



# State of Somalia Report

**SOS 2019**  

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**YEAR IN REVIEW**

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## Executive Summary

The State of Somalia (SOS) Report focuses on the main developments and key trends in politics, security, economy, social services and the role of external actors from 1 January to 31 December 2019. The objective of the report is to: empirically and systemically document key events in Somalia; provide analysis and context to policymakers, academics and the general public; and support peace building and state building efforts in Somalia.

During the reporting period, the political situation was characterized by major upheavals and a deepening rift between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Federal Member States (FMS). Four out of the five states<sup>1</sup> held (or are still holding) elections which the FGS saw as an opportunity to influence, and, if possible, replace the often-hostile state leaders with loyalists who would implement its vision across the country.

In its zeal to change the face of the member states, the FGS unleashed its juggernaut across the country, setting off a political firestorm that effectively brought progress towards the lofty goal of inclusive politics<sup>2</sup> to a virtual standstill. Central to this arrangement is the provisional constitution

and the federalism system of governance. During the reporting period, meaningful discussions on the finalization of the constitution and electoral modalities also ceased as a direct result of the political showdown between the FGS and FMS.

Equally frozen were the talks between the FGS and Somaliland, which declared unilateral secession in 1991. Although the talks between Hargeisa and Mogadishu have produced little substance since they were first launched in 2012, they at least created a conducive environment to continue the dialogue. The tone has now shifted to one of open hostility and acrimony between the two sides as the FGS has taken a more rigid stance than its predecessors. A recently appointed reconciliation committee that was formed to advise the FGS did not succeed in moving the process forward.

One major achievement of the federal parliament was the passage of the national electoral bill on 28 December 2019. After more than a year of negotiations and haggling over which model to adopt<sup>3</sup> for the 2020/2021 parliamentary and presidential elections, the Lower House passed an electoral bill that appears to have the support of most MPs as well as some key

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<sup>1</sup> These are: Puntland, Jubbaland, Southwest, Galmudug and Hirshabelle.

<sup>2</sup> Inclusive politics refers to the political arrangement between Somalia's key stakeholders to share power and resources in a way that does not risk the total collapse of the state. In place since the rebirth of the state in 2000, the Djibouti-brokered dispensation ensured a modicum of power sharing based on a complex clan system as well as understanding Somalia is a post conflict society that requires those

who hold political power to apply the principles of compromise, consensus-building and do no harm.

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive treatment on electoral models, Somalia's past experiences and options available for the country's 2020/21 electoral cycle, see the HIPS report **Somalia: In Search of a Workable 2020 Electoral Model**, [http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/HIPS\\_report\\_english\\_version.pdf](http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/HIPS_report_english_version.pdf)

stakeholders. However, that legislation has a long way to go before it becomes binding and implementable. The Upper House also has to ratify it, and the president must sign it into law.<sup>4</sup>

The security situation was severely impacted by the political crises. During the reporting period, the militant group Al-Shabaab hit the capital Mogadishu and elsewhere.

Al-Shabaab currently controls roads to the north and the south to Mogadishu. Even within the capital, Al-Shabaab was able to penetrate deep into the “green zone”, killing scores of people including the former mayor of Mogadishu and several district commissioners. More worryingly, Al-Shabaab roams freely in almost all cities and town in south central Somalia and is collecting millions of dollars in revenue from many parts of the country including Mogadishu’s seaport—the main source of income for the FGS.

In response to frequent terrorist attacks with high causality figures, the FGS resorted to closing most major roads in Mogadishu, severely restricting the movement of goods and people, prompting criticism from citizens.<sup>5</sup> Although the semi-permanent road closures reduced the frequency of attacks,

they were a death knell for many businesses which were forced to close.<sup>6</sup>

But there are also some positive developments.<sup>7</sup> Chief among them is the successful implementation of the security sector reform. Previously unregistered soldiers have been fingerprinted and properly identified, substantially reducing the number of so-called “ghost soldiers” whose salaries were habitually siphoned off by corrupt commanders. Most security personnel are now receiving their salaries more regularly and directly through their bank accounts.

The FGS also adopted the National Development Plan (NDP9), which enjoys the backing of the FMS ministries of planning.<sup>8</sup> The NDP established a national baseline and key priority areas for government intervention and focus with which donors are required to align their development agenda. Economic growth, social development, efficient institutions and human capital development have all been designated as national priorities.<sup>9</sup>

Despite this, the country’s economy is struggling to rebound from a downturn caused by a devastating drought two years ago. However, the revenue generated by the FGS has increased, allowing the government

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<sup>4</sup> The proposed model is based on the first past the post (FPTP) system, though as of this writing, the constituency unit is not yet known.

<sup>5</sup> The new mayor of Mogadishu, consoling citizens, said, “intii la dhammaan lahaa halla dhibtoodo” which translates as “instead of us being exterminated (by mass terror attacks), let us accept road closure hardships”, <https://www.caasimada.net/daawo-cumar-filish-intii-la-dhamaan-lahaa-ha-dhibtoodo-waddooyinkalama-furayo/>

<sup>6</sup> Goobjoog News: Khasaare dhanka dhaqaallaha oo ka dhashay xirnaanshaha wadooyinka Magaalada Muqdisho (Economic costs of Mogadishu road closures)

<sup>7</sup> INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS BACK SOMALIA’S SECURITY SECTOR REFORMS, 26 March 2019, <https://unsom.unmissions.org/international-partners-back-somalia%E2%80%99s-security-sector-reforms>

<sup>8</sup> <https://bit.ly/2RAHO0c>

<sup>9</sup> Somalia National Development Plan 2020 to 2024, pp. 255-56, <https://bit.ly/3aiOGbA>

to extend some basic services such as health and education.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps the most promising aspect of the economy is the debt relief program championed by the FGS together with international financial institutions. The government has successfully implemented the majority of the requirements needed to secure debt cancellation by major creditors. It is widely expected that the first breakthrough will be announced in early 2020, paving the way for a much more complex post-debt economic outlook for Somalia.

Finally, the humanitarian situation continues to deteriorate. Aid agencies estimate that nearly two-thirds of the population is food insecure while a further third is suffering from malnutrition.<sup>11</sup> Natural calamities such as repeated floods continue to wreak havoc across the country, resulting in the death of hundreds of people in places such as Baladweyne and the displacement of tens of thousands. Poor infrastructure and the lack of emergency response mechanisms are contributing to the worsening humanitarian situation.

Looking ahead, parliamentary elections are scheduled and presidential elections are supposed to take place in 2021. In the absence of a broad consensus on the electoral

model and the stalemate between the FGS and FMS on a range of policy issues, 2020 is likely to be much more challenging for Somalia.

## Collapse of Elite Compact

Since the election of President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo in February 2017, the overall political climate of the country was animated by what some scholars describe as “the collapse of the elite compact”.<sup>12</sup> Relations between the FGS and FMS soured months after Farmaajo came to power and ushered in a governing style anchored on centralizing state authority and a departure from the consensus-based federalism arrangement which had been in place since 2004.<sup>13</sup> A key fault line was the degree to which member states can invoke constitutional autonomy to pursue political, economic and even diplomatic objectives that are contrary to those of the FGS. Mogadishu viewed the actions of the member states with suspicion and quickly moved to shore them up by all means necessary including coercion. There were limited carrots offered

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<sup>10</sup> The government has produced a unified curriculum and began distributing text books to schools throughout the country, <https://twitter.com/RABdiCG/status/1209378520897654784>

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF SOMALIA HUMANITARIAN SITUATION REPORT No. 11, 30 November 2019, [https://www.unicef.org/somalia/SOM\\_sitrep\\_November2019.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/somalia/SOM_sitrep_November2019.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Professor Ken Menkhaus defines the elite compact as the unofficial agreement among the Somali political elite to play the game of politics in a way that helps everyone receive his share of the “cake”

while ensuring that a total rupture of the system is avoided. Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Somalia Case Study, <https://bit.ly/2RBAiay>

<sup>13</sup> The president and a significant number of Somalis subscribe to the view that to revive the collapsed/fledgling state, there should be a strong central government and that sub-national polities should take the back seat and allow the FGS uncontested leadership, at least at the foreign relations arena. As a popular leader (at least during the first year), President Farmaajo was also affected by this idea and felt he had the support of some Somalis to bypass FMS leaders.

by the FGS, which relied heavily on the sticks at its disposal.<sup>14</sup>

One of its most effective tools was the suspension of fiscal transfers to the member states which desperately needed the support. Each state was receiving monthly budget support from the federal treasury, but the Farmaajo administration appeared to make the fiscal transfers conditional on loyalty to the FGS.<sup>15</sup>

The establishment of the Council of Interstate Commission (CIC) in 2018 intensified the conflict between the FGS and FMS. The CIC declared that all five regional states were severing ties with Mogadishu until the FGS agreed to a set of demands.<sup>16</sup> One fundamental demand was the release of the fiscal transfers and a greater role in shaping key policies, namely electoral laws, resource sharing mechanisms, national security architecture and review of the provisional constitution.

However, the electoral calendar in virtually all of the member states was unfavorable to the leadership of the CIC. Four out of the five<sup>17</sup> member states held elections in 2018 and 2019, giving the FGS a rare opportunity to oust those it considered wayward rebels and replace them with loyalists. The FGS flexed its financial, diplomatic and military

muscle to produce its desired results in each state, attempting to change the face of FMS leadership in a fundamentally favorable direction.

## Southwest Election

The first electoral process took place in Southwest state, comprising of the Bay, Bakool and Lower Shabelle regions. After months of negotiations and maneuvers by both sides, President Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden<sup>18</sup>, a maverick politician who has been a fixture in Somalia's political landscape since 2000, abruptly resigned under duress from the Somali government and AMISOM's Ethiopian military contingent, paving the way for the FGS to install its preferred candidate.<sup>19</sup> However, an unexpected front-runner emerged during the electoral campaign for the presidency of the state: Mukhtar Robow, a co-founder and former deputy of Al-Shabaab who had defected only a few months earlier after the US removed him from its terror list.<sup>20</sup> He captured the imagination of many residents in Southwest as a strong candidate who could liberate their farms and communities from his former comrades in the insurgency. Al-Shabaab controls many of the Southwest districts, and

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<sup>14</sup> Southwest and Hirshabelle states are currently aligned with the FGS, and Puntland and Jubbaland oppose it. The FGS is trying to add Galmudug to its column, creating a majority among key stakeholders.

<sup>15</sup> "Xukuumadda oo qaadeysa xayiraaddii dhaqaale ee ay galisay Galmudug", June 2018, <https://bit.ly/2G4zLUK>

<sup>16</sup> "Somali regional states cut ties with central govt", Xinhua, 8 Sept., 2018, <https://bit.ly/2v1ISDj>

<sup>17</sup> Puntland, Jubbaland, Southwest, Galmudug and Hirshabelle.

<sup>18</sup> In 2011, when Sharif Hassan was the speaker of the federal parliament, he successfully led a campaign to oust then Prime Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo under the so-called Kampala Accord.

<sup>19</sup> "Somalia's South West State: A New President Installed, a Crisis Inflamed", <https://bit.ly/2NFVVAJ>

<sup>20</sup> "Somali Insurgent Leader Defects to Government", Reuters, August 2017, <https://reut.rs/2GehowJ>

Robow had been a militia leader in that region for over a decade.<sup>21</sup>

Only a few days before the election, the FGS security forces, together with Ethiopian troops, arrested Robow in Baidoa and flew him to Mogadishu where he remains under house arrest.<sup>22</sup> Although he has not been charged with any crime, his continued arrest is widely seen as extrajudicial in nature, politically motivated and a self-serving move by the federal government which could undermine recruitment of future Al Shabaab defectors.<sup>23</sup>

The arrest of Robow sparked protests in Baidoa where 15 civilians were killed and dozens were injured in the ensuing violence.<sup>24</sup> With Robow out of the picture, the FGS anointed its preferred candidate for the presidency of the state, Abdulaziz Hassan Mohamed (Laftagareen). According to a United Nations report, the FGS flew dozens of regional MPs from Baidoa to Mogadishu so they could be persuaded to vote for the FGS's favored candidate who was the commerce minister in the federal government.<sup>25</sup>

To this day, the new Southwest president is grappling with the aftermath of the election in December 2018 and is widely seen as lacking local legitimacy because his victory

was a result of the inappropriate use of money and force by the FGS. President Laftagareen is seen by many as a reasonable politician and he has been courting senior politicians from Southwest to usher in wider reconciliation efforts. However, the forceful manner in which he was installed and his inability to release Robow from captivity, a key demand for many in Southwest, has not helped his rapprochement strategies.

## Puntland Election

A month after the Southwest election, Puntland also went into the polls, with both its president and 66-member parliament up for re-election. Unlike all other states, Puntland has long experience in election management, as well as a strong foundation for traditional elders who directly appoint regional MPs. Since its creation in 1998, Puntland had held more than five elections, mostly peaceful and orderly.<sup>26</sup>

The incumbent president, Abdiweli Gaas,<sup>27</sup> who was also the founding chairman of the CIC, has been a strong proponent of federalism in Somalia and a vocal critic of the FGS.<sup>28</sup> Puntland views itself as the protector

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<sup>21</sup> Profile: Sheikh Mukhtar Robow (Abu Mansur), <https://bit.ly/364wpeV>; In 2009, when Robow was a top Al-Shabaab leader, he captured his home city of Baydhabo and gave senior government officials from his clan safe passage to Mogadishu.

<sup>22</sup> "Somalia Lures Defectors in New Push Against Insurgents", Reuters, January 2018, <https://reut.rs/2R4u4fy>

<sup>23</sup> In late December 2018, a UN diplomat called out the actions of the FGS which resulted his expulsion from the country in January 2019, <https://bit.ly/2NEFR23>

<sup>24</sup> "UN Report of Panel of Experts on Somalia", p4, November 2019. <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/751/work-and-mandate/reports>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> "Somalia: UN congratulates Puntland region's newly-elected President", <https://bit.ly/3aoShVK>

<sup>27</sup> President Gaas and President Farmaajo were friends in Buffalo, New York. In 2010, Farmaajo recruited Gaas to be his deputy prime minister and planning minister.

<sup>28</sup> "Somali Regional States Suspend Ties With Federal Government", <https://bit.ly/2Tx1FAF>



of the federal arrangement in Somalia and President Gaas felt that President Farmaajo was attempting to dismantle federalism. For that reason, it was no secret that the FGS was determined to oust Gaas at all costs. However, unlike Southwest, the FGS did not have boots on the ground in Puntland.

But the FGS had other means to influence the outcome of the election in Puntland. It was widely believed that Villa Somalia invested resources in a lesser-known candidate among a dozen other contestants. In the end, Said Abdullahi Deni, a former federal MP and minister of planning, was elected president, to the chagrin of Villa Somalia.<sup>29</sup>

The FGS tried to patch things up with the new Puntland president. President Farmaajo led a delegation that participated in Deni's inauguration in Garowe. There, the president announced that he would be a "true peacemaker and an elder statesman" going forward. He appealed for cooperation with other member states whose presidents were all attending the inauguration. It was agreed that a follow-up meeting between the FGS and FMS would be organized in Garowe in May 2019.

That meeting was perhaps the best opportunity to settle issues between the FGS and FMS.<sup>30</sup> However, after nearly a week of discussions, the meeting ended without a concrete outcome after the two sides

disagreed on a range of policy issues including the national security architecture, resource sharing modalities, finalizing the provisional constitution and the 2020 electoral model. Following the failure of the Garowe meeting, the two sides sharpened their knives and prepared to engage in an all-out political contestation,<sup>31</sup> particularly with the Jubbaland and Galmudug elections on the horizon.

## Jubbaland Election

Jubbaland was perhaps the most consequential of all state elections given its multidimensional challenges.<sup>32</sup> On one hand, destabilizing the administration of President Ahmed Madoobe would have almost certainly given Al-Shabaab a rare opportunity to consolidate its near total control of Lower and Middle Jubba. On the other hand, Kenya considers Jubbaland a buffer zone and strategic foothold in Somalia. As a result, any attempt by the FGS to change the leadership of the state would almost certainly have prompted Kenya to intervene.

In the end, the Jubbaland electoral commission conducted a highly contested parliamentary selection and presidential election. By all accounts, the process guaranteed the re-election of President

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<sup>29</sup> "UN Report of Panel of Experts on Somalia", November 2019, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/751/work-and-mandate/reports>

<sup>30</sup> "Puntland rolls out the red carpet for Somalia President", <https://bit.ly/30wXDcU>

<sup>31</sup> "Somalia: Puntland suspends cooperation with central government", <https://bit.ly/3aiZtTn>

<sup>32</sup> Kismaayo, the interim capital and biggest city of the region, has been a coveted and contested city

since the collapse of the Somali state in 1991. Resources including the port, agricultural farmland and abundance of livestock has resulted in the city changing hands many times since 1991. Even though many Somali clans hail from the city, it's always the clan that controls the city that mostly benefited financially. Jubbaland consists of the Jubba regions (Middle Jubba controlled by Al Shabaab and Lower Jubba which Kismaayo is the key city) and the Gedo region.

Ahmed Madoobe by a wide margin.<sup>33</sup> His main rivals boycotted the whole process and ultimately staged their own “election” in Kismaayo.<sup>34</sup>

The FGS was quick to denounce the process as illegitimate and unconstitutional.<sup>35</sup> It also imposed a short-lived blockade on Kismaayo and commercial aircrafts were not allowed to fly to the city during the election. The FGS also arrested Abdirashid Janan, the security minister of Jubbaland and a close ally of Madoobe, while he was in transit at Mogadishu airport on allegations of human rights abuses.<sup>36</sup> His sudden arrest has weakened Madoobe’s hand in Gedo, but it also exacerbated tensions in the region between Janan and President Farmaajo’s sub-clans.

More daringly, the FGS tried to force Madoobe out of office by enlisting the help of the small Ethiopian contingent in Kismaayo. The Ethiopian air force dispatched a military plane to Kismaayo, ostensibly to arrest Madoobe and to nullify the outcome of the election. Tipped off by his Kenyan allies, President Madoobe dispatched anti-aircraft weapons to the runway and prevented the landing of the Ethiopian military aircraft.<sup>37</sup> That episode put Ethiopia and Kenya, long time strategic allies, on a collision course over their respective roles in Somalia.<sup>38</sup>

At the time of the writing of this report, the newly elected Jubbaland parliament and

president are still not recognized by the FGS. Direct flights to Kenya are diverted to pass through Mogadishu and the diplomatic passports of some Jubbaland officials have been confiscated by the FGS. Nonetheless, a parliamentary ad hoc committee on the electoral bill visited Kismaayo to consult with the Madoobe administration. In addition, the federal ministry of finance held a number of consultations on issues ranging from the debt relief trajectory to resource sharing and wider fiscal federalism priorities. This indicates that the FGS is slowly but grudgingly accepting the de facto authority in Kismaayo.

## Galmudug Election

Having failed to install its loyalists in Puntland and Jubbaland, the FGS sharpened its focus on Galmudug, the home state of both President Farmaajo and Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire. The state’s president, Ahmed Du’ale Geelle (Haaf), resigned after tremendous pressure from many quarters including the federal government. His own chief minister, Sheikh Shakir, declared that the president’s had mandate expired. Shakir

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<sup>33</sup> “Is Madoobe ringfencing Jubbaland presidency?”, <https://bit.ly/2TBEvJf>

<sup>34</sup> “Jubbaland election results mired by conflicting regional interests,” <https://bit.ly/2ugR2ah>

<sup>35</sup> “Leader of Somalia’s Jubbaland, at odds with Mogadishu, wins new term,” <https://reut.rs/2G2KWwX>

<sup>36</sup> “Jubbaland Security Minister Abdirashid Janan Arrested in Mogadishu,” [Allafrica.com](https://allafrica.com), September

2019

<https://allafrica.com/stories/201909020153.html>

<sup>37</sup> “Regional Somali Airport Refuses Ethiopian Military Plane to Land”, 19 August 2019, <https://reut.rs/2G5Doti>

<sup>38</sup> “Why is Jubbaland election important for East Africa? Kenya, Ethiopia among countries jostling for influence over Somali region,” <https://bit.ly/2TDQOoo>

belongs to the Sufi armed group, Ahlu Sunna Wal-Jama'ah (ASWJ).<sup>39</sup>

Following the resignation of President Haaf, Prime Minister Khaire traveled to the state capital Dhuusamarreeb where he stayed for more than 40 days trying to iron out a detailed agreement with ASWJ, one of the key actors in the state, and fashion an electoral roadmap. The prime minister was successful in nationalizing the militia of ASWJ and effectively wresting control of the city from the group.<sup>40</sup>

More than six months after the former president resigned, Galmudug is still grappling with the electoral process. On 17 January 2020, the regional parliament elected Dr. Mohamed Nur Ga'al<sup>41</sup> as the speaker of the parliament. Presidential elections are expected towards the end of January or early February. In the meantime, Haaf is organizing a parallel administration in his native Galkayo where he has set up a base. For now, neither the FGS nor ASWJ is fully in control of the administration and security.<sup>42</sup>

Mishandling the presidential election process could thrust the state into much deeper

turmoil. Currently, the FGS seems to favor one candidate but manipulating the electoral process<sup>43</sup> could take Galmudug to square one, as the state is multi-clan in composition and therefore needs consensus and fair play to survive.<sup>44</sup> However, if the process fails to win the confidence of most stakeholders, it would be a lost opportunity to reconstitute Galmudug into a viable polity. Meanwhile, continuous political turmoil and a leadership vacuum could make Al Shabaab the net beneficiary of the squabbling.

## Talks with Somaliland

The talks with Somaliland have come to a standstill since President Farmaajo came to power and the rift between Hargeisa and Mogadishu has deepened.<sup>45</sup> Although the dialogue between the two sides achieved very little in terms of a clear roadmap for reconciliation, it offered a platform for gradual negotiations leading to the final status discussion. The FGS appears to have taken a tough stance against Somaliland's diplomatic activities<sup>46</sup>, even cutting ties with the West African country of Guinea after the

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<sup>39</sup> Ahlu Sunna Wal-Jama'ah (ASWJ) is a multi-clan Sufi armed group which successfully repelled Al-Shabaab from most of Galguduud and the south Mudug regions. ASWJ was awarded the post of chief minister in a power sharing agreement reached in 2018.

<sup>40</sup> "Somalia starts process to integrate Ahlu Sunna forces into the Somali Security Forces", <https://bit.ly/38j4A3P>

<sup>41</sup> Ga'al is a former state minister for foreign affairs and is close to Prime Minister Khaire.

<sup>42</sup> See the HIPS policy brief "Galmudug Crisis: A Blueprint for Sustainable Settlement", September 2019, <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/the-galmudug-crisis-a-blueprint-for-sustainable-settlement/>

<sup>43</sup> "Shaacinta Musharaxnimada MD Galmudug Ee Musharax Qoorqoor", <https://bit.ly/30z33nG>

<sup>44</sup> "The Galmudug Crisis: A Blueprint For Sustainable Settlement", <https://bit.ly/2szyjGy>

<sup>45</sup> The current Somaliland leaders are former SNM commanders who are hawkish towards Farmaajo whom they associate with the late Siyad Barre regime as the two hail from the same clan.

<sup>46</sup> The Somali government instructed donors to nix Somaliland's Special Arrangement with donors where it could negotiate and get donor aid without coordinating with the Somali government; "Somalia-Somaliland: The Perils of Delaying New Talks", <https://bit.ly/2G2zcuD>

president of Somaliland received a red carpet welcome there.<sup>47</sup>

In 2019, President Farmaajo appointed a seven-member committee on “reconciliation with Somaliland”.<sup>48</sup> Hargeisa immediately rejected the committee, objecting to the inclusion of “people who committed atrocities against Somaliland and individuals who are from Somaliland”.<sup>49</sup> After months of research and consultation, the committee reported back to President Farmaajo that dialogue with Somaliland was necessary.

In September, the Somaliland government unveiled a new set of conditions for the dialogue to restart.<sup>50</sup> It said the FGS “must recognize that Somaliland was an independent state before the union in 1960”<sup>51</sup> and that “past atrocities by the Somali government must be admitted and apologized for”. While the latter condition is not new, the first one points to a carefully calibrated position by Somaliland in its effort to gain independence from Somalia. Among other things, this demand could give Somaliland greater leverage in the negotiations on its final status.<sup>52</sup>

Beyond the stalled talks with Mogadishu, Somaliland has been facing serious political issues over the past few months. In November, the Guurti (Upper House) extended its mandate and that of the House of Representatives by three more years. It was the fifth time since 2005 that the Guurti extended the mandates of both houses.<sup>53</sup> The move was strongly rejected by Somaliland’s international partners who said it was “to the detriment of Somaliland’s democratic credentials and international standing”. They added that both houses of Somaliland’s parliament “have been sitting for a period much too long for any democratic standards”.<sup>54</sup>

Although MPs from both the governing Kulmiye Party and the opposition parties, Waddani and UCID, have supported the extension of the parliamentary mandate, the three sharply disagreed on the formation of the new electoral commission. The opposition accused the ruling party of appointing members who did not meet the legal criteria and therefore refused to recognize the legitimacy of the commission. The tension stemming from this issue has led to the brief arrest of opposition leaders. The

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<sup>47</sup> “Somalia Cuts Ties with Guinea Over Somaliland”, 4 July 2019, <https://apnews.com/882952c69922482590379635f01cf327>

<sup>48</sup> “Farmaajo meets with committee to Negotiate with Somaliland”, <https://bit.ly/37iLLhr>

<sup>49</sup> “Somaliland Gov responds on Villa Somalia reconciliation committee”, <https://bit.ly/2Rvpp5t>

<sup>50</sup> “Somaliland Sets New Conditions for Dialogue with Somalia”, September 2019, <https://bit.ly/2Ryhggr>

<sup>51</sup> Only four days separated the independence of Somaliland, a British protectorate, and Somalia, an Italian colony. The two merged on 1 July 1960. Their joint vision was to liberate Greater Somalia, which includes Djibouti, the Somali Region of Ethiopia and Northeastern Kenya, known as NFD.

<sup>52</sup> Somaliland emphasizes that there were two countries that merged and that divorce is possible. It argues that the original vision was to unite all five Somali regions under a democratic state. Democracy was hobbled by the military dictatorship that came to power in 1969 which committed documented atrocities in Somaliland.

<sup>53</sup> <https://twitter.com/GuleidJ/status/1198496126854483969>

<sup>54</sup> See UNSOM statement “On Delays to Somaliland Parliamentary and Local Council Elections”, November 2019, <https://unsom.unmissions.org/delays-somaliland-parliamentary-and-local-council-elections>

international partners emphasized that “there needs to be an Electoral Commission that inspires trust from all political actors as well as citizens of Somaliland”.<sup>55</sup>

To arrest the crises stemming from the Electoral Commission, Somaliland’s business and religious leaders have intervened and won the confidence of both sides. Their mediation has led to the calming of tensions and a face-to-face meeting between the Somaliland president and the leaders of the opposition parties to find a way forward.<sup>56</sup>

## The Absence of Inclusive Politics

Beyond the commotion associated with regional elections, cooperation between the FGS and FMS, often referred to as inclusive politics, reached a breaking point during the reporting period.<sup>57</sup> Central to this collaboration were a number of key processes that were seen as crucial to long-term stability in Somalia. First came the provisional constitution which needs exhaustive review and agreement among key stakeholders on major issues such as resource and power sharing. The federal ministry of constitutional affairs and an independent constitutional review commission often lead this process. Over the past year, very little

progress has been made in this regard,<sup>58</sup> mainly due to the stalemate in the relationship between the FGS and key member states such as Puntland and Jubbaland.<sup>59</sup>

The second element is the electoral process which again was supposed to be agreed between the FGS and FMS before the federal parliament codified it into law. In the absence of a meaningful dialogue between the FGS and FMS, the cabinet passed electoral legislation based on the proportional representation, closed list (PR CL) model which would have seen the president directly elected by the people for the first time in the history of Somalia – but in contravention with the provisional constitution.<sup>60</sup> Widely seen as legislation designed to secure re-election for President Farmaajo who ostensibly is popular with ordinary citizens, the federal parliament formed an ad hoc committee to review that bill and/or draft a fresh one if need be.<sup>61</sup> After months of consultations with various stakeholders, including the FMS, the committee ultimately made substantive changes to the legislation and proposed a first past the post (FPTP) electoral mode. On 28 December 2019, the Lower House of parliament passed the new bill which, among other things, requires that the two chambers of the federal parliament

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> “Somaliland President and VP meet leaders with the two opposition parties”, <https://twitter.com/MadaxtooyadaJSL/status/1209082353940934656>

<sup>57</sup> “Political consensus critical ahead of Somalia election: UN mission chief”, <https://bit.ly/2G9xHdP>

<sup>58</sup> “UK Decries Absence of Consensus-building, Dialogue Between Villa Somalia, Fed States”, <https://bit.ly/38iF5jl>

<sup>59</sup> “The National Security Council Meeting in Mogadishu: The Sisyphean Search for Political Agreement in Somalia,” <https://bit.ly/37k0GYk>

<sup>60</sup> Article 89 of the constitution states that the president will be elected jointly by the two chambers of parliament, [https://www.parliament.gov.so/images/Downloads/Dastuurka\\_ku\\_meelgaarka\\_SOM\\_03092012-1\\_2.pdf](https://www.parliament.gov.so/images/Downloads/Dastuurka_ku_meelgaarka_SOM_03092012-1_2.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> “Somalia races to beat time ahead of planned polls”, <https://bit.ly/30K90OZ>

elect the president, as the current constitution requires.<sup>62</sup>

In many ways, the passing of the electoral bill by the Lower House is a tremendous achievement.<sup>63</sup> However, that achievement lacks a key ingredient which is the political agreement among key stakeholders (the FGS, the FMS and registered political parties).<sup>64</sup> For that reason, the absence of political agreement renders the bill meaningless as states can refuse to implement it.<sup>65</sup>

## Security

During the reporting period, the overall security of the country did not improve and in certain areas it has deteriorated, even as the government's spending on security rose to 36 percent of the national budget.<sup>66</sup> Al-Shabaab has been able to carry out major terrorist attacks, mainly in Mogadishu but also around the country. By one estimate, Al-Shabaab killed more than 1,500 people in 2019 alone.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> "Somali parliament passes the country's Electoral Bill", <https://bit.ly/2G5D3XA>

<sup>63</sup> Parliament has been mostly ineffective and inactive in the past year and both donors and the Electoral Commission have beseeched it to produce an election law.

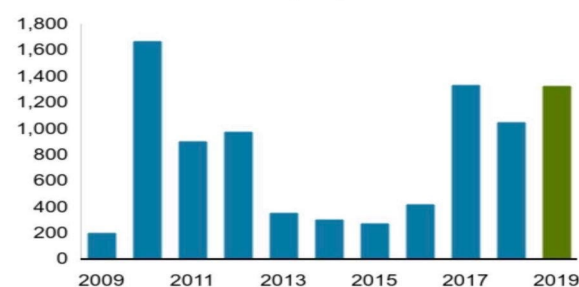
<sup>64</sup> Most registered parties seem to endorse this law, however key regions such Puntland have yet to declare their official position.

<sup>65</sup> "Int'l partners visit Puntland for talks over Somalia's election in 2020", <https://bit.ly/3664MSD>

<sup>66</sup> "Somalia Economic Update" by the World Bank, August 2019, p.8.

### Al-Shabab attacks in Somalia

The number of fatalities per year



In 2017, over 500 people were killed in one terror attack. The figures for 2019 are the latest available data, and the set includes military and civilian casualties.

Source: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project

The FGS's centralist posture which sought to subordinate the FMS in the provision of security across the country has rendered the National Security Architecture (NSA) agreed during the London Conference on Somalia in May 2017 ineffective. Among other things, the NSA laid out a cooperative arrangement on security between the FGS and FMS.<sup>68</sup> However, the political impasse between the two sides has created an enabling environment for terrorist groups to thrive.<sup>69</sup>

On 28 December, Al-Shabaab carried out its second deadliest massacre at Ex-Control Junction on the southwestern outskirts of Mogadishu. More than 90 people were killed, most of whom were students heading to university and police officers.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. <https://www.acledata.com/?s=somalia>

<sup>68</sup> London Conference Somalia, 11 May 2017: SECURITY PACT, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/613720/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/613720/london-somalia-conference-2017-security-pact.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> "The Somali government's attention is not focused on defeating al Shabaab", <https://bit.ly/38lJ8ey>

<sup>70</sup> "Al-Shabab claims deadly attack in Somalia's Mogadishu", <https://bit.ly/2Ty6h9E>

The FGS has admitted that the militant group has been able to penetrate deep into state institutions. Following the assassination of the former mayor of Mogadishu, Abdirahman Osman (Yarisow), the security minister said “preliminary findings show that an Al-Shabaab female agent who worked for the local government blew herself up with the help of another who also worked for the Banadir Regional Administration.”<sup>71</sup>

## Politicization of Security and Culture of Impunity

Despite the worsening security situation, the FGS has yet to hold senior government officials responsible for the failure to prevent repeated terrorist attacks.<sup>72</sup> Many Somalis, particularly residents of Mogadishu who are the only ones who pay federal taxes, are raising questions related to impunity and accountability in the security arena as Al-Shabaab’s infiltration and resource mobilization in the form of extortion has reached unprecedented levels. In April 2019, the federal parliament summoned the chiefs of the security agencies for questioning about the deteriorating security situation in Mogadishu<sup>73</sup> but the media were removed from the parliamentary chamber, stifling a

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<sup>71</sup> “Somalia Says Blind Female Suicide Bomber Killed Mogadishu Mayor”, August 2019, <https://reut.rs/38f0D06>

<sup>72</sup> Previously senior officials were held to account when Al-Shabaab attacks become more deadly, frequent and emboldened. That fear of losing their job forced security officials to perform better and work harder.

<sup>73</sup> “Security chiefs, line ministers to appear before L.House Saturday”, <https://bit.ly/2v3uB9c>

<sup>74</sup> The prime minister’s office produced a slick promotional video entitled, “Rebirth of the Lion of

transparent and frank discussion on why security is failing.

## Security Sector Reform

The FGS continued its successful security sector reform which is designed to reduce rampant corruption.<sup>74</sup> By the end of 2019, the FGS had registered and finger printed nearly all military and police officials in the country. In doing so, the government has stamped out the notorious “ghost soldier” list from the rolls of the military and, to a lesser extent, the police force. This process has also transformed the salary payment system from cash-based to monthly transfers to the individual bank accounts or mobile phones of each soldier.<sup>75</sup>

## Al-Shabaab Financing

Over the past two years, Al-Shabaab has exponentially increased its revenue generating capacity across the country including the government-controlled capital of Mogadishu.<sup>76</sup> According to the Hiraal Institute, a security think tank based in Mogadishu, Al-Shabaab collected more than \$27 million in 2018 alone.<sup>77</sup>

Africa (Somalia) under leadership by Prime minister Hassan Ali Kheyre”, <https://bit.ly/2Gg22b3>

<sup>75</sup> “Renewed hope: Rebuilding Somalia’s national army”, <https://bit.ly/36bwbm1>

<sup>76</sup> “‘If I don’t pay, they kill me’: Al-Shabab tightens grip on Somalia with growing tax racket”, <https://wapo.st/2Ru8aBz>

<sup>77</sup> “AS Finance System”, Hiraal Institute, July 2018, p.7, <https://hiraalinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/AS-Finance-System.pdf>

According to the Hiraal Institute: “While the loss of territory would normally mean fewer administrators to keep on the payroll, the nature and strategy of AS - keeping everybody on the payroll and naming officials as shadow administrators in areas held by the government - means that the group would continue having sizeable financial commitments even if it loses territory. However, no amount of financial loss would ever be sufficient to derail its terrorist activities, although its conventional military capability may be affected.”<sup>78</sup>

In fact, Al-Shabaab has set up a sophisticated racketeering system across the country, levying extortion money on all goods and even some services in both the areas under their control and ones controlled by the FGS. A UN report has documented evidence that the militant group collects funds from Mogadishu’s seaport, which is also the main source of income for the FGS.<sup>79</sup>

## Arms Embargo

During the reporting period, the FGS lobbied hard for the complete lifting of the UN arms

embargo on Somalia, in place since 1992. However, the UN Security Council not only renewed the partial arms embargo, but strengthened it with new restrictions.<sup>80</sup> Paradoxically, all the western allies of the FGS (the US, UK and France) voted in favor of the resolution while Russia and China abstained mainly on tangentially related issues.<sup>81</sup> In its resolution, the Security Council appeared to be irked by the fact that Somalia is lobbying for the complete lifting of the arms embargo, despite being able to import nearly all types of weapons.<sup>82</sup> Somalia does not have the financial means to buy advanced weapons but a complete lifting of the arms embargo would have been a morale boost for the Somali people and would have given the government bragging rights and domestic political accolades.

Meanwhile, AMISOM has begun the gradual drawdown of its forces from Somalia as part of its hard-to-implement exit strategy.<sup>83</sup> In renewing its mandate, the UN Security Council in May approved a reduction of nearly 3,000 troops by February 2020. The maximum force in Somalia is set to be 19,626 soldiers. The council also instructed AMISOM to gradually hand over

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.8.

<sup>79</sup> See UN “Report of Panel of Experts on Somalia”, November 2019, <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/751/work-and-mandate/reports>

<sup>80</sup> See UN Press Release “Security Council Renews...Sanctions Regime on Somalia”, November 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc14021.doc.htm>

<sup>81</sup> The Security Council resisted lifting the arms embargo because it questioned the FGS’s capabilities to buy heavy weapons and safeguard them. The FGS has also failed to implement the London Agreement with the Somali regions

(instituting a federal security arrangement or architecture).

<sup>82</sup> To buy weapons FGS requires only doing notification to the Security Council for most weapons and seeking approval for some of the most advanced weapons. See SIPRI’s “UN Arms Embargo on Somalia”, [https://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoes/un\\_arms\\_embargoes/somalia](https://www.sipri.org/databases/embargoes/un_arms_embargoes/somalia)

<sup>83</sup> The HIPS policy brief Exit Strategy Challenges for the AU Mission in Somalia discussed AMISOM’s possible withdrawal while Al-Shabaab is still a menace and Somalia’s security apparatus is not ready. We believe the situation on the ground has not changed much since that report was written in 2016. <https://bit.ly/2TCexFB>



responsibilities to their Somali counterparts, with the goal of having the Somali government taking full leadership for its security by 2021.<sup>84</sup>

## Economy

According to the World Bank, Somalia's economy is growing again after a "steep downturn" during the 2016/2017 drought. The Somalia Economic Update stated, "wide-ranging reforms have begun to rebuild Somalia's economy and have achieved a measure of stability and modest growth."<sup>85</sup> As a result of the growing economy, the revenue of the FGS has also increased markedly. "Revenue from taxes and other domestic sources grew by 29 percent. Changes in tax policies and improved tax administration helped to diversify central government revenue away from a heavy reliance on customs duties and other trade taxes."<sup>86</sup>

Despite the overall positive trends in the economy, the World Bank highlights that poverty remains stubbornly high due to exponential population growth, which is disproportionate to the real GDP growth. "As a result, the incidence of poverty is still high—about 69 percent – according to the latest estimates from Wave 2 of the 2018 Somalia High Frequency Survey."<sup>87</sup> Poverty

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<sup>84</sup> "Security Council Extends Mandate of AMISOM", May 2019, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/sc13828.doc.htm>

<sup>85</sup> "Somalia Economic Update" by the World Bank, August 2019, <https://bit.ly/2R8ndSq>

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> "World Bank ties Somalia insecurity to illiteracy", <https://bit.ly/37a3kjr>

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> "Farmaajo's Presidency: A scorecard for the first two years and the prospects for the remaining two", <https://bit.ly/2R8avmQ>

is pervasive throughout the country, although both monetary and non-monetary poverty are higher and deeper among rural residents and nomads, whose remoteness and mobility make them hard to reach."<sup>88</sup>

## Debt Relief

The FGS has done excellent work on the debt relief program and continues to prioritize it.<sup>89</sup> It is about to complete the fourth Staff Monitoring Program (SMP) and has launched the ninth National Development Plan, which is compliant with the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) framework. Together, these steps bring Somalia closer to the so-called "decision point" which is expected in the spring of 2020.<sup>90</sup> The success of the debt relief process is in part due to the prioritization of the issue by the most senior officials of the FGS, namely the finance minister and the prime minister.<sup>91</sup> However, continued political crisis could undermine that effort, as the process is fundamentally political as much as it is technical.<sup>92</sup>

Once Somalia normalizes relations with international financial institutions, the harder part will be to take out new loans in a responsible manner. Many poor countries

<sup>90</sup> "Key Questions on Somalia", <https://bit.ly/38ey7vl>

<sup>91</sup> Finance Minister Abdirahman Dualeh Beileh succeeded in convincing both his bosses and regional governments to make the debt relief and finance issues an exception to their squabbles, <https://twitter.com/DrBeileh/status/1194954435186872320>

<sup>92</sup> "SRSG James Swan - Remarks to the Security Council on the Situation in Somalia", 21 August 2019, <https://bit.ly/38mYBuU>

have almost instantly fallen back into the so-called debt trap, where they go on a shopping spree and splurge on new debts, often offered by China with ostensibly no strings attached.<sup>93</sup>

## Humanitarian Situation

The overall humanitarian situation of Somalia deteriorated during the reporting period.<sup>94</sup> Just two years after a devastating drought displaced more than a million people, “severe climatic conditions, combined with other persistent drivers of humanitarian crisis, armed conflict, protracted and continued displacement and a spike in evictions of internally displaced persons are again pushing Somalia towards a major humanitarian emergency,”<sup>95</sup> according to the Somalia Drought Impact Response Plan launched by the FGS together with humanitarian partners. This report also highlighted that nearly half of the Somali people are food insecure and in need of emergency assistance and some 1.5 million children are suffering from acute malnutrition.<sup>96</sup>

Floods in many parts of the country have devastated major towns such as Beledweyn

and Berdaale, forcing tens of thousands of people to flee their homes.<sup>97</sup> The poor infrastructure is making millions of people vulnerable to the slightest of shocks. Unfortunately, neither the FGS nor the FMS have developed the necessary capacity to respond to major humanitarian crises, forcing them to rely on the goodwill of citizens, diaspora, international NGOs and the UN.<sup>98</sup>

## External Actors

In 2019, the role of external actors in Somalia was more ubiquitous than in past years.<sup>99</sup> Both Ethiopia and Kenya intervened in the recent elections in Southwest and Jubbaland. The Ethiopian troops in Baidoa helped arrest Mukhtar Robow at the behest of the FGS.<sup>100</sup> The Kenyan troops in Kismaayo also helped President Ahmed Madoobe to get himself re-elected and to fend off a serious attempt by the FGS to unseat him. In recent weeks, Ethiopian troops have been deployed to Dhuusamarreeb, the capital of Galmudug, and opposition leaders claimed that the timing of the deployment—just weeks before state elections—is designed to intimidate their candidates.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> “Lessons from Sri Lanka on China's 'debt-trap diplomacy' For vulnerable African countries, a reliance on Chinese financing could pose a threat to sovereignty”, <https://bit.ly/367EUWv>

<sup>94</sup> “Somalia Humanitarian Bulletin”, 1 - 31 December 2019, <https://bit.ly/2twu4vS>

<sup>95</sup> See 2019 “Drought Impact Response Plan”, [https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/somalia\\_2019\\_dirp.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/somalia_2019_dirp.pdf)

<sup>96</sup> “Humanitarian Action for Children 2019 – Somalia”, <https://bit.ly/38mrUxP>

<sup>97</sup> “Over 270,000 people displaced in Somalia floods: UN”, <https://bit.ly/2ubmXck>

<sup>98</sup> “Somaliland Oo Deeq \$600,000 Gaadhsisay Dadkii Ay Dhibatadu Kasoo Gaadhay Fatahadihii Webiga Shabeele”, Somaliland provided \$600,000 aid to flood victims, <https://bit.ly/2ZQFR4b>

<sup>99</sup> “Kenya, Ethiopia spar over Jubbaland polls in Somalia, AMISOM steps in”, <https://bit.ly/363NGVD>

<sup>100</sup> “African Union force denies it was involved in arrest of ex-al Shabaab leader”, <https://reut.rs/368COWj>

<sup>101</sup> “Somalia’s Opposition Scolds Ethiopian PM for Violent Involvement in Somalia”, November 2019, <https://goobjoog.com/english/somalias-opposition-scolds-ethiopian-pm-for-violent-involvement-in-somalia/>

Eritrea is also making a major regional comeback after it restored relations with both Somalia and neighboring Ethiopia.<sup>102</sup> Somalia and Eritrea restored their relationship in 2018 following a historic visit by President Farmaajo to Asmara. Since then, Eritrea has joined the phalanx of countries training Somali security forces. According to one source, the FGS secretly sent 600 soldiers for specialist training in Eritrea.<sup>103</sup> Arab Gulf countries continue to play a role in the domestic politics of Somalia. As the Crisis Group stated in a recent report, “Gulf crises...have spilled into the Horn of Africa, notably fanning instability in Somalia.”<sup>104</sup>

The relationship between Somalia and the UAE continued to deteriorate after the FGS accused Abu Dhabi of funding opposition figures. However, the relationship between Qatar and the FGS is deepening as Doha increases its overall financial support to humanitarian and development projects in Somalia. The UAE is also building a military base in the port city of Berbera in Somaliland as part of a 30-year contract to train Somaliland forces. Dubai Ports World is also developing the port of Berbera as part of a three-way partnership with Ethiopia and Somaliland, ignoring a unanimous decision by the parliament in Mogadishu barring the company from entering Somalia.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> “Somali, Eritrean leaders in Ethiopia to Cement Regional Ties”, <https://bit.ly/36apTTZ>

<sup>103</sup> “Eritrea Secretly Training Somali Forces”, August 2019, <https://eritrea-focus.org/eritrea-is-secretly-training-somali-forces-report/>

<sup>104</sup> “Somalia and the Gulf Crisis”, June 2018, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/260-somalia-and-gulf-crisis>

<sup>105</sup> “UAE to Train Somaliland Forces Under Military Base Deal”, March 2018, <https://reut.rs/2uZYNIq>

<sup>106</sup> On 30 December, Somalia’s National Intelligence and Security Agency tweeted that a foreign country

In many ways, the Gulf countries are fueling the tension and the political impasse between the FGS and member states by providing financial support to both sides. More ominously, there are accusations and counter accusation pointing fingers at some Gulf countries as directly linked to the violence in Somalia.<sup>106</sup>

Beyond the neighboring countries and the Gulf, major powers are also playing a role in Somalia. The US maintains about 600 special operations forces in Somalia, mainly in Ballidogle airbase in southern Somalia.<sup>107</sup> From there and other locations, US unmanned drones regularly launch attacks against Al-Shabaab and other terrorist groups. In 2019, the US carried out some 60 drone strikes compared to 47 in 2018.<sup>108</sup> The UK has a training mission in Baidoa, and the EU has been training Somali forces for nearly a decade now. Turkey has its largest overseas military base in Somalia, where it also trains thousands of Somali troops. Given the diversity and the complexity of external actors in Somalia, the country’s ultimate settlement would have to include addressing many of the interests of those countries, which are often at odds and duplicitous.

planned the 28 December attack that killed and maimed over 200 people. See the New York Times report “With Guns, Cash and Terrorism, Gulf States Vie for Power in Somalia”, July 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/22/world/africa/somalia-qatar-uae.html>

<sup>107</sup> “US military mission in Somalia could take seven years to complete”, <https://cnn.it/2G7J3PL>

<sup>108</sup> “Somalia Bombing Kills 80, Raises Fears of Resurgent Militancy”, December 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/28/world/africa/somalia-explosion-mogadishu.html>

## Foreign Policy

The FGS is playing a notably prominent role in regional diplomacy. In the Horn of Africa, it was among the countries that helped Sudan secure the chairmanship of IGAD, the regional bloc, a seat Kenya lobbied hard for.<sup>109</sup> Kenya's relationship with Somalia soured over a number of issues, including the maritime dispute and Nairobi's unwavering support for Jubbaland state where it has over 4,000 peacekeepers under AMISOM.

The comradeship between President Farmaajo and Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia continues to grow, fueled by the two leaders' populist politics and a disdain for the status quo.<sup>110</sup> Together with the President of Eritrea, Isaias Afwerki, the three leaders aim to spearhead regional integration in the Horn of Africa, an initiative interpreted by Djibouti and Kenya as an unfriendly move at best.<sup>111</sup>

On the other hand, Somalia is still embroiled in the Gulf crisis unleashed by the rivalries between Qatar and the UAE. The FGS has curtailed the influence of the UAE in Somalia where it is widely seen as pernicious. The relationship has not recovered since the FGS's seizure of nearly \$10 million at Mogadishu airport, allegedly destined for

opposition groups. The UAE continues to enjoy a direct relationship with Somaliland and Puntland.

The FGS has been courting Saudi Arabia. Mogadishu embraced the Saudi-led "Dialogue on the Red Sea", an initiative that brings together Arab and African states with access to the Red Sea, although its true objective remains unclear.<sup>112</sup> While smoothing over relations with Saudi Arabia, the FGS has deepened its relationship with Qatar which is spending millions of dollars in humanitarian and development projects in the country, in addition to bilateral financial support.<sup>113</sup>

## Democratic Process

Fierce competition over power, resources and self-preservation permeates Somalia's body politic.<sup>114</sup> Partisan politics legitimized misinformation and poisoned the political atmosphere.<sup>115</sup> As a result of the weakened rule of law, all types of corruption were normalized, compromising state institutions. Due to an insular view of politics by the Somali political class, the peculiar has become the norm in Somalia resulting in a tokenistic view of good governance,

Eritrea occupying Djiboutian territory and holding its prisoners of war.

<sup>112</sup> "RED SEA RIVALRIES: THE GULF, THE HORN, & THE NEW GEOPOLITICS OF THE RED SEA", <https://brook.gs/2R78kje>

<sup>113</sup> "Qatar will continue its support to Somalia", <https://bit.ly/2G5PuTy>

<sup>114</sup> "Ex-President threatens to kick Farmajao out of Mogadishu amid political tensions", <https://bit.ly/37c2GSu>

<sup>115</sup> Slick videos promoting government or anti-government positions and major PR wars online replaced civil duty and discussion on common good and cooperation among local and diaspora citizens.

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<sup>109</sup> Djibouti led this push as both Djibouti and Kenya are vying for a UN Security Council Seat for 2020. IGAD chairmanship may have given Kenya an edge and prominence over Djibouti. Somalia and Kenya have a maritime border case at The Hague and Kenya's support for Madobe irked the FGS.

<sup>110</sup> "Abiy Ahmed: The Ethiopian PM who captured Africa's imagination", <https://bit.ly/30zfekm>

<sup>111</sup> IGAD has been the sub regional institution for all Horn countries and Kenya was dismayed that Ethiopia, its six-decade strategic partner, abruptly decided to join forces with its adversaries Somalia and Eritrea. Djibouti was also flabbergasted by President Farmaajo's cozying up to Afewerki, despite

shrunk civic space, polarized citizenry and confused international partners. In its Democracy in Retreat: Freedom in the World 2019 report, Freedom House refers to Somalia, as the “worst of the worst” placing it at number seven on its undemocratic/repressive list, adding that, “of the 50 countries designated as Not Free, the following 13 have the worst aggregate scores for political rights and civil liberties.”<sup>116</sup> In Transparency International’s 2018 global perceptions survey, Somalia was referred as the most corrupt country in the world.<sup>117</sup> If myopic Somali politicians don’t read or care about such indices, investors and tourists consider these comparative appraisals seriously before they pour their money into countries or visit them as tourists.<sup>118</sup>

## Conclusion and Way Forward for 2020

The unraveling of the elite compact was the biggest challenge Somalia faced in 2019. Ditching collaboration and failing to agree on the rules of the game paved the way for lack of progress, regression and the emergence of a toxic political environment. Continuous and often frivolous contestations by those holding positions of responsibilities at the FGS and FMS level also resulted in extremists having a free hand and a field day, resulting in the massacre of citizens. Unprecedented humanitarian suffering,

debilitating unemployment and a near absence of provision of basic services to citizens such as schooling and healthcare are largely due to bad politics – which begets all other problems.

To overcome these critical, internal and man-made problems in 2020, Somalia’s current policymakers urgently need to embrace consensus based politics and collaboration. That is the only way the needs of Somali citizens can be prioritized.

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<sup>116</sup> “Democracy in Retreat Freedom in the World 2019”, <https://bit.ly/38jUjEL>

<sup>117</sup> “Corruption Perceptions Index 2018”, <https://bit.ly/2v3CpaR>

<sup>118</sup> “Think Quarterly (2011)”, Sarah Bracking, p.25

