's crucial second-phase offensive, launched in March and aimed at eradicating al-Shabab from the southern regions including Southwest, remained focused in the central regions.²⁵² Phase one's reliance on clan militias yielded significant gains in Hirshabelle and Galmudug. Understanding that this approach may not work in Southwest and Jubbaland, the federal government switched tactics for phase two, as it secured commitments from frontline states including Djibouti, Ethiopia, and Kenya for more than 30,000 troops to address both security needs and the complexities of clan dynamics.²⁵³ However, concerns remained about the long-term impact of relying heavily on foreign troops.²⁵⁴ It is worth noting that, contrary to initial assessments, local residents in the Bay and Bakool regions rallied alongside security forces, emphatically demonstrating the region's commitment to eradicating al-Shabaab.²⁵⁵

In July, Baidoa, faced a crisis when al-Shabaab militants initiated a strict blockade.²⁵⁶ The blockade was reportedly in response to the arrest of school principals by Southwest police. The educators had been invited by al-Shabaab to Buulo-Fulaay village, known for al-Shabaab's mobile makeshift courts in the Bay and Bakool regions.²⁵⁷ This blockade severely disrupted the flow of essential goods into Baidoa. Numerous trucks loaded with food and vital supplies were stranded between Wanlaweyn and Afgooye districts. The dire consequences of the blockade included a sharp increase in food prices, inflation, and significant economic repercussions for the city. The blockade ended unexpectedly due to internal conflicts within the al-Shabaab ranks that led to clashes and reported fatalities among the militants.²⁵⁸ Notably, the Southwest government denied any involvement in negotiating the release of the stranded trucks, despite local media reports suggesting the participation of regional elders.²⁵⁹

In Barawe, a fierce firefight erupted on 12 June between SNA soldiers stationed in the town and paramilitary police known as Darwish.²⁶⁰ The 60th division of the SNA have played a crucial role in Barawe's security since the city was liberated from al-Shabaab in 2014.

252. See "Hassan Sheikh returns to central Somalia as clans mobilize against Al-Shabaab," Garowe Online, August 6, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/hassan-sheikh-returns-to-central-somalia-as-clans-mobilize-against-al-shabaab>

253. See "Somalia's Neighbours Commit to Send More than 30,000 Additional Troops to Combat Al-Shabaab," Hiiraan Online, March 2, 2024. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/Mar/190155/somalia_s_neighbours_commit_to_send_30_000_additional_troops_to_combat_al_shabaab.aspx.

254. See "Somalia Situation Update: April 2023 | Counter-Insurgency Operation Gains Regional Support in Phase Two," ACLED, April 21, 2023. Accessed at: <https://acleddata.com/2023/04/21/somalia-situation-update-april-2023-counter-insurgency-operation-gains-regional-support-in-phase-two-as-al-shabaab-attacks-and-political-differences-persist/>.

255. See "Southwest State Leader Signals Intensified Operation against Al-Shabaab in Graduation Ceremony" Radio Dalsan, October 7, 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/southwest-state-leader-signals-intensified-operation-against-al-shabaab-in-graduation-ceremony/>.

256. See "Al-Shabab Imposes Blockade on Baidoa Town in Somalia," VOA News, July 18, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.voanews.com/a/al-shabab-imposes-blockade-on-baidoa-town-in-somalia-/7185165.html>.

257. See "Crisis Unfolds in Baidoa as Al-Shabaab Enforces Comprehensive Blockade," The Somali Digest, July 11, 2023. Accessed at: <https://thesomalidigest.com/crisis-unfolds-in-baidoa-as-al-shabaab-enforces/>.

258. See "Baidoa Blockade Ends as Commercial Supplies Arrive Following Internal Disputes among Al-Shabaab Militants," Radio Dalsan, July 22, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.radiodalsan.com/baidoa-blockade-ends-as-commercial-supplies-arrive-following-internal-disputes-among-al-shabaab-militants/>.

259. See "South West State to Launch a New Military Offensive to Respond Baidoa Blockade," Hiiraan Online, July 22, 2023. Accessed at: https://www.hiiraan.com/news4/2023/July/192332/south-west-state-to-launch-a-new-military-offensive-to-respond-baidoa-blockade.aspx?utm_source=hiiraan&utm_medium=SomaliNewsUpdateFront.

260. See "10 Killed as Fighting between Disciplined Forces Intensifies in Somalia," News.cn, June 13, 2023. Accessed at: <https://english.news.cn/africa/20230614/6cdc5f745374e93a5950d6b1249ad17/c.html>.

The Darawish troops were deployed by the Southwest administration in 2021 and have been stationed at the presidential palace, working in coordination with SNA units responsible for maintaining control over key access points and major checkpoints within the town. Although not officially confirmed, tensions in Barawe hinted at wider debates regarding governance and security in a federal system, where defining roles and responsibilities can become a source of tension.²⁶¹

Economy and humanitarian situation

In May, Laftagareen and the Speaker of the Federal Lower House Parliament, Adan Madobe, inaugurated the construction of a new port in the state's capital city of Barawe. This project is said to be funded by Somali businesspeople and is envisaged to support importers and exporters and to become alternative to the port of Mogadishu.²⁶² In September, Laftagareen and Central Bank of Somalia Chairman, Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, inaugurated the Baidoa branch of the Central Bank. This development, part of a nationwide plan, will help Somalis to access financial services provided by the CBS, contributing to a stronger banking system in the state.²⁶³

On the humanitarian front, Southwest grappled with the aftermath of El Nino rains that hit the country in October. The floods led to casualties, displacement, and the disruption of the critical Baidoa-Mogadishu supply route, posing risks of food scarcity and price spikes. Inadequate infrastructure, limited resources, and persistent security challenges further compounded these vulnerabilities.²⁶⁴ Southwest has established an El Nino Response Committee to address immediate crises such as the destruction of the Baidoa-Mogadishu route, which threatens to exacerbate food shortages and escalate consumer prices.²⁶⁵

261. See "Muxuu Salka Ku Hayaa Dagaalka Baraawe?" BBC News Somali, June 13, 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.bbc.com/somali/articles/clex8l6zg97o>.

262. See "Somali House Speaker Lays Foundation Stone for New Barawe Port." Shabelle Media Network, May 30, 2023. Accessed at: <https://shabellemedia.com/somali-house-speaker-lays-foundation-stone-for-new-barawe-port/>.

263. See "Southwest State President, Central Bank Chairman Cut the Rippon of New Branch." SONNA, September 2, 2023. Accessed at: <https://sonna.so/en/southwest-state-president-central-bank-chairman-cut-the-ripon-of-new-branch/>.

264. See "Somalia Situation Report, 31 Oct 2023," UNOCHA, October 31, 2023. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/somalia/somalia-situation-report-31-oct-2023>.

265. See "Somalia's Southwest State Launches El Nino Response Committee amidst Rains Crisis." Halqabsi News, November 5, 2023. Accessed at: <https://halqabsi.com/2023/11/sw-forms-committee-to-tackle-el-nino/>.

10. Conclusion

Somalia achieved significant milestones on the international stage throughout 2023, including securing substantial debt relief, joining the East African Community, and successfully advocating for the lifting of the UN arms embargo.

However, internally, Somalia faced persistent challenges. The National Consultative Council's agreement to reform the country's political system, particularly transitioning from a parliamentary to a presidential system and shifting from the 4.5 clan power-sharing model to a one-person-one-vote electoral model, were noteworthy but contentious endeavors. However, continuing these efforts in the absence of key stakeholders like Puntland compromises the broad-based support necessary for successful political restructuring.

The security situation remained complex, with mixed results in the ongoing offensive against al-Shabaab. Despite notable territorial gains, particularly during the first phase in central Somalia, the terrorist group continued to pose a significant threat. Furthermore, the humanitarian crisis, worsened by climate shocks and conflict, led to devastating floods that displaced hundreds of thousands and exacerbated acute food insecurity for millions.

HERITAGE

I N S T I T U T E