



Sahan Research Map

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Mogadishu on the Edge: The Danger Has Not Passed

Two days of heavy clashes (3–4 June) in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, between federal troops and opposition-aligned forces have underscored both the fragility of the city's security environment and the volatility of electoral politics. Although relative calm has since returned to the two hardest-hit districts - Hawl Wadaag and Abdiiaziz - and mediation efforts have intensified, tensions remain high, fuelling fears of renewed armed skirmishes. Credible reports of mass clan militia mobilisation on the edges of Mogadishu speak to a conflict that is widening. The militarisation of politics and elite fragmentation over the electoral process have shattered a core assumption: that Somali leaders will ultimately step back from the brink to negotiate a way forward. Consequently, the country is entering a perilous phase in which domestic factions alone cannot resolve the impasse, making neutral, external mediation a necessity.

The Assault

In the days preceding the clashes, Mogadishu's political geography shifted quietly but significantly. Former Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire and former President Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed - the opposition's two most prominent figures - relocated from their primary residences to districts densely

populated by their respective clan constituencies. Khaire moved to Hawl Wadaag, the heart of Murusade sub-clan territory, accompanied by his personal security detail and former NISA Director General Abdullahi Mohammed Ali "Sanbaloolshe." Simultaneously, Sheikh Sharif relocated to the Mirinaayo area of the Abdiiaziz district, a stronghold of the Abgaal sub-clan. These movements constituted a tactical dispersal designed to circumvent a government ban on the 18 May demonstrations, position the leaders directly among their support bases, and mobilise supporters for a mass demonstration scheduled for 4 June. The subsequent fifteen-hour government crackdown was the most aggressive deployment of state force against political opponents in Mogadishu since the April 2021 crisis, with eyewitnesses describing its severity as unprecedented.

On the evening of 3 June, at approximately 5:00 p.m., Khaire convened a meeting at his Hawl Wadaag compound with senior leaders of the Murusade clan. The gathering included roughly 70 traditional leaders, led by *Ugaas* Abdirizaq Ugaas Abdullahi Ugaas Haashi - the paramount traditional chief - of the Murusade, whose recent coronation President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (HSM) had personally attended. Weeks later, fully aware of the *Ugaas's* presence inside the compound, President Mohamud ordered a direct assault on the residence.

As the military operation unfolded, a state-sanctioned mediation delegation arrived at the perimeter. Led by Ugaas Mahmoud Ali Ugaas, the paramount chief of the Abgaal clan, the committee included prominent Senators Dhegdheer and Dhegay, alongside other high-profile public figures. This delegation had been shuttling between the principal political factions, holding talks with Sheikh Sharif, former Prime Minister Roble, and Abdirahman Abdishakur. They arrived at Khaire's compound after skirmishes began at 5:00 p.m. to broker an immediate ceasefire and de-escalate tensions. As the assault intensified, however, the mediators became trapped inside the compound.

Sources with direct knowledge of the operation indicate that the coordinated assault on Khaire's compound and the surrounding neighbourhood involved a near-total mobilisation of Somalia's state security apparatus. The deployed forces included: SNA Military Police units typically tasked with maintaining Mogadishu's urban security; the Gorgor Special Forces, an elite unit effectively utilised as a personal instrument of the presidency; the 77th Presidential Brigade, led by Maslax, a nephew of President Mohamud; regular SNA forces commanded by Beeryare, the head of Military Intelligence; Banaadir Police Forces, commanded by Moallim Mahdi; Haram'ad Police Special Forces and HSM's Special Presidential Guard unit led by Adan Dheere, also a relative of the president.

The weaponry deployed was extraordinarily heavy for what the government would later term a 'law enforcement' operation in a capital city. State forces utilised heavy automatic weapons, Rocket-Propelled Grenades (RPGs), mortars, B-9 and B-10 anti-tank recoilless rifles, and – most extraordinarily – fixed wing explosive drones provided by Türkiye.

Wider Context

The violent clashes of 3-4 June do not represent isolated security incidents. Rather, they mark the culmination of a discernible progressive militarisation and weaponisation of state instruments since HSM unilaterally extended his mandate by one year on 16 May. Since then, the federal government's response has been overwhelmingly escalatory and, driven by containment: placing opposition leaders under de facto siege, erecting physical barricades around their residences, and deploying security forces to curtail their movement and prevent them from leading popular protests.

The current impasse bears stark, structural parallels with the 2021 constitutional crisis. Then-President Mohamed Abdullahi "Farmaajo's" attempt to unilaterally extend his presidential term fractured the national security forces along clan lines, pushing Mogadishu to the brink of a civil war. Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was a leading opposition figure during that exact period. He routinely invoked constitutional order, democratic principles, and institutional checks to resist what he termed executive overreach. In a dangerous reversal, he is now the chief executive issuing commands from a position of entrenched authority.

Subversion of Security Assistance

The tactical shock of the assault extends beyond its immediate human cost: it exposes a critical and troubling shift in Somalia's broader institutional trajectory. Elite state units including the Gorgor Brigade, Haram'ad Police, NISA, the Military Police, and elements of the regular Somali National Army (SNA) have been built, trained, and equipped through billions of dollars in international

security assistance. The explicit, internationally-backed purpose of these forces is to counter Al-Shabaab and establish a stable state framework. During this operation, however, these specialised capabilities were turned inward to suppress and clamp down on legitimate political opposition. International counter-insurgency assets such as surveillance drones, anti-tank weapon systems, and heavy mortars were deployed in a densely populated residential district of the capital.

Role of Türkiye

Turkish-trained elite military units and drone assets are allegedly being deployed to suppress legitimate, organised political opposition in Somalia. This operational alignment compromises Ankara's long-standing position as a neutral actor. The continued systemic deployment of these assets against domestic political rivals risks precipitating wider inter-clan warfare and undermining regional stability. Ankara cannot maintain credibility as an impartial mediator while state-trained forces and advanced military hardware are actively leveraged against opposition figures.

Current Turkish policy appears overly reliant on direct alignment with HSM. This must change if Ankara seeks a long-term relationship with Somalia beyond one single leader. Türkiye would be well-advised to implement strict oversight mechanisms to ensure Turkish-trained assets and platforms are used exclusively for counter-terrorism operations, not domestic political enforcement. And Turkish diplomatic and intelligence officials are well-positioned to exert substantial political and economic leverage to actively incentivise non-violent political dialogue and facilitate a comprehensive national settlement. Instead, many Somalis believe that the Turkish government is exporting elements of its domestic political playbook to Somalia: anaesthetising opposition groups with the promise of dialogue, while simultaneously dismantling them through targeted lawfare and warfare.

Disarmament Debate and the 'Civilianisation' of Politics

Somalia remains one of the world's most heavily militarised societies - a reality that stems from protracted state collapse, deep-seated civil conflict, and a pervasive clan system that sustains active combatants. The widespread proliferation of small arms among the citizenry directly reflects the state's historical inability to provide basic public security. Conversely, the FGS cannot establish an effective security monopoly until it can successfully out-coerce non-state armed groups.

Recent violence in Mogadishu has reignited the disarmament debate. The continued existence of an armed opposition engaged in civilian politics, remains understandable for now, but may need to change in the longer term. Conversely, Villa Somalia's ongoing heavy-handed, selective disarmament - targeted at former allies and pro-opposition leaders - risks reinforcing historical grievances and exacerbating political polarisation, producing the opposite of its intended effect. Lasting stability requires transitioning from narrow, securitised enforcement towards comprehensive governance and institutional reform.

The US-UK Diplomatic Track

The recent escalation of violence in Mogadishu, coupled with the rigid polarisation of both the federal government and opposition factions, underscores that internal political mechanisms are exhausted. Resolving the crisis now strictly depends on structured, external third-party mediation. The joint US-UK diplomatic initiative currently stands as the most robust and credible framework for negotiation. While functionally sound, the initiative requires immediate, unified multilateral backing to generate the geopolitical leverage necessary to compel compliance from both sides. International partners should urgently align behind the US-UK framework to prevent competing, fragmented mediation tracks. Türkiye must align its mediation with this broader international effort; Ankara's push for a technical intra-Somali committee certainly signals a renewed interest to broker a consensus.

Ultimately, the June assault exposes a perilous reality: the tools built to secure Somalia's future are again being deployed to dismantle its fragile democratic foundation. By deploying international counter-insurgency assets against domestic political opponents, the administration has shattered the norm of negotiated consensus and pushed Mogadishu back to the brink of systemic fragmentation. Should international donors and regional partners fail to intervene with decisive diplomatic and financial leverage, this unchecked executive overreach will not only trigger a catastrophic urban conflict but will also create a catastrophic security vacuum - one that Al-Shabaab is uniquely positioned to exploit.

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