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The looming threat: A resurgence of Islamic State and inter-clan fighting in Somalia

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July 31, 2024

Situation Update | July 2024

31 July 2024

Somalia at a Glance: 1 June – 26 July 2024

VITAL TRENDS

- ACLED records 395 political violence events and 1,082 reported fatalities from 1 June to 26 July 2024. Most political violence centered in the Lower Shabelle region, where al-Shabaab attacks targeting security forces remained at high levels.
- Galgaduud region had the highest number of reported fatalities, with 352 recorded during the reporting period. Lower Juba region followed, with 265 reported fatalities.
- The most common event type was battles, with over 265 events, followed by 78 events of explosions/remote violence.



SOMALIA



Horn of Africa | Situation Update
1 June-26 July 2024

Key Figures

Political Violence Events

395

13% increase
compared to the same
time period prior

Reported Fatalities

1,082

31% increase
compared to the same
time period prior

Key Developments

Political Events

3 JUL.
Jubaland state
parliament
extends the
president's term
of office from four
to five years

10 JUL.
Jubaland's
president meets
with a US military
official to discuss
the campaign
against al-Shabaab

17 JUL.
Government delegates
arrive in Galgaduud
region to negotiate
with clan militias who
looted trucks carrying
weapons

21 JUL.
Members of
parliament request
that President Hassan
Sheikh Mohamud
resign from office

23 JUL.
Local council
elections are held in
the Nugaal region of
Puntland

Violent Events

8 JUN.
Inter-clan fighting
between the
Marehan and Dir in
Galgaduud results
in over 50 reported
fatalities

27 JUN.
Inter-clan clashes
in Mudug claim at
least 70 reported
fatalities

10 JUL.
Al-Shabaab and
security forces clash
in Lower Juba after
the militants ambush
a convoy in Gacan
Maroodi

14 JUL.
Al-Shabaab
detonates a car
bomb at a hotel in
Mogadishu, killing
nine people

22 JUL.
Security forces clash
with al-Shabaab in
Lower Juba, resulting
in over 150 reported
fatalities

24 JUL.
Al-Shabaab
ambushes a military
convoy in Middle
Shabelle, killing 13
soldiers

Since May, the Islamic State (IS) in Somalia has been increasingly active in the semi-autonomous region of Puntland. After airstrikes by the United States in May targeted IS positions and threatened the life of its leader, Abdulqadir Mumin, the Somalia branch of IS has waged several attacks on security forces and business centers, locking horns with al-Shabaab for control of strategic mountain ranges in Puntland. Elsewhere in Somalia, violent inter-clan fighting took place in the Mudug and Galgaduud regions of Galmudug state. In Lower Juba, Somali security forces intensified operations against al-Shabaab while the militant group continued to engage with security forces to protect its strongholds.

Islamic State's expansion in Puntland

In the last week of May, the US, in coordination with the Somali National Army (SNA), conducted three airstrikes targeting IS positions in Puntland. These are the first round of airstrikes against IS since April 2023. One of these airstrikes targeted Abdulqadir Mumin — the leader and founder of IS in Somalia — in the vicinity of Dhadar village, Bari region, on 30 May. Mumin survived the attack, but three

militants, including a commander, were killed.¹Courtney Kube, 'Global leader of ISIS targeted and possibly killed in U.S. airstrike,' NBC News, 15 June 2024; Hiiraan Online, 'Source: ISIS leader Abdulqadir Mumin survives U.S. airstrike in Somalia,' 10 July 2024 US officials believe that the IS threat is growing in Somalia after top IS members allegedly traveled to Somalia to expand and develop links in the region.²Carla Babb, Harun Maruf, and Jeff Seldin, 'Islamic State in Somalia poses growing threat, US officials say,' Voice of America, 18 June 2024 Further, some US officials believe that Mumin is the head of IS worldwide.³Courtney Kube, 'Global leader of ISIS targeted and possibly killed in U.S. airstrike,' NBC News, 15 June 2024; Hiiraan Online, 'Source: ISIS leader Abdulqadir Mumin survives U.S. airstrike in Somalia,' 10 July 2024

Despite this increasing threat that the Somalia branch of IS is reported to represent regionally and globally, reports indicate that the group has between 100 and 400 fighters, largely operating in the northeastern Puntland state.⁴ADF, 'Somalia Faces Critical Threat as Islamic State Group Expands in Puntland,' 18 June 2024 Its activity has been fairly limited in 2024, during which time ACLED records approximately 10 events in Somalia. ACLED records 13 and 18 events in 2023 and 2022, respectively.

However, IS is reported to have expanded its activities in its stronghold of Puntland. Significantly, IS has gained control of the Buuraha Cali Miskat mountain range, previously held by al-Shabaab, in Bari region.⁵ADF, 'Somalia Faces Critical Threat as Islamic State Group Expands in Puntland,' 18 June 2024 This rugged terrain is strategic to the group because it provides militant hideouts and training camps. Despite the presence of al-Shabaab, IS has also increased its influence in the port city of Bosaso and the surrounding remote villages in Qandala district. One factor has facilitated this expansion: Qandala district is home to the Ali Saleban, a sub-clan of the Majeerten clan, from which Mumin hails. Militant presence in this district makes it easier for the group to recruit followers and establish control.⁶International Crisis Group, 'The Islamic State Threat in Somalia's Puntland State,' 17 November 2016

To finance its battle for control of the strategic areas in Puntland, IS has increased its monthly payments from businesses, which the group considers 'taxes.' This money is used to pay fighters and support the group's activities, including recruitment. Those who delay or refuse to pay face the threat of targeted violence; IS militants conduct hand grenade attacks against businesses that fail to comply with their demands for payment.⁷Garowe Online, 'ISIS Extortion Threats Force Business Closures in Bosaso, Somalia,' 18 June 2023 After IS started asking for higher amounts in 2023, businesses began closing due to threats from the group. For instance, in June 2024, two large private hospitals in Bosaso town closed in the face of IS extortion demands. These hospitals were two of the last few left in the city that provided diagnostic services.⁸Halqabsi, 'Bosaso Hospitals Shut Down Amidst ISIS Extortion Demands,' 24 June 2024 In the group's latest attacks on 19 and 25 June, IS ordered Bulsho Trading Company and Towfiiq General Trading in Bosaso to pay 'tax.' In

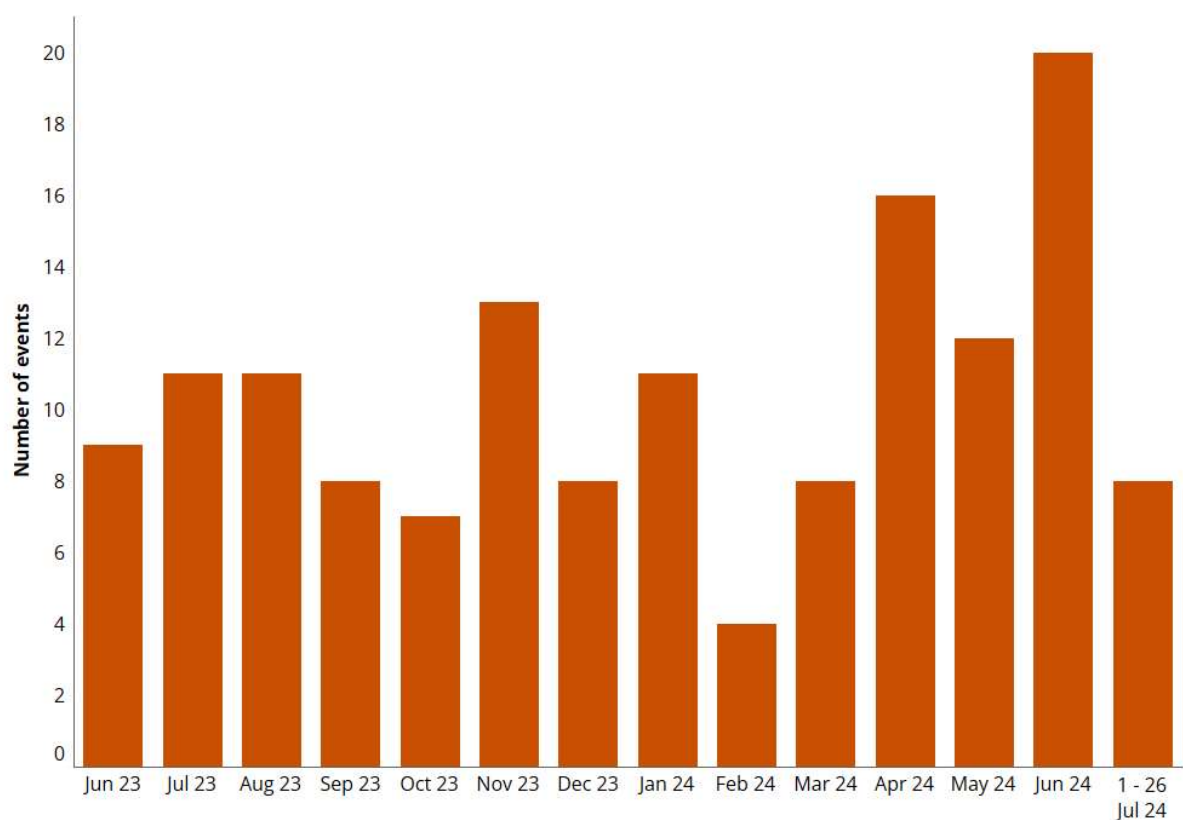
response, the owners closed the companies, that supplied goods such as construction materials and food items, for fear of attack.⁹X @AJaajalle, 27 June 2024 Similarly, in 2023, a prominent company in Puntland closed its business centers after the group demanded 500,000 US dollars and targeted the company with a hand grenade attack.¹⁰Garowe Online, 'Somalia: Puntland's Business Center Faces Terrorist Threats as Businesses Close Down, ' 14 April 2023

Inter-clan fighting escalates in Mudug

Inter-clan fighting continues to affect domestic stability in Somalia. Since February 2024, the number of armed clashes between clans has been trending upward, leading to June being the month with the highest number of recorded clashes in the last 12 months and continuing well into July in Gedo, Lower Shabelle, Middle Shabelle, and Lower Juba (see *graph below*). Nearly half the clashes recorded in June were in Mudug region in Galmudug state. Power struggles between various clans, each vying for control and influence over different regions, fuel the violence. Incidents are typically related to disputes over grazing fields, the construction of water walls and dams, and unresolved clan revenge disputes.

Inter-clan clashes in Somalia

1 June 2023 - 26 July 2024



In Mudug, inter-clan fighting has primarily involved the Habar Gedir Saad sub-clan of the Hawiye clan and the Leelkayse sub-clan of the Darod clan. The dispute between the sub-clans is connected to contested land ownership and the construction of water

dams.¹¹Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Intense Clan Conflict in West Mudug Displaces Over 5,820 Individuals,' 25 June 2024 This dispute began and turned violent in May and escalated in June, with eight clashes between the two parties recorded around Galdogob and Gaalkacyo towns. ACLED records armed clashes between the Habar Gedir Saad sub-clan militia and Leelkayse sub-clan militia on 27 June in five remote villages between Galdogob and Gaalkacyo towns. At least 70 people were reportedly killed and more than 50 injured.

Such inter-clan fighting was also observed in Galgaduud region in Galmudug state. The hostilities in June in Galgaduud were between the Marehan sub-clan from the Darod clan and Sure sub-clan from the Dir clan in Cabudwaaq district. The fighting was linked to the killing of a prominent clan elder from the Sure sub-clan in Laanqeylo village by the Marehan sub-clan militia on 12 April. In response to his killing, the Sure sub-clan militias started regrouping and mobilizing weapons to launch a retaliatory attack targeting members from the Marehan. On 8 June, fighting broke out between the Marehan and Sure sub-clan militias in Laandheer and Hulkujir villages, resulting in more than 50 reported deaths.¹²Cabdiraxmaan Macalin Muuse, 'Heightened security measures imposed following deadly clan clashes in Somalia's Galgaduud,' Hiiraanweyn, 10 June 2024; Mustaqbal Media, 'Somalia: Death toll hits 50 in inter-clan clashes in Galgaduud, peace efforts underway,' 9 June 2024 After this round of clashes, the parties agreed to an immediate ceasefire.¹³Hiiraan Online, 'Somali clans reach preliminary agreement to stop deadly clash in Galgadud,' 13 June 2024

The Somali president and members of the Galmudug state administration have accused al-Shabaab and some political figures of influencing the inter-clan fighting in Mudug and Galgaduud regions.¹⁴Hiiraan Online, 'President Mohamud accuses al-Shabab of instigating clan conflicts to disrupt military operations,' 7 July 2024 President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud accused al-Shabaab of inciting conflicts among clans to interfere with the government's operation against the group. Clan militias and security forces have been fighting the militant group during the counter-insurgency operation, which began in August 2022. At the same time, some political figures have been accused of using clan allegiances to gain political seats within the Galmudug administration and at the federal level.¹⁵Goobjoog, 'Galmudug Regional Leader Links Clan Clashes to Political Groups,' 2 July 2024 Clan-related violence remains a source of instability and disorder, causing widespread loss of lives and large-scale displacement.

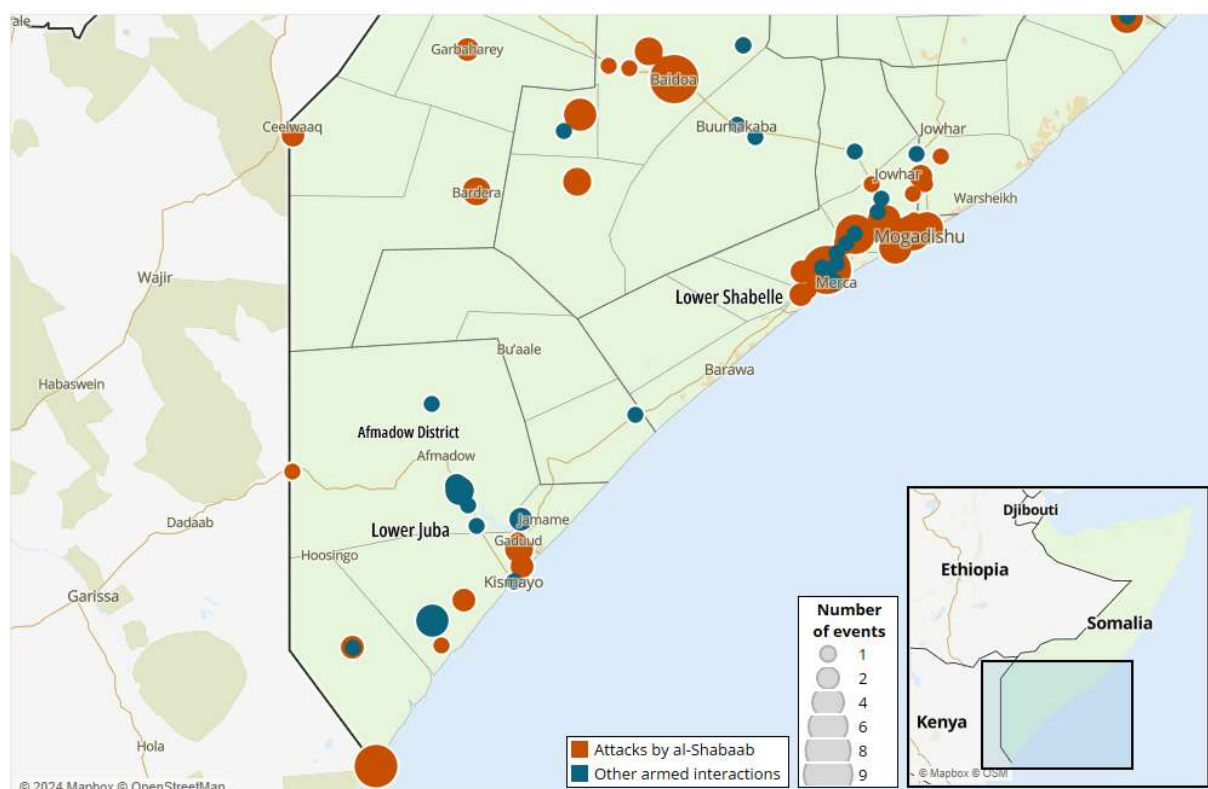
Security forces intensify operations in Lower Juba

Security forces in Lower Juba and Lower Shabelle conducted counter-insurgency operations against al-Shabaab. In Lower Juba, Jubaland security forces and Danab special forces launched an operation targeting the group's stronghold positions in the Lower and Middle Juba regions in Jubaland state (*see map below*). Security forces

cleared IEDs planted by al-Shabaab along the main roads linking Afmadow to Hagar town, where al-Shabaab has been controlling swaths of remote rural villages. This operation intends to flush out al-Shabaab from areas linking Afmadow town to Jamaame town. On 10 July, security forces took control of five villages south of Afmadow after clashes with al-Shabaab. On the same day, clashes between al-Shabaab and security forces spread in villages in the Kismaayo district, resulting in dozens of reported fatalities.

Armed interactions between al-Shabaab and Somali security forces

1 June - 26 July 2024



Somali security forces advanced toward al-Shabaab strongholds in Lower Juba, expanding their operation to Middle Juba. In response to al-Shabaab movements in remote areas between Afmadow and Kismaayo districts, security forces increased patrol operations to thwart al-Shabaab attacks. At the same time, al-Shabaab regrouped to launch hit-and-run and remote explosion attacks on different fronts, which are similar tactics used in Galgaduud and Middle Shabelle regions to slow down the counter-insurgency operations.

These latest operations conducted by the Somali security forces against al-Shabaab in the Lower Juba region put pressure on the group and threaten its capacity to continue waging war against security forces in the region. The militants have been controlling swaths of villages over the past years but have suffered significant setbacks due to increased military intervention and counter-terrorism efforts by security forces and their international partners.