

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During August, the overall state of affairs in Puntland, Somalia, were relatively calm. There were a number of major security incidents at the state's edges – in Galmudug-controlled parts of Mudug region, armed fighting between Al Shabaab and local militia led to heavy casualties. Similarly, clan violence in Somaliland-controlled areas of Sool region led to many fatalities. In Galkayo, Puntland Presidential Guard commander and his bodyguard were killed during a security operation against local criminal networks. Puntland security officials vowed to bring the attackers to justice. Meanwhile, ISIS branch in Somalia confirmed to the media that one of its leaders was killed in a U.S. airstrike in Bari region. During the month, there were no reported VEO incidents in areas controlled by Puntland forces. Meanwhile, state forces continued security operations in Bossaso and Galkayo, leading to arrests and raids on criminal networks.

Puntland and Jubaland states rejected attendance at Dhusamareb Conference 3, which was attended by Somali President, and state presidents of Galmudug, Southwest and Hirshabelle. Dhusamareb 3 communique proposed an electoral model for 2021 Somali national elections, including more delegate-voters and for the elections to take place at three districts of each Federal Member State (FMS). In 2016, the delegate-voters totaled 14,025 and elections took place only at FMS capital cities; however, the Dhusamareb 3 proposal increased the delegate-voters to over 80,000 delegate-voters representing electoral constituencies. Surprisingly, Puntland and Jubaland leaders held a consultative conference in Garowe but did not issue an alternative electoral plan. Instead, the two state leaders pledged to travel to Mogadishu for further discussions with the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS).

Meanwhile, Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) announced that 10 political associations were successfully registered to compete in the state's 2021 Local Council elections. However, some political associations raised concern over plans to hold "pilot project" elections at three Local Councils. Another political association, *Mideeye*, issued a press statement welcoming Dhusamareb 3 communique, a move that was seen as challenging the Puntland government's policy approach in relations with the FGS.

This *Puntland Situation Report* also covers the Puntland Ministry of Health's concern over rising cases of COVID-19 and presents a critique of the Ministry's high fees for COVID-19 travel medical certificates. The certificate fees in Puntland is significantly higher than rates in Mogadishu or Hargeisa.

Finally, the *Report* focuses on the Puntland president's trip to Djibouti and media reports about a sunken ship at Bossaso port. The *Report* further notes the Puntland government's concerns over UAE-based P & O Ports company and its lack of progress on construction of Bossaso port. Furthermore, the *Report* focuses on the Djibouti government's possible investment interest in Gara'ad port project, a community-led construction initiative underway to become the state's second commercial port.

## 2. PEACE AND SECURITY

- 2.1 **Key Developments:** During August, a total of 35 fatalities (dead and wounded) were reported in Puntland and the regional fault-lines, representing an increase of 34.6% from total fatalities reported in July. About 54% of all fatalities were attributed to local/clan conflicts (84% of such incidents took place in Somaliland-controlled areas of Sool region), about 40% of attacks were attributed to the regional fault-lines (a major attack in Galmudug-controlled areas of Mudug region), and about 3% each attributed to counter-terrorism and violence within Puntland forces. There were no VEO attacks reported during the month; however, the Puntland Presidential Guard commander was killed during a security operation in Galkayo. Meanwhile, Puntland authorities strongly rejected media reports of a piracy attack off the Puntland coast.
- 2.1.1 **Sub-National Conflict:** There were no security incidents reported during August, with regard to Puntland-Somaliland or Puntland-Galmudug sub-national disputes. In recent months, Puntland-Galmudug relations have improved significantly, including increased security cooperation.
- 2.1.2 **Regional Fault-lines:** On Aug. 12, Somali media reported heavy fighting between Al Shabaab group and local militia near Shabelow town in Galmudug state, part of Bacaadweyn area, about 70km southwest of Galkayo.<sup>1</sup> Reports noted that 5 Al Shabaab fighters and 9 locals including a local Islamic school teacher were killed.<sup>2</sup> The next day, Galmudug state force and Somali National Army (SNA) units arrived as reinforcements.<sup>3</sup> Bacaadweyn town mayor Ahmed Dahir Mo'allim told reporters that Al Shabaab fighters kidnapped local elders which sparked armed fighting.<sup>4</sup>
- 2.1.3 **Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO):** There were no reported VEO incidents during the month, representing the second month this year without reported VEO incidents in Puntland.
- 2.1.4 **Counter-Terrorism:** On Aug. 5, ISIS group in Somalia confirmed the death of Khalid Jama Mohamed aka Osman abu Osama al-Muhajir. The fighter was killed by U.S. airstrikes in Bari region of Puntland, Somalia.<sup>5</sup> On Aug. 9, Puntland government forces including state police and Puntland Security Force (PSF) counter-terrorism forces raided locations in Galkayo and seized alcohol, drugs and other illegal substances.<sup>6</sup> On Aug. 25, PSF counter-terrorism force reportedly arrested Somali reporter Abdirahman Abdi Mohamed 'Hudayfi' in Bossaso. According to local media, the reporter's family members said they were not informed about the reason for the arrest or allowed contact.<sup>7</sup>
- 2.1.5 **Local/Clan Conflicts:** On Aug. 2, local civilian Shuaib Abdulkadir was killed in Garowe, and it was not confirmed if the killer was caught or what was motive for the killing.<sup>8</sup> On Aug. 9, Col. Osman Omar Mohamed, the commander of Puntland Presidential Guard, and a bodyguard were killed in clashes at Kabida compound, in Galkayo.<sup>9</sup> The two men were killed when fighting erupted after Puntland state forces raided local militia involved in criminal activities at Kabida compound. Local reports said, the militia 'attacked government forces' the next morning, and the commander was killed during the subsequent armed clashes.<sup>10</sup> On Aug. 9, Puntland government officials condemned the attack and vowed to bring the criminals to justice. According to Galkayo mayor Sahid Mohamud Ali, government forces have seized control over 'an area used by criminals' in Galkayo; the militia attacked government forces in retaliation after police raided and seized the compound.<sup>11</sup> On the same day, clan elders in Galkayo strongly condemned the killing of the government commander and called on the Puntland government to 'act strongly' against the criminals.<sup>12</sup> On Aug. 10, President Deni appointed Col. Abdikadir Jama Dirir as the new commander of the Puntland Presidential Guard; Col. Dirir is the former commander of Nugal Regional Police Division.<sup>13</sup> On Aug. 13, local media reports indicated that Puntland deployed additional forces to Galkayo, as security forces were reportedly preparing for battle against local militia and criminal networks, who were responsible for the killing of the commander.<sup>14</sup>

On Aug. 13, Somali media reported that 2 fighters were killed when clan violence erupted in Lafweyn village, part of Huddun district of Sool region.<sup>15</sup> The area is under control of Somaliland forces; on Aug. 14, Puntland vice president Ahmed ‘Karash’ Elmi Osman appealed for peace among rival clan militias in Huddun district.<sup>16</sup> On Aug. 15, Somaliland deployed forces to intervene in clan conflict in Jidbaale town, also in Sool region, where 6 persons were killed and 8 others wounded.<sup>17</sup> On Aug. 18, Puntland deputy finance minister Abdi ‘Qowdhan’ Ibrahim Warsame appealed for peace after clan fighting occurred in Adhi-adeye town, 30km west of Las Anod, an area under the control of Somaliland forces.<sup>18</sup> The deputy minister called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and for local clans to resolve matters peacefully. On Aug. 29, Somaliland officials including Information Minister Saleban Koore attended a peace conference among local clans at Adhi-adeye town, with representatives arriving from Huddun, Erigavo and Taleh districts.<sup>19</sup>

- 2.1.6 **Maritime Security:** On Aug. 20, international media reported that Somali piracy suspects had ‘hijacked’ a Panamanian-flagged vessel off the coast of Somalia, which was transporting fuel from UAE to Mogadishu port.<sup>20</sup> On Aug. 21, Puntland fisheries minister Mohamud Haji Salah rejected the media report, claiming that “pirates have not hijacked any vessel” and that Puntland troops “boarded the vessel” as part of a ‘routine security check’.<sup>21</sup> *Reuters* news agency reported that Somali “pirates” had hijacked the Panama-flagged vessel, which was traveling from UAE to Mogadishu.<sup>22</sup>
- 2.1.7 **Security Sector Governance:** On Aug. 1, a Puntland soldier named Abdi Osman Ali was killed in Garowe by another soldier. Local media reports noted that the attack was linked to “family issues” and the suspected killer was arrested.<sup>23</sup> On Aug. 26, Puntland Security Reform Committee led by Finance Minister Hassan Shire Abgal commenced registration of Puntland troops at security posts in Galkayo and wider Mudug region, including state police and Darawish forces.<sup>24</sup> On Aug. 29, Puntland media reported that the Security Reform Committee was facing obstacles to registration process for state forces in Mudug region.<sup>25</sup> On Aug. 30, President Deni appointed new judges to the three regional divisions of Puntland Military Court: for each regional military court, the president appointed a chief judge, a prosecutor and 3 judges.<sup>26</sup> President Deni nominated new judges to the Puntland Military Court in May 2020.

### 3. POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

#### 3.1 Puntland and Jubaland States Boycott Dhusamareb 3

3.1.1 **Key Developments:** During August, Federal Member States (FMS) of Puntland and Jubaland rejected attendance at Dhusamareb Conference 3. The conference was expected to be the third and last part of FGS-FMS dialogue on 2021 Somali national election. On the evening of Aug. 1, Puntland president Said Deni addressed people at Puntland Day celebration, which was held at Puntland State House in Galkayo, whereby he criticized the FGS for approving laws and commissions by the Council of Ministers, after Federal Parliament dismissed Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire in a surprise confidence vote on July 25.<sup>27</sup> President Deni also warned international oil companies against investing in oil projects in Somalia until the Somali people, federal and state governments have all “agreed to share” the country’s petroleum resources.<sup>28</sup> He repeated that Puntland government does not recognize the Petroleum Law approved by Federal Parliament. On Aug. 3, in a continuation of tense FGS-Puntland relations, Puntland civil aviation minister Osman Lugatoor told Radio Daljir that “no airplane was returned from Puntland airspace”; local media reported that a plane transporting khat from Kenya to Puntland was “ordered to return” by the FGS in Mogadishu.<sup>29</sup> Minister Lugatoor also announced that international flights to Puntland would resume on Aug. 10 for the first time since COVID-19 lockdown on Mar. 18, 2020.<sup>30</sup>

On Aug. 17, Puntland government issued a press release regarding its participation at Somali National Consultative Conference (Dhusamareb Conference 3).<sup>31</sup> Puntland set forth conditions, such as that Somalia should “have a new Prime Minister” and that the international community should be “guarantor” of any FGS-FMS agreement.<sup>32</sup> On Aug. 20, Dhusamareb Conference 3, attended by Somali President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo, and leaders of Galmudug, Hirshabelle and Southwest state governments, concluded with a proposal for 2021 Somali national elections, including 80,000 voters to elect 275 MPs of Lower House of Federal Parliament.<sup>33</sup> The next day, Puntland and Jubaland issued a joint statement that “they were not in any form part of the Conference, and were not represented at Dhusamareb Conference”.<sup>34</sup>

On Aug. 27, Puntland and Jubaland presidents concluded two-day consultative talks in Garowe and issued a joint press statement, calling for Somali national unity and announcing their trip to Mogadishu for talks with the FGS.<sup>35</sup> On Aug. 27, Hirshabelle, Galmudug and Southwest states issued a statement welcoming the Puntland-Jubaland leaders’ decision to engage in consultative talks with the Somali federal government in Mogadishu.<sup>36</sup> In yet another sign of disagreement of federalization issues, on Aug. 28, Puntland information minister Abdullahi Ali Tima’adde told reporters that the Media Law that was presented in Mogadishu “does not concern Puntland media”.<sup>37</sup>

3.1.2 **Analysis:** Dhusamareb Conference 3 issued an electoral model proposed by the FGS, and three states of Galmudug, Southwest and Hirshabelle. However, because Puntland and Jubaland were absent, there was pressure on the FGS to accommodate the political position of the dissenting states. The conference’s proposed electoral model envisaged a more democratic exercise of the Somali people’s voting power by increasing delegate-voters from 51 (in 2016) to 301 (in 2020/2021), by forming voting blocks of 3 to 5 seats together (900 to 1,500 voters per seat), and assigning the federal parliamentary elections to take place at least three districts per FMS. While Puntland and Jubaland rejected the conference, the two states’ consultations in Garowe did not issue an alternative electoral model; instead, the two leaders opted to travel for talks to Mogadishu, whereby they are expected to engage in talks with President Farmajo over the 2021 electoral model. The two leaders’ anticipated trip to Mogadishu is a welcome development, as the FGS-FMS discussions on 2021 elections has dragged on for months.

- 3.1.3 **Forecast:** While all FMS leaders did not attend Dhusamareb Conference 3, it is widely expected that the conference communique shall form the basis for finalized negotiations on the electoral model between FGS and FMS leaders, at the upcoming conference in Mogadishu.

## 3.2 10 Political Associations Registered for 2021 Puntland Local Government Elections

- 3.2.1 **Key Developments:** On Aug. 1, Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) announced that 10 political associations in Puntland had concluded phase two of registration process.<sup>38</sup> In June, TPEC approved 17 political associations for phase one. On Aug. 15, TPEC announced that 10 registered political associations have qualified to partake in the planned Local Council elections in 2021.<sup>39</sup> The major political associations include *Kaah* (led by President Said Deni), *Horseed* (led by former Puntland president and Senator Abdirahman Farole), *Mideeye* (which has many former Puntland ministers among its founders), and *Mustaqbal*, which is led by a Puntland parliamentarian.

On Aug. 16, Puntland political association *Mustaqbal* chairman Mohamed Sibad, a Puntland state MP, questioned the legality of the election commission's plans to hold Local Council elections in three districts as "pilot projects" for the state's democratization process. On Aug. 22, Puntland political association '*Mideeye*' ('*The Uniter*') issued a formal press statement expressing support for Dhusamareb Conference 3, a national conference on 2021 federal elections, which Puntland leaders declined to attend. *Mideeye* press statement was met with widespread public backlash, with Puntland supporters accusing *Mideeye* of lobbying for support from the FGS and undermining Puntland authority, while *Mideeye* supporters claimed the political association's right to issue policy statements on state and national affairs.<sup>40</sup>

- 3.2.2 **Analysis:** Puntland state embarked on the democratization process early during the term of President Deni. TPEC has successfully concluded registering 10 political associations to compete in the state's upcoming Local Council elections, slated for early 2021. However, some political associations have expressed concern over plans to hold Local Council elections in three districts as "pilot projects"; the political association is concerned over the process of deciding which three districts, and the idea that "pilot project" implies that the Local Council elections may not go forward after elections in the three selected districts. TPEC has a responsibility to explain to political associations and the wider public the process for identifying which three districts, and for what reasons. Furthermore, as a matter of principle, *Mideeye* as a registered political association, has the right to share its political views with the public in a manner that is legal and responsible; however, it is important that TPEC establishes the guidelines and clarifies the role of registered political associations in relation to federal-level affairs.
- 3.2.3 **Forecast:** Puntland state's attempt at democratization is commendable and given the early start, there is likelihood that the process – which already enjoys the support of state government, political associations and the wider public – will garner support from donor communities as the state prepares to hold Local Council elections in 2021.

## 4. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

### 4.1 Concern in Puntland over 'Rising COVID-19 Cases'

- 4.1.1 **Key Developments:** On Aug. 11, Puntland Ministry of Health director-general Dr. Abdirizak Hersi Hassan told reporters in Garowe that the Health Ministry is "concerned about rising COVID-19 cases". He further advised the public to observe health precautions.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the director advised travellers to visit the state lab to obtain travel medical certificates for COVID-19 test. On Aug. 14, Puntland media reported that travellers were concerned about the cost of COVID-19 travel certificate in Puntland; managed by the Ministry of Health, the medical travel certificate costs \$60.00 USD per traveller.<sup>42</sup> By comparison, in Somaliland the fee is \$12.00 USD and in Mogadishu the fee is \$30.00

USD per traveller. On Aug. 15, Puntland state minister Mohamed Hassan Isse died at a hospital in Garowe from complications related to COVID-19 pandemic, according to media reports.<sup>43</sup> He became the second Cabinet member to die from COVID-19 in Puntland in the past two months. On Aug. 16, a group of Somali doctors in Puntland expressed their concern over public misperceptions of COVID-19 pandemic and worried that the pandemic may spread further in Puntland due to public unawareness or disregard for health precautions.<sup>44</sup>

- 4.1.2 **Analysis:** It is not a coincidence that, as Somalia eased travel restrictions and lifted the ban on international flights, cases of COVID-19 increased in Puntland. Internationally, public health experts have voiced their concerns about easing restrictions not supported by science, as they warn this could lead to a second spike in COVID-19 cases.<sup>45</sup> It is unclear what scientific rationale the Federal Government has used to justify the re-opening of international flights. What is clear, however, is the lack of cooperation and coordination between the FGS and FMS in battling COVID-19 together. Since the outbreak, there have been incidences of cooperation with the FGS sending supplies to Puntland and other states but there has not been a lasting concerted effort by the FGS and FMS to jointly combat the spread of COVID-19 or sufficiently prepare once restrictions are eased. Each has implemented ad-hoc restrictions on their constituents, which have rarely aligned or have been effectively enforced. Puntland imposed its most strict restrictions from March up until May. There was a city-wide nighttime curfew in the month of April, as there were a significant number of cases. In May, which coincided with Islamic holy month of Ramadan and the celebration of Eid drew closer – the most active consumer season – the curfew restrictions were lifted. This was an essential boost to the economy but it set a trend that has not been reversed. Since then restrictions have continued to lax and the threat of COVID-19 has been downplayed. As the positive cases of COVID-19 started to decrease nationwide, so too did the threat of it within the sub-conscious of the public and more troubling the politicians. The various Dhusamareb Conferences attended by the FGS and FMS leaders underscored how leaders did not view COVID-19 as a public health threat anymore, as many of the leaders did not follow any of the guidelines of social distancing; ironically, it is the same guidelines that government public health institutions continue to advocate for. The focus on the national elections should not have eclipsed the threat of the global pandemic and the example that should be set by the leaders of Somalia.

An FGS decree stated all international travelers would have to undergo a COVID-19 test before leaving Somalia. This was largely accepted throughout Somalia, even in Somaliland as this stipulation followed international standards. But how this was implemented underscored how fragmented the approach to COVID-19 has been in Somalia. Despite equipment such as COVID-19 tests being donated by World Health Organization (WHO) via the FGS to Puntland, the state still charged its residents exorbitant fees compared to rest of the nation. Puntland charged the highest fee within the country, which was widely publicized and condemned for charging more than double the rate of Mogadishu and five times the rate in Hargeisa. Citizens were perplexed as to how the Puntland government could justify \$60 for COVID-19 tests. Many Puntland residents took to social media to voice their discontent for what some described as “predatory business practices”.<sup>46</sup> The COVID-19 tests are mainly being utilized by international travelers leaving the country, many of whom have been stuck for months waiting for the flights to reopen. Rather than address the controversial issue, the Puntland government has not responded to why they charged \$60 per test. Rather, the government has opted to remain quiet. The opening of flights risks an increase in COVID-19 cases, which could be worse than the initial outbreak as Somalia largely quarantined itself from the world early on, as a means of prevention. But as Somalia opens back up again with fragmented approaches, lax restrictions, profit driven policies and a leadership that does not follow its own advocacy, it is unlikely to create an environment suitable to combating COVID-19.

- 4.1.3 **Forecast:** It is no coincidence that the fragmented approach to combating COVID-19 occurred during a period of uncertainty and polarization over the national elections. Although the global pandemic could have been an opportunity to improve FGS-FMS cooperation, more specifically Puntland, the opportunity was not capitalized on. It is unclear how the FGS and FMS will work



together to battle COVID-19 going forward, as the contentious issue of national elections still has not been agreed upon.

## 4.2 As Djibouti Shows Interest in Gara'ad Port, Bossaso Port Controversy Continues

**4.2.1 Key Developments:** On Aug. 11, Puntland president Said Deni and a government delegation arrived at Djibouti City for talks with Djiboutian government leaders and met with Djiboutian President Ismail Omar Guelleh the next day, where discussions focused on cooperation in trade and Gara'ad port development.<sup>47</sup> On Aug. 5, Puntland state MP Abdiaziz Saeed Ga'amey told media that DP World subsidiary company P & O Ports "breached its contractual obligations" in its Bossaso port agreement, signed with Puntland state.<sup>48</sup> On Aug. 5, VOA Somali Service reported that a ship transporting cement from Dubai to Bossaso port sunk and blocked the entryway to the port, quoting a Puntland businessman, Barwaqo cement company director Ismail Said Hussein 'Kutubaweyne'.<sup>49</sup> The next day, Puntland deputy ports minister Yasin Artan told the media that "there are no problems at Bossaso port" and denied reports of sunken ship.<sup>50</sup> On Aug. 10, Somali media reported that Puntland President Deni requested the Djibouti government's assistance with dredging for Bossaso port, although the report could not be independently verified.<sup>51</sup>

**4.2.2 Analysis:** The Puntland government has prioritized development and lauded the Gara'ad Port project as a testament to state development led by a community initiative. The visit to Djibouti by President Deni was spurred partly by the growing interest of the Djibouti government in the Gara'ad port project. The meetings with the Djiboutian government may have resulted in more interest, but it is unclear how interested the Djibouti government is in investing in Gara'ad Port. On the other hand, another port development project inherited by President Deni has continued to receive negative publicity, as there have been no significant positive developments since its inception. Just last month, Puntland Minister of Ports and Marine Transportation Mohamed Abdi 'Majino' addressed Puntland parliament and stated that the UAE-based company had delayed on meeting its deliverables and that they would either implement their contractual duties or forfeit their rights to the port. The minister stated that in the months to come the Puntland administration would visit UAE to sit down with P&O Ports' company leadership to discuss the future of the port deal. The visit to parliament by the minister and his remarks came after months of mounting public pressure led by several parliamentarians opposing the port deal.

The statement by Puntland parliamentarian Ga'amey against the Bossaso port deal came on the heels of the VOA report alleging that a sunken ship blocked entryway to the Bossaso port. The MP's allegations of breach of contract are serious, but it is one that has been echoed by other state MPs in the past. The denial by the Puntland government of VOA's report seemed to put an end to what the government dubbed 'unfounded allegations.' But the media reports suggesting that the Puntland government requested assistance in port dredging from Djibouti only five days after the report of the sunken ship raised more questions than answers, as it caused citizens to question the timing of the two reports. The Puntland government's handling of the Bossaso port deal in the crucial months to come will likely have huge implications to Bari region's socio-economic stability.

**4.2.3 Forecast:** It is unclear how interested the Djiboutian government is with the Gara'ad port project. This will likely manifest itself in the coming months. On the other hand, the planned visit to UAE by the Puntland government to discuss the Bossaso port deal will likely not occur in the next reporting period, as the Puntland leadership is focused on the upcoming national elections process.

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*New Access International (NAI Somalia), founded in 2012, is a research and development agency based in Somalia. NAI specializes in research, development, and advocacy. NAI Somali Law and Policy Program publishes the monthly Puntland Situation Report and the Somali Federalization Monitor.*

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