

Somalia's Code-Red: Looming Security Crisis in the Horn

Today's editorial in The Somali Wire is written by Dr. Mursal M. Khaliif.

We would like to extend an invitation to others who may wish to contribute to the Somali Wire in the future. We appreciate insightful perspectives on topics concerning Somalia crafted as editorials. The opinions expressed in the below piece do not necessarily represent the views of Sahan.

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Never, in the history of Somalia's contemporary governance, has so much political goodwill, both domestic and international, been squandered by anyone as President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has done in the past 12 months. In the early morning hours of 16 May 2022, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (HSM) was elected as the 10th President of Somalia, marking his second term, following his first from 2012 to 2017. Optimism was high, partly due to his previous experience as president and partly because of the deep unpopularity of his predecessor, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo, with many relieved that the incumbent had been defeated. However, just over three years later, the outlook in Somalia remains unrelentingly bleak due to HSM's destabilising political agenda.

The president has squandered significant domestic and international support in the past three years. Even after appointing an incompetent Prime Minister with no track record of leadership to speak of, all Federal Member States' leaders cooperated closely with HSM, and the Federal Parliament approved all of his legislative priorities for the first two years. And Somalia's international partners wholeheartedly backed him, from debt forgiveness to lifting of the arms embargo to membership in the coveted East African Community. Piggybacking on the successes of the *ma'awiisley* in Hiiraan and Middle Shabelle, HSM's call for a national offensive against Al-Shabaab was welcomed by both the Somali people and international partners alike. As the war was being waged against the terrorists in a manner that can best be described as mediocre, there was still so much hope that HSM could turn things around, even while pursuing divisive domestic politics. This agenda has centred around scrupulous changes to the Provisional Constitution and unilateral electoral reform intended solely for his re-election in 2026.

Then came the two Darood-majority Federal Member States, Puntland and Jubaland, which successively split from the federation, opposing Villa Somalia's increasingly authoritarian constitutional and electoral agenda. Beyond that, HSM's approval of unconstitutional term extensions for his allies in Galmudug, Hirshabelle, and South West has also been considered a prelude to the president seeking his own extension when his mandate expires in mid-2026. The harm to Somalia's federal system in pursuit of Villa Somalia's centralising agenda became particularly extreme after Jubaland President Ahmed Madoobe withdrew from the National Consultative Council in October 2024, before organising state-level elections a month later. This was followed by the deployment of hundreds of Somali National Army (SNA) troops to Ras Kamboni, a coastal enclave in southern Jubaland, in a

thwarted attempt to unseat Madoobe. It was an embarrassing debacle, with Jubaland forces routing hundreds of SNA across the border into Kenya.

Yet despite this failure and mounting calls by domestic opposition and influential allies of Somalia to resolve the political dispute with Jubaland through dialogue, Villa Somalia has shown zero willingness for peaceful engagement. Since Ras Kamboni in December, Villa Somalia has continued to attempt to destabilise Jubaland's government, now through Gedo. In turn, HSM has deployed the weight of the federal government to undermine Jubaland, and violent clashes have ensued in Baardheere, Beledhawo, and Dollow in the attempts to install loyal district commissioners and forces. Each of these districts is located on the borders of Kenya and Ethiopia, from which Al-Shabaab has sought to penetrate into Somalia's neighbours. Instead of being able to solely focus on the fight against the militant movement, Jubaland forces and administration have been forced to fend off HSM's attacks on Jubaland for over 8 months.

In recent weeks, Villa Somalia has further increased its deployment of forces to Gedo, and sought to ban flights into several airstrips in the region. The federal government appears set on securing control of towns in Gedo to implement its contentious one-person, one-vote (OPOV) agenda, even as the third round of negotiations between the Somalia Salvation Forum (SSF) and the president took place yesterday at Villa Somalia. Early reports indicate that little progress was made again, as the president continues to frustrate progress. The National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) has now appointed Abdirashid Janan as the director for the Gedo region, a figure previously accused of severe human rights violations, and a nomination clearly intended to remilitarise the political dispute in Jubaland.

This diverting of federal resources to attempt to violently reverse engineer the re-election of Madoobe comes even while jihadists roam freely in Mogadishu, and still control most of the major bridges across the Shabelle River to the capital. Reports in the past 24 hours have suggested that Somali National Army (SNA) troops and partnered Ugandan forces have withdrawn again from Sabiid, one of the principal targets of their operations. Likewise, many of the villages and towns in Lower and Middle Shabelle that have fallen to Al-Shabaab were liberated three years ago in the *ma'awiisley* offensive. Losing these areas to Al-Shabab is an indictment of both how HSM's administration has conducted the war on terror and the evaporation of the Somali people's confidence in the regime. Meanwhile, over the weekend, Puntland security forces seized a ship off the Bareeda coast carrying armoured vehicles and light weapons destined for the federal government. Although details are still murky, preliminary reports suggest the involvement of shady businessmen and close political allies of Villa Somalia in the purchase of the weapons, individuals previously implicated in the smuggling of arms and arming of loyal Abgaal sub-clan militias.

As this policy of destabilising Jubaland's administration continues, the chief beneficiary is none other than Al-Shabaab. And sooner rather than later, the terror group may well capitalise on this opportunity in Gedo, as it has done in central Somalia. Such a ripple of insecurity across the Kenyan and/or Ethiopian borders grows exponentially as a direct result of HSM's personal vendetta against Jubaland. The failure of regional partners and the international community to rein in the wayward central administration may well result in bloodshed beyond Somalia's borders.

The clock is ticking, and sustained inaction will likely be regretted in the future. With regional partners committing their forces-- unpaid-- to the African Union mission in Somalia, and Western allies footing the bill for much of Somalia's development and security, there remains tremendous leverage. It is time to utilise all the necessary levers to stop Villa Somalia in its centralising, destabilising tracks before it is too late.

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