



SAHAN GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY MONITOR

Somalia/Somaliland

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HIGHLIGHTS

During August 2026, Somalia's national political deadlock persisted as President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud continued to delay negotiations while trying to consolidate his position through Federal Member State elections. Political competition increasingly played out through armed confrontation: Puntland defeated Villa Somalia-backed forces in a deadly confrontation in Galkayo, and South West State witnessed significant political violence in Baidoa. Politically, Jubaland regained leverage in Gedo by negotiating the defection of a senior clan militia leader and Galmudug's disputed election was annulled. Meanwhile, al-Shabaab retained the operational initiative across Lower Shabelle and Hiraa Regions. The group remains a threat along Mogadishu's periphery despite repeated ground operations and airstrikes. These challenges coincide with a visible contraction of international support and growing uncertainty over AUSSOM's future, while resurgent piracy further exposed the weakness of Somalia's security environment. Somaliland President Abdirahman Irro visited Kenya and held talks with President Ruto, while Hamza Barre made another trip to Laas Anood in a bid to stem Dhulbahante rifts and pre-empt further leadership defections to Somaliland.

Somalia's political deadlock continues

Following the failure of talks brokered by Türkiye, the United States and the United Kingdom last month, national political dialogue remained deadlocked in August, with no meaningful progress toward resolving the dispute over elections. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, whose mandate expired in May 2026, appears content to allow the stalemate to continue and has shown little urgency entering into serious negotiations. On 1 August, he explicitly rejected the Somali Future Council's (SFC) proposal for an inclusive transitional body to oversee the electoral and constitutional process, underscoring the continued distance between the two sides.

Hassan Sheikh is now insisting that the upcoming Federal Member State (FMS) elections be completed before national election negotiations continue. This appears to be a deliberate effort to consolidate his political alliance at the FMS level before returning to the negotiating table, thereby strengthening his hand against the opposition.

International partners continued to press for an "inclusive dialogue". This external pressure may still represent the best opportunity for the SFC to regain momentum and push the federal government toward negotiations. The opposition also took tentative steps toward broadening its coalition, with SFC

representatives opening discussions with former President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo's Nabad iyo Nolol movement. However, the two camps have yet to establish a unified position on the elections.

Meanwhile, Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur "Jama," a close Hassan Sheikh ally with strong ties to Türkiye, was elected Speaker of the House of the People. The SFC immediately rejected the result, arguing that Parliament's mandate expired on 14 April and that it therefore lacked the authority to elect a new Speaker.

Puntland Defeats Villa Somalia-Backed Militia

On 4 August, Puntland forces intercepted a shipment of weapons reportedly sent from Mogadishu to pro-Villa Somalia forces operating in Puntland. This triggered an all-out Puntland assault the following day against the opposition forces' base of operations in North Galkayo. Following a sustained barrage of indirect fire, Puntland forces defeated the FGS-backed Puntland Security Force (PSF), formerly trained and funded by the United States and under the command of General Mohamud Osman Diyano.

The PSF was the strongest of an estimated 3,000 clan-based personnel that Hassan Sheikh had been arming and supporting as part of an effort to weaken and potentially remove Puntland President Said Abdullahi Deni. Following its defeat in Galkayo,

the PSF's principal base in Bosasso was surrounded, prompting its remaining soldiers to defect to Deni on 6 August. Armed groups drawn from the Omar Mohamud, Ali Saleban, Bi'idyan, Siwaqroon, Lelkase and Arab Salah clans were subsequently disarmed after receiving assurances that their personnel would be integrated into Puntland's formal security architecture.

The outcome represents a significant political and military victory for Deni. Villa Somalia's attempt to cultivate an armed counterweight to his administration has been disrupted, at least for the time being, while the defeat of the PSF has embarrassed the federal government and largely neutralized the immediate threat to Deni's position. This allowed Deni to spend the latter part of August touring Puntland and projecting an image of effective presidential governance.

The victory nevertheless creates a substantial new burden for the Puntland administration. Deni must now rationalize the various defecting forces, integrate suitable personnel into a coherent command structure and secure the resources required to pay them. Without outside assistance and a credible security-sector reform process, the absorption of these forces could strain Puntland's finances and reproduce the same fragmented security arrangements that contributed to the crisis.

Puntland and the United States reached new security cooperation agreements following AFRICOM Commander General Anderson's July visit to the region. The U.S. Department of War is expected to reestablish a presence in Bosasso, including a training program for local special forces. A parallel U.S. agreement with Jubaland could also open the way for closer coordination among the United States, Jubaland, Kenya and Ethiopia in the Juba River Valley. Together, these initiatives indicate that Washington is moving toward a more state-level approach to security cooperation after years of growing frustration with the Mogadishu-based federal authorities.

Al-Shabaab Attacks Intensify Across South Central Somalia

Despite an increasingly volatile security situation across south-central Somalia and renewed efforts to secure the outskirts of Mogadishu, government forces made little meaningful progress in August. Somali National Army (SNA) troops continued to engage al-Shabaab across Lower Shabelle, including through efforts to dislodge the group from the Ugunji area north of the Shabelle River.

However, Al-Shabaab maintained pressure on Janaale and Mubaarak, basing fighters in surrounding farmland and conducting increasingly frequent hit-and-run attacks against SNA and Ugandan forward operating bases.

Al-Shabaab also retained control of Majabto, including a strategically important bridge that allows the group to move fighters and launch attacks across a wide area. An improvised

explosive device (IED) attack between Awdheegle and Mubaarak killed at least 16 SNA personnel and wounded approximately two dozen others. Elsewhere in Lower Shabelle, al-Shabaab fighters burned charcoal trucks travelling between Afgooye and Waanlaweyn, conducted a small-arms attack near Lafoole outside Afgooye, and detonated a landmine near Balidoogle that killed five U.S.-trained Danab soldiers. These attacks demonstrate the group's continuing ability to operate across the region despite sustained government and partner pressure.

Government forces suffered an additional setback in Hiraan Region on 2 August, when al-Shabaab seized Teedan and several surrounding villages. Teedan is strategically located approximately 60 kilometres southeast of Belet Weyne and gives the group greater influence over important trade and movement routes connecting Hiraan with central Somalia.

By the end of August, the government's security focus had shifted toward the northwestern periphery of Mogadishu, particularly efforts to retake Basra village in Lower Shabelle. This is likely a response to worsening insecurity around the capital, where several grenade and small-arms attacks occurred during the month. Nevertheless, al-Shabaab remained in control of Basra at the end of August despite repeated SNA ground assaults and partner airstrikes. The failure to dislodge the group highlights how deeply entrenched al-Shabaab has become, the narrow military advantage enjoyed by government forces in this area, and the limitations of airpower without effective ground operations. It also indicates limited support for the SNA among local clans.

The FGS continued to claim successful airstrikes against senior al-Shabaab figures. NISA reported that international partners killed Abdullahi Hashi Labajir, also known as "Ikhlaas," the commander of al-Shabaab's Jabhat intelligence network in Jilib District, on 23 August. However, al-Shabaab has not confirmed his death, and several similar government claims have subsequently proven false. On 5 August, for example, al-Shabaab's Middle Shabelle governor, Sheikh Yusuf Isse "Kabokutukade," released a statement asserting that he remained alive after the federal government claimed he had been killed in an airstrike.

Uncertainty Over Aussom's Future Continues

The impending end of U.S. support for AUSSOM and the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) continued to reverberate in August. UNSOS instructed AUSSOM personnel to vacate residential containers in Mogadishu and Baidoa ahead of their planned auction. Ten civilian employees of the joint African Union-United Nations Information Support Team were also informed that their contracts would terminate on 10 September. Meanwhile, UNSOS began seeking auctioneers to dispose of vehicles, heavy machinery, information technology equipment and medical assets. The contraction of international support is already underway, even though there is still no viable replacement for the logistical system that sustains the mission.

Senior African Union military officials convened in Mogadishu to develop a new operational plan for AUSSOM. The resulting proposals emphasized accelerated operations, improved intelligence sharing among troop-contributing countries and better coordination of resources and capabilities. However, the plan remains is not an executable operational framework. Each of its objectives is a repeat of existing commitments and they depend on aviation support, fuel, casualty evacuation, equipment and troop reimbursement – none of which AUSSOM independently controls or can reliably finance. Without a sustainable new funding and logistics arrangement, the proposed increase in operational tempo is unlikely to materialize.

Ethiopian forces abruptly transferred their forward operating base in Buurhakaba, Bay Region, to the SNA. The handover will test the ability of Somali forces to hold a town that remains largely encircled by al-Shabaab. It also raises serious concerns that Ethiopia could withdraw from additional AUSSOM positions in the coming months, particularly more remote locations such as Diinsoor and Qansaxdheere. These bases are far from the Ethiopian border and are less directly connected to the immediate security priorities of leaders in Addis Ababa.

Uganda has indicated that its forces will remain in Somalia through the summer of 2027, either under a reformed African Union mission or through a bilateral agreement with Mogadishu. Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre travelled to Doha to seek Qatari financing for post-AUSSOM security arrangements. Qatar prefers to fund Ugandan forces directly, while Villa Somalia is seeking to retain control over the financing, likely to preserve its access to and influence over the funds. This disagreement could complicate efforts to establish a bilateral arrangement before existing support mechanisms expire.

Finally, Kenya confirmed that it is deploying additional units along the Kenya-Somalia border following a series of al-Shabaab attacks in July and August. The reinforcements are intended to strengthen border security and prevent further militant infiltration into northeastern Kenya. Like the emerging U.S. agreements with Puntland and Jubaland, the deployment reflects a broader shift toward nationally driven and bilateral security arrangements as confidence in the sustainability of AUSSOM continues to decline.

Piracy Continues to Surge

Piracy continued unabated throughout August. Following the 24 August hijacking of the MV Seamull/Sibu 1, pirates were holding six vessels and more than 90 crew members. All six ships were anchored off Puntland's northeastern coast. The Puntland administration claimed that foreign actors were contributing to the resurgence, alluding to growing evidence of cooperation between Somali pirate networks and Yemen's Houthi movement.

Of particular concern was the hijacking of the Cameroon-flagged cargo ship MV Lutuf on 17 August. The vessel was reportedly carrying weapons, communications equipment and satellite equipment destined for the Turkish military base in Mogadishu. Federal government sources subsequently claimed that at least 14 pirates or pirate facilitators were killed in two airstrikes – most likely carried out by Türkiye – against supply vessels supporting the hijackers.

Pirates released the MV Lutuf on 30 August. Although the government attributed the vessel's release to security operations, Puntland sources asserted that either Türkiye or Villa Somalia paid a ransom of approximately \$2.5 million. A payment of that size would provide pirate networks with substantial resources and create a strong incentive for additional hijackings in the coming weeks and months.

South West State Faces a Widening Crisis

The security situation in South West State (SWS) deteriorated sharply in August. On 17 August, forces loyal to former SWS President Abdiyaziz Laftagareen entered Baidoa and temporarily captured several neighbourhoods before withdrawing several hours later. The assault involved the use of vehicle-borne explosive devices and destroyed an SNA base, with positions in Boonkaay, Mayafuulka and Warshada Xasey among those targeted. Laftagareen's forces remain deployed outside the city. Although the SNA sent reinforcements to Baidoa, tensions remained high, and a major mortar barrage on 21 August prompted residents to flee outlying areas of the city.

Newly installed SWS President Aden Madobe has been slow to respond politically to the threat. His administration accused Laftagareen's forces of operating alongside al-Shabaab, but no reconciliation talks have taken place. Baidoa therefore remains surrounded and at continued risk of attack, with neither side appearing prepared to compromise.

The balance of power could shift further if the Madobe administration loses control of Buurhakaba town. The commander of the SWS Special Police, known as "Sandheere", defected to the opposition during the month, increasing the possibility that the town could fall to Laftagareen-aligned forces. Sandheere belongs to the Elay sub-clan of the Rahanweyn/Mirifle, which predominates in and around Buurhakaba. Although the Elay initially supported Laftagareen's removal, the sub-clan appears to have turned against Madobe because of his handling of SWS politics over the past month.

Madobe moved quickly to appoint Major Mustaf Ahmed Mohamed, also known as "Malaaq Guudow," as the new commander of the SWS Special Police. However, a change in leadership may not be sufficient to reverse the deterioration in

local support. If Buurhakaba falls to Laftagareen's forces, the Madobe administration will become increasingly isolated in Baidoa, while the opposition will gain control of a strategically important approach to the regional capital.

In response to the growing threat, Villa Somalia reportedly asked AUSSOM to treat the SWS opposition as a force allied with al-Shabaab. Ethiopian troops in and around Baidoa have thus far remained neutral and are unlikely to intervene against Laftagareen's forces. The request nevertheless risks drawing AUSSOM into an internal Somali political conflict and further undermining perceptions of the mission's neutrality.

Uncertainty Reigns in Galmudug's Politics

Hassan Sheikh's Justice and Solidarity Party (JSP) emerged as the dominant force in Galmudug's parliamentary election, receiving approximately 70 percent of the vote and securing 63 of the legislature's 189 seats. The result appeared to clear the way for the election of Villa Somalia's preferred candidate, Liban Shuluq, as Galmudug's next state president.

However, the federal Supreme Court subsequently annulled the election because of widespread voting irregularities, catching both Villa Somalia and the opposition off guard. Opposition leaders have so far avoided taking a public position on the ruling. It remains possible that the annulment is a Villa Somalia maneuver intended to demonstrate the court's independence while buying Hassan Sheikh additional time to extend his political mandate and organize the upcoming election in Hirshabelle.

A rerun of the Galmudug parliamentary election is expected by late September. Barring significant infighting within Villa Somalia's coalition, JSP-aligned candidates are likely to prevail again, preserving Shuluq's path to the state presidency. The unexpected delay will also likely push Hirshabelle's anticipated state election into October or November. This plays into Hassan Sheikh's strategy of delaying the national political dialogue until the FMS elections are complete and his allies are in stronger negotiating positions.

Hassan Sheikh also toured Galmudug during August. His visit generated heightened security tensions around Galkayo, particularly along the boundary with Puntland-controlled areas, although no serious incidents occurred. During the tour, Hassan Sheikh presided over the graduation of as many as 5,000 new Somali security personnel trained by Saudi Arabia and Sudan at the Xananbuure military camp. Their intended operational role remains unclear, as does the FGS's ability to provide the salaries, equipment and logistical support required to sustain such a large force.

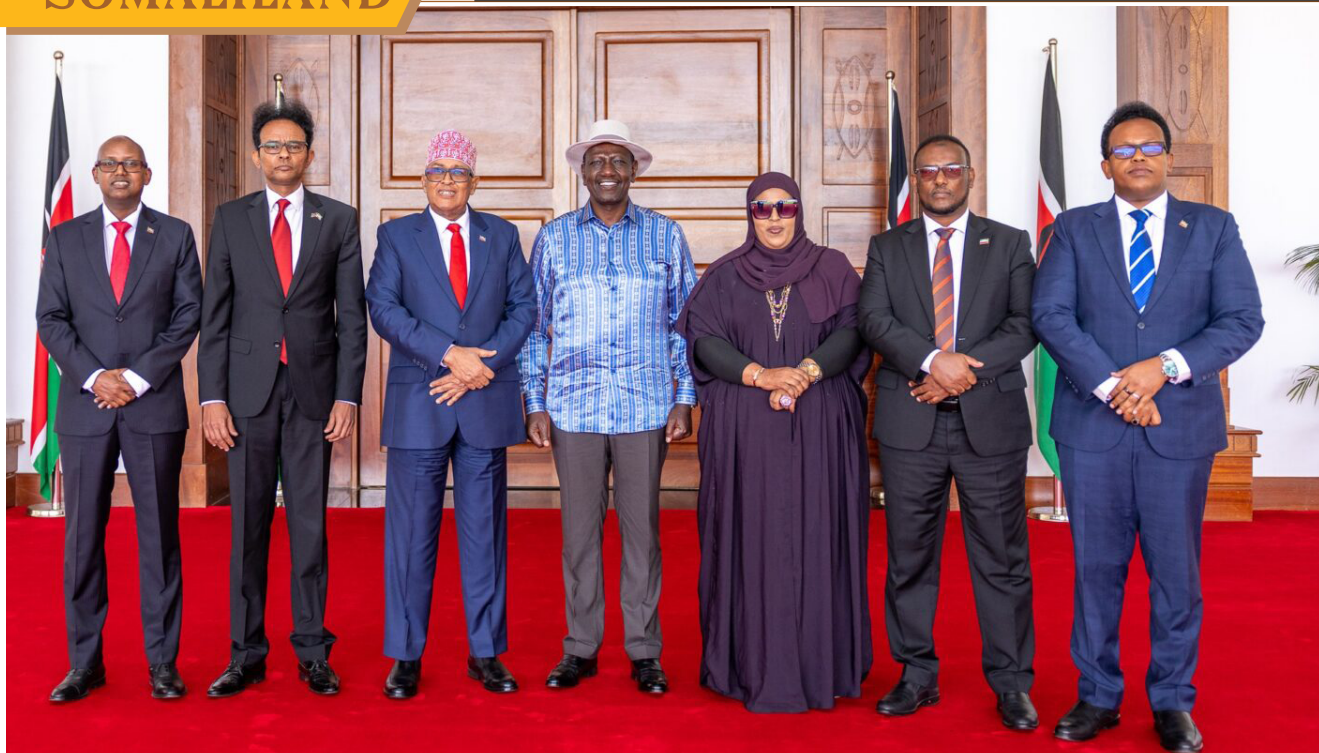
Jubaland Secures Control of Gedo Region

The Jubaland administration reached an agreement with Abdirashid Janan, a prominent Reer Ahmed/Marchan figure, to reintegrate his pro-FGS forces in Gedo into the Jubaland Security Forces (JSF). Once fully implemented, the agreement will return important clan support, weapons systems, and territory to Jubaland's control, particularly in and around Bulo Hawo. It will also significantly weaken Villa Somalia's ability to use local armed proxies to challenge Jubaland President Ahmed Madobe's authority in Gedo.

The agreement's durability will depend on Madobe's willingness and ability to invest in Gedo's stabilization and development. Jubaland must integrate and reliably pay Janan's forces while rebuilding political relationships with communities that have repeatedly shifted between Kismayo and Mogadishu. Failure to follow the security agreement with meaningful local governance and development would leave Gedo vulnerable to another round of FGS-backed efforts to undermine Madobe's authority.



SOMALILAND



Irro Visits Kenya

Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi (Irro) conducted a working visit to Nairobi, Kenya, in August 2026. The meeting was largely facilitated by the Kenyan intelligence chief Noordin Haji. Irro used the visit to brief Western diplomats and development partners, where he urged the international community to engage with Somaliland through direct sovereign investments rather than aid channels managed via Mogadishu. Israeli Ambassador Gideon Behar was also present.

The Somaliland leader also held high-level bilateral talks – one at State House with Kenyan President William Ruto and another with National Assembly Speaker Moses Wetang'ula. Discussions focused on expanding cooperation, finalising mutual frameworks for trade, energy, and infrastructure development, and enhancing collaborative social programs in education and healthcare.

Somaliland has been pushing Kenya to establish direct flights between Nairobi and Hargeisa but has been unable to obtain a firm commitment. Kenyan authorities are probably concerned the issue may complicate its increasingly brittle relations with Mogadishu.

Sahan has been informed by authoritative sources Kenyan President William Ruto expressed “his readiness to do everything with his powers to support Somaliland” but was forthright in voicing his reluctance to offer Hargeisa recognition

‘at this time.’ The Kenyan leader cited the forthcoming general elections in his country as one impediment. Ruto is keen to secure another term and worries that a formal diplomatic recognition of Somaliland in an election year could complicate his campaign and risk undermining his strong support from the country’s ethnic Somalis – a significant number of whom may be opposed to Somaliland’s recognition.

Fresh FGS Bid to Mend Laas Anood Rifts

Somali Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre visited Laas Anood on 2 August to participate in the first-anniversary celebrations of the Northeastern State of Somalia (NES) administration. The visit - his third trip to the city - was primarily aimed at reassuring the Dhulbahante clan of Mogadishu’s unwavering and continued commitment to NES, mollify growing local discontent with the Somali federal government’s perceived erratic support for the administration and to resolve local leadership rifts within the NES administration.

Meanwhile, the regional President, Abdikadir Ahmed Aw-Ali ‘Firdhiye’ spent the better part of the month of August touring the Middle East. Firdhiye visited Saudi Arabia and Egypt and held talks with officials, Arab League representatives. The details and outcome of the NES leader’s latest engagements in Arab capitals remain scanty, but it is almost certain Firdhiye is seeking Arab financial resources and diplomatic support, and keen to position NES as the primary strategic geopolitical bulwark to counter Israel and Somaliland.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Translate calls for “inclusive dialogue” into coordinated pressure on President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud.** International partners should make clear that completing disputed Federal Member State elections cannot become a precondition for resuming national negotiations. Engagement should proceed immediately and in parallel with state-level electoral processes. Partners should establish common expectations, a defined timetable and credible political and financial consequences if Villa Somalia continues to delay talks while consolidating its alliances at the state level.
- **Help the Somali Future Council turn its transitional proposal into a credible negotiating position.** The SFC should receive legal and technical assistance to define the proposed transitional council’s legal basis, composition, mandate, duration, decision-making procedures and pathway to elections. International partners should also encourage coordination of a common position between the SFC and Farmaajo’s Nabad iyo Nolol movement. A more coherent opposition would make it harder for Villa Somalia to exploit opposition divisions while requiring the opposition to present a workable alternative to the current process.
- **Develop transparent post-AUSSOM security arrangements before the existing support structure collapses.** Discussions involving Uganda, Qatar and other potential funders should establish direct, auditable funding mechanisms that reliably pay and supply deployed forces. Financing should not be routed through opaque federal channels that invite political diversion or rent-seeking. Bilateral and state-level arrangements may be necessary, but they should be coordinated within a broader framework that prevents fragmented deployments and ensures that transferred positions can be held against al-Shabaab.
- **Intensify engagement in Addis Ababa to clarify Ethiopia’s intentions in Somalia.** Ethiopia’s abrupt withdrawal from Buurhakaba raises questions about the future of its other AUSSOM positions, particularly Diinsoor and Qansaxdheere. International partners should seek clear commitments regarding Ethiopia’s planned force posture, withdrawal timelines and conditions for transferring additional bases. These discussions should also clarify whether Ethiopian forces around Baidoa will remain neutral and how Addis Ababa intends to prevent security vacuums that al-Shabaab could exploit.
- **Provide targeted security-sector and funding support to Puntland.** Puntland now faces the expensive and potentially destabilizing task of disarming, vetting, integrating and paying thousands of defecting personnel. International assistance should support a unified payroll, biometric registration, command-and-control reform, weapons management and the demobilization of personnel who cannot be absorbed. Funding should reinforce Puntland’s counterterrorism and maritime-security capabilities while remaining conditional on the forces not being used for internal political or clan-based purposes.
- **Establish a neutral conflict-prevention process for South West State.** International partners should engage both Aden Madobe and Abdiiaziz Laftagareen without treating political recognition or material assistance as a reward for either side. The immediate priorities should be a ceasefire around Baidoa, military deconfliction, protection of civilian infrastructure and continued counter-al-Shabaab coordination. AUSSOM should not be drawn into fighting the SWS opposition or treat it as an al-Shabaab affiliate without credible evidence. At the same time, both camps should be pressed to maintain defensive positions against al-Shabaab and prevent the group from exploiting the political conflict to expand around Baidoa or Buurhakaba.
- **Focus counter-piracy efforts on the land-based networks that organize and finance hijackings.** Maritime patrols and rescue operations address pirates already at sea but do little to disrupt the criminal infrastructure that sustains them. Puntland and its international partners should prioritize the financiers, ransom negotiators, arms suppliers, telecommunications providers, transporters, coastal brokers and local political protectors who make hijackings possible. This should include financial tracing, targeted sanctions, investigations of suspicious hawala transfers, stronger coastal intelligence networks and support for Puntland police, prosecutors and courts.