



Somalia's Polycrisis – A Tipping Point?

Delegates from Somalia's influential Darood clan family are currently gathering in Nairobi, Kenya, for a crucial "pre-conference" planning session. Driven largely by clan chiefs, the meeting is designed to formulate a unified strategy and coordinate responses to 'fundamental issues' (*arrimo masiiri ah*) within Somalia, principally centre-periphery tensions and the future of federalism. The anticipated culmination of these talks is a comprehensive Pan-Darood congress in Garowe. This development represents a rare and significant intervention, serving as a clear indicator of accelerating political polarisation and fragmentation.

Although friction between Darood constituencies and the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) is historically persistent, recent events in Puntland have acted as a catalyst for widespread discontent. A growing perception within the community suggests that federal authorities in Mogadishu are actively seeking to engineer a violent subversion of President Sa'id Abdullah Deni's elected administration. For both the regional leadership of Puntland and the broader Darood collective, this perceived federal interference represents a critical, non-negotiable red line.

Deni prevails

For the moment, Puntland President Sa'id Abdullah Deni has successfully held the line against Villa Somalia's alleged orchestrated attempt to instigate an armed insurrection. In a swift pre-emptive response, pro-Deni forces neutralised a Puntland Security Force (PSF) faction that had openly aligned itself with federal interests and units of the federal forces. This decisive outcome was largely engineered behind the scenes by senior Majerteen elders and politicians, including ex-President Mohammed Faroole. Despite their internal political grievances with Deni, the broader Majerteen

instinctively rallied behind their regional executive – a cohesive, defensive alignment that must have caught federal strategists completely off guard.

The PSF is no ordinary militia; it is an elite, American-trained counter-terrorism asset long overseen by the prominent Diyaano family. Consequently, a subsequent US agreement with Puntland over the strategic utilisation of Bosaaso reads as a quiet, calibrated American protest against Mogadishu's heavy-handed machinations and the weaponisation of the PSF.

While Deni has prevailed for now, the threat has not dissipated. The Deni camp remains convinced that Villa Somalia will launch fresh campaigns to fracture Puntland or possibly instigate fresh armed clashes along the fault lines of Gaalka'yo – a divided city that is also a historical flashpoint of inter-clan hostilities in the north.

Darood mobilisation – the pitfalls

Driven by mounting frustration over the collapse of meaningful political dialogue with Villa Somalia, senior Darood elders and politicians appear intent on using the Nairobi platform to maximise leverage. The initiative aims to either pressure the HSM administration back to the negotiating table or, failing that, establish a parallel political track. Precisely what that entails, or what it would look like, is not clear at this stage.

The initiative, however, faces significant internal hurdles. Jubaland President Ahmed Mohamed Islam (Ahmed Madoobe) rejected hosting the talks in Kismayo, warning that explicitly clan-based political mobilisation would deepen national divisions. Madoobe noted a key structural difference from the previous Farmaajo administration – where Darood politicians formed the core opposition – arguing the current government lacks a comparable, unified Hawiye opposition bloc. Consequently, he cautioned that an overt Darood platform would inadvertently strengthen Villa Somalia by consolidating Hawiye political support while weakening the broader, multi-clan opposition.

Former President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed Farmaajo similarly is believed to have declined to participate, viewing the explicitly clan-centric framework as politically inappropriate.

Ultimately, while the Nairobi initiative risks reinforcing clan polarisation during a period of heightened uncertainty, Villa Somalia views the gathering as a short-term tactical advantage capable of consolidating its own Hawiye support base.

Over the longer term, however, the emergence of competing, clan-based political blocs will likely complicate future electoral negotiations, deepen national fragmentation, and undermine the prospects for a durable, broad-based national political settlement. The ultimate efficacy of the Nairobi gathering remains highly uncertain given the prominent absence of key regional powerbrokers, including Madoobe, Farmaajo, and Puntland President Deni.

OPOV enforcement

The growing clan unrest in Jubaland and Puntland, strongholds of the Darood, also feeds off the festering wider national political stalemate.

Prospects for a negotiated settlement to end months of deadlock over elections have diminished further. Following the lapse of a notional mid-August cut-off date for a final deal, the Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (HSM) administration shifted gears to focus on regime consolidation. It extended the controversial "one-person-one-vote" (OPOV) system to Galmudug, cementing the control of the ruling JSP, and engineered the election of a JSP stalwart and key presidential ally, Abdulqadir Nur Jama, as Speaker of the Federal Parliament.

The goal of this OPOV mandate is to create as many electoral pockets as possible across the country, cultivating a new crop of elected leaders allied with the JSP whose votes will be crucial in a future presidential poll. It is explicitly a quantitative, not a qualitative, race. Though deemed illegitimate and dubious by critics, this limited plebiscite will still be sold by Mogadishu as an 'enhanced' or even 'democratic' vote – creating a *fait accompli* that either strengthens HSM's hand in future talks or proves incredibly messy to undo.

In the coming weeks, the OPOV exercise will be conducted in Hirshabelle and possibly in Laas Anood, the seat of the so-called Northeastern State of Somalia (which was declared a new federal state in late

2025). This will allow Villa Somalia to proclaim that five diverse regions have been covered, thereby stigmatising the holdout regions, principally Jubaland and Puntland – leaving them exposed as obstructionists to the national federal mandate.

"Bouquets of flowers"

The security situation, meanwhile, remains deeply precarious. A summit of Troop and Police Contributing States (TPCCs) on 31 July in Entebbe, Uganda, ended without resolving the vexed funding crisis that has hit the peacekeeping mission (AUSSOM) after the US cut funding to the mission's critical logistical arm UNSOS. President Hassan Sheikh publicly rebuked regional states at the meeting, telling them to keep off Somali politics – a robust but needless display of foreign policy assertiveness that may have earned him credit with his nationalist base, but roiled and aggravated already febrile relations with the TPCCs.

To make matters worse, on the weekend, speaking in Adaado, Galmudug, the Somali President said Somalia was now capable of assuming responsibility for its own defence and security, adding it was time to send home AUSSOM troops with "bouquets of flowers." This is despite the fact that only a few weeks earlier, the FGS was busy sending emissaries or a flurry of letters to Arab and Muslim states appealing for emergency funding to keep the mission going for one more year – to 2027.

With hopes for alternative funding diminishing, regional armies are fast-tracking exit plans. The ENDF is expected to cede more FOBs in the coming weeks in the Gedo sector. A chaotic and hasty exit may still be avoidable, but cannot be ruled out. Despite HSM's bullishness, the danger of an AUSSOM collapse triggering a security vacuum – highly likely to be filled by Al-Shabaab – appears more elevated than at any point in recent years.

Ultimately, this dangerous convergence of clan polarisation, unilateral electoral mandates, and a fraying security architecture exposes the true depth of Somalia's polycrisis. By forcing centralisation while simultaneously alienating regional states and frontline security partners, Mogadishu risks pushing the country past a critical tipping point.

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