



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During May 2020, Puntland State of Somalia continued efforts to improve security, battle against the spread of COVID-19 pandemic and manage relief after flash floods in Qardo. Puntland security forces foiled two bombing attacks in Bossaso and arrested a number of suspects during security operations, concentrated in parts of Bari region. Violent extremist organizations (VEO) carried out a military-style assault on Puntland forces base near Af-urur army base in Bari region and carried out a deadly suicide bombing attack in Galkayo, whereby the target, the late Mudug Governor Ahmed Muse Nur, and four others were killed.

Puntland and Galmudug officials intervened in a local clan conflict that was brewing near an outpost west of Galkayo, where local tensions were rising after fatal militia clashes. Instead of confrontational policies, the two neighboring Somali sub-national sides seemed to focus on cooperation to bring together clan elders from the warring parties and commence a reconciliation process to resolve the new conflict. This was a commendable step in the right direction, as Puntland-Galmudug security cooperation in Galkayo would likely benefit overall peace and stability in Mudug region.

The dispute between the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Puntland state continued, despite positive overtures from the FGS, including allocating \$1million USD for Qardo floods relief and airlifting aid supplies to Puntland. However, Puntland senior official's remarks that the aid "came from UNHCR" underscored the behind-the-scenes infighting that was continuing despite positive developments of cooperation in COVID-19 prevention and disaster relief between the two parties. Meanwhile, the dispute between the president and vice president of Puntland threw the state into the midst of a "constitutional crisis" – as some media organisations have claimed. Even after 21 years, Puntland state does not have a Constitutional Court, and therefore, the parliamentary leadership reportedly invited titled elders to mediate between the president and vice president of Puntland. This development became indicative of Puntland state's lack of clear legal and constitutional foundations that can adjudicate between different branches of government, or resolve disputes within the executive branch.

Also, during May, the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) announced plans to commence phase two of political association registrations. Although the decision seems untimely due amidst COVID-19 concerns, still the Puntland public has shown support for the political associations and the democratization process in general. This month's report also showcases that Puntland authorities have struggled to contain the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, many of the lockdown measures that were imposed in late March were removed, including the import and sale of *khat* drug trade. The report overviews the challenges state authorities have faced in the fight against the spread of COVID-19 and lays out brief recommendations for how Puntland could enhance its prevention efforts in the short and mid-term.

Finally, the report overviews issues related to the transparency and management of aid relief intended for Qardo floods victims. The report covers the how the donations were managed to support victims of the flooding. The report also presents the government's concerns over the aid committee's management and reviews the state's lack of long-term disaster management strategy. This is perhaps the biggest flaw, as with each emergency, a new ad-hoc aid committee is set up with no regulatory framework, and as such the committee works in secrecy and issues financial statements that do not get evaluated by a third-party assessment, leaving space for mismanagement. The report notes similarities in public concerns over the role and transparency of aid committees in flood victims in Qardo and cyclone victims in Gardafui region.

2. PEACE AND SECURITY

2.1 **Key Developments:** During the reporting month, there were a total of 42 fatalities (dead and wounded) reported in Puntland and in the regional fault-lines, doubling from 21 fatalities reported in April. About 62% of fatalities were attributed to regional fault-line areas, 24% were attributed to VEO attacks in Puntland, 12% were attributed to clan conflict, and 2% attributed to counter-terrorism operations. Puntland forces also foiled two bomb attacks and arrested at least 4 suspects including “head of ISIS in Bari region” in three security operations conducted during the month. Puntland and Galmudug officials signed a ceasefire agreement after clan clashes in Galkayo, while pledging to increase security cooperation at the sub-national level.

2.1.1 **Violence Against Women:** On May 21, Puntland High Court issued a verdict in the rape-murder case of 12-year-old Najma Abdulkadir Hassan, who was violently raped in Burtinle on Mar. 2, 2019, and on Jun. 18, 2019, in Garowe as a result of the violent attack.¹ The High Court suspended the lower court’s decision and convicted and sentenced 3 men – Jama Mohamed Ibrahim, Abdihakim Mohamed Abdirahman and Mohamed Abdirizak Hassan – to pay 50 camels in blood compensation, 5 years in jail and \$20,000 USD in court expenses, according to Puntland deputy prosecutor-general Mohamed Hared.

Sub-National Conflict: On May 16, Puntland police in Mudug region announced that they seized a vehicle stolen from Galmudug and pledged to “increase security cooperation between Galmudug and Puntland”.² On May 27, Puntland and Galmudug ministers, along with federal parliamentarians, held a meeting to discuss security cooperation in Galkayo district and wider Mudug region.³ The two state administrations agreed to strengthen “joint security cooperation”. Galmudug security minister Ahmed Fiqi and Puntland interior minister Mohamed Dhabanad attended the meeting.⁴

2.1.2 **Regional Fault-Lines:** On May 18, Somali National Army (SNA) forces ‘Danab’ reported a security operation at Wargalo town, about 60km south of Galkayo, whereby one Al Shabaab suspect was arrested.⁵ On May 23, fighting erupted in South Galkayo after clan militia attacked a base used by Danab special forces. Local media reported at least 8 persons were killed and 18 others wounded.⁶ The fighting erupted after clan militia demanded Danab forces release a terrorism suspect, whom local militia said was a “businessman”; Danab forces arrested the suspect in South Galkayo a day earlier.⁷ On May 26, Galmudug security minister Ahmed Fiqi announced that the state government had taken over control of 60 militia and 5 armed trucks, who were the armed militia that attacked Danab special forces base in South Galkayo three days earlier.⁸ The armed group was reportedly “integrated” into Galmudug state forces.

2.1.3 **Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO):** On May 15, Al Shabaab militants attacked Puntland troops at Bali-khadar village in Bari region, near Af-urur army base. At least 2 soldiers and 3 militants were killed in the overnight battle.⁹ On May 17, at least 5 persons including Puntland’s Mudug governor Ahmed Muse Nur were killed in a suicide bombing attack, when the governor’s vehicle was hit by a vehicle-borne explosion near Mudug regional offices in Galkayo.¹⁰ Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the attack. Puntland interior minister Mohamed Dhabanad blamed terror group for the attack, and Federal Government and Galmudug officials also condemned the attack.¹¹

On May 24, unconfirmed report said “60 Al Shabaab fighters” had travelled by boat to Hul Anod coastal town, in Puntland’s eastern Gardafui region.¹² The fighters reportedly travelled by boat from Harardhere coastal district in Galmudug, south of Puntland. Government officials did not publicly comment on the story. On May 29, the website *Intelligence Briefs* reported that 60 Al Shabaab militants arrived at Hul-Anod coast, north-eastern Puntland.¹³ The report alleges that the Al Shabaab militants arrived in parts of Puntland’s Bari region where ISIS group is active and the two groups

“launch attacks on each other as well as on government targets”. Puntland government has neither confirmed nor denied the story.

2.1.4 Counter-Terrorism: On May 9, Puntland forces seized a vehicle laden with explosives in Bossaso based on intelligence information;¹⁴ authorities said one suspect was killed in crossfire and one suspect was arrested for investigation.¹⁵ Local authorities blamed ISIS branch in Somalia for the foiled attack and police commanders said that Puntland security forces arrested “ISIS head of operations in Bari region”.¹⁶ On May 9, speaking from Qardo, President Deni told reporters that the government commends security forces for “foiling an attack in Bossaso”.¹⁷ He commented that government forces had “increased security operations and awareness in Galkayo”, and that he was “pleased” with joint security cooperation in Mudug region between Puntland and Galmudug forces.¹⁸

On May 11, Puntland security forces raided homes in Bossaso and arrested 3 suspects with alleged links to militant groups Al Shabaab and ISIS.¹⁹ On May 13, PSF counter-terrorism force announced that its soldiers raided locations in Bossaso and seized a cache of explosives, including suicide vests; there were no reports of arrests during the operation.²⁰ On May 20, Puntland police in Bossaso announced that they foiled a bombing plan after local police disarmed a roadside bomb. No one was hurt or arrested during the operation.²¹ On May 25, Puntland state police led by Bari regional police chief Col. Hussein Ali Mohamud conducted security operations in Iskushuban, Toga Jacayl, Toga Canjel, and Gabin valley areas of Bari region and arrested a “number of ISIS fighters”, including the “driver of ISIS leader Abdulkadir Mumin”;²² the commander did not share any details of how many suspects were arrested or if there were any reports of casualties during the police operation.²³

2.1.5 Local/Clan Conflicts: On May 3, Puntland forces stationed at Teraage security post west of Galkayo were attacked overnight by unknown militia, with local media attributing the attack to ‘clan militia from Galmudug side’.²⁴ At least 1 soldier was reported dead and 3 others wounded on Puntland side, while 1 fighter was killed from the attacking militia. Puntland’s Mudug Governor Ahmed Muse Nur rejected media speculation and said that “the attack was intended to disturb the peace and cooperation between Puntland and Galmudug”.²⁵

On May 9, a group of armed men raided and seized control over a convoy of trucks intended to do roadworks in Bargaal, of Puntland’s eastern Gardafui region. The unpaved roads of the remote region were damaged by recent heavy rains. At least 1 person was wounded in the attack; the armed group “returned” the trucks to local elders and complained over “corruption” by Puntland government’s Gardafui aid relief committee.²⁶

On May 12, officials from Puntland, Galmudug and SNA 21st Division held “reconciliation meeting” between local clans hailing from the two states, as part of wider reconciliation efforts in Mudug region.²⁷ On May 19, new fighting was reported between Puntland and Galmudug forces in Teraage village west of Galkayo. It was the second time the two sides clashed since May 3.²⁸ On May 20, Puntland and Galmudug officials met at Teraage outpost west of Galkayo and agreed to a “ceasefire” after two clashes at Teraage area.²⁹ Puntland interior minister Mohamed Dhabanad, Galmudug officials and federal senator Abdi Qeybdiid attended the meeting and the two states signed an agreement to stop the new round of fighting near Teraage outpost.³⁰

2.1.6 Security Sector Governance: On May 5, Puntland Presidential Guard commander Col. Barkhad Abdullahi Yusuf announced that he had resigned from his position, but did not elaborate as to the reasons for his resignation.³¹ On May 12, an unknown number of Puntland soldiers “escaped” from Af-urur army base in Bari region.³² The new recruits had recently completed training at Horgoble camp in Qardo and reportedly escaped with new AK-47 rifles. Af-urur army base is the main base for Puntland troops in the frontline war against Al Shabaab militants in the Golis Mountains.³³

On May 16, President Deni appointed new judges to the state military court with six judges led by chief judge Col. Mohamud Abdi Mohamed and military prosecutor Col. Mohamud Farah Mohamed.

The military court is responsible for rulings on crimes committed by security forces and terrorism cases in Puntland.³⁴ On May 17, President Deni told a press conference in Garowe that “Puntland is under attack by different groups” and criticized the international community for withholding support to Puntland in its fight against terrorism. The president’s speech came hours after Mudug governor was killed by a suicide bomber in Galkayo (*see: PSR May 2020, Section 2.1.4*).³⁵ The president also noted that “suspects” will be brought to court for involvement in the suicide bombing that killed the late Nugal governor Abdisalam Gujir in late March.³⁶

2.2 Security Forecast

2.2.1 **Violence Against Women:** The Puntland High Court’s decision to convict 3 men on charges of rape and murder of a 12-year-old girl was on the right path. The court sentenced the convicted men to five years in prison, a verdict that is very different from the High Court’s decision on the rape-murder case of 13-year-old victim Aisha Ilyas case. On Aug. 22, 2019, the High Court upheld the regional court’s conviction of three men in the Ilyas case, who were sentenced to death; the state executed two of the three convicted men on Feb. 11, 2020. The high court should share with the public the legal reasoning for its rulings in the two above cases.

2.2.2 **Sub-National Conflict:** The intervention of officials from Galmudug and Puntland in clan clashes west of Galkayo may result in bringing the clan conflict to an end. The approach of the state officials signals a transformation in relations between Galmudug and Puntland administrations, which has been strained since mid-2019. If the two states work together, they could further improve the security of the region and its capital Galkayo. Clan conflicts in rural parts of Mudug region have caused conflict to spread to Galkayo in the past, especially when the relations between Galmudug and Puntland have been strained. If the two states and their security apparatuses in Mudug region continue their cooperation, security in the region and more specifically Galkayo is likely to improve.

2.2.3 **Regional Fault-lines:** The Galmudug administration has made concerted efforts to improve security within the state’s jurisdictional boundaries. The skirmish between Danab forces / Galmudug police and clan militia loyal to a terrorism suspect indicates that the new Galmudug security minister is not swayed by clan sentiment. The quick subduing of the clan militia underlines Galmudug administration’s commitment to demobilizing militia and establishing state forces.

2.2.4 **VEO/Counter-Terrorism:** The attack on Governor Nur was a major blow to Puntland’s security reform process. It was the second governor to be killed within two months. A plan to assassinate the late governor was foiled in April, due to security cooperation between Galmudug and Puntland forces. The attack in Af Urur base in Bari region signals that Al Shabaab is not letting up in their fight against Puntland. But as Al Shabaab heightens their high-profile attacks on Puntland targets, they are also fighting ISIS in Bari region with a reported deployment of forces in the Al Miskaat mountains in Bari region, a stronghold of the ISIS group in Puntland. Fighting on two fronts will likely overstretch Al Shabaab fighters and occupy time and resources.

Despite high profile attacks by VEOs in Puntland, the counter-terrorism institutions also conducted notable raids and arrests, in which security forces were able to recover large caches of explosives and weapons. Puntland forces were also able to make some high-profile arrests of alleged ISIS members. Furthermore, the Puntland government increased operations in areas of close proximity to ISIS strongholds in Bari region. The arrests, seizures and killings of alleged VEO operatives are indicative of Puntland’s increased operational capacity following a number of VEO attacks throughout the state in the past two months. It is likely that security operations will continue on in the next reporting, however the outcomes of these operations is uncertain.

2.2.5 **Local/Clan Conflicts:** The clan conflict west of Galkayo between clans hailing from Galmudug and Puntland has been reoccurring over the past year, with attacks escalating throughout 2019. Despite several attempts, local elders from the respective clans have been unable to arbitrate the conflict

successfully thus far. Clan conflicts in the Galkayo area between clans hailing from Galmudug and Puntland has been reoccurring over the past year, with attacks escalating throughout 2019. Despite several attempts, local elders from the respective clans have been unable to arbitrate the conflict successfully thus far.

Local conflicts in Gardafui region are uncommon, as the remote coastal region has enjoyed relative stability throughout Somalia's tumultuous post-central government era. The conflict is reportedly due to grievances that local communities hold against a committee managing donation to fund construction of an access road in the mountainous area. In April, corruption allegations were levied against the committee by residents in the region. It is likely that the grievances were not addressed adequately, leading to a shooting and robbery. This incident will likely not result in continued conflict, however, if the allegations of corruption are not investigated and dealt with, conflict may return to the peaceful region.

2.2.6 Security Sector Governance: Since the presidential elections in 2019, the Puntland administration has prioritized security sector reform, with the commencement of trainings and the establishment of biometric system being among key accomplishments. However, as Puntland takes steps forward to improve security governance, it has also taken steps backwards. The new military recruits that went AWOL after being stationed in the Galgala area, is a setback to the Puntland administration's security efforts. The new soldiers left with equipment provided by the Puntland government, which is a blow to the state's resources and to the government's efforts to curb corruption. Despite the challenges, the administration continued to make changes to its security and judicial apparatuses, selecting a number of new military court judges. Throughout 2019, Puntland has made several changes to its security institutions as part of its reform process, but changes at the helms of these institutions does not necessarily equate to improved capacity and reform in the governance of these institutions. This will require the formulation and implementation of policies that reform the institutional governance that is increasingly archaic and increasingly non-effective. It is unlikely that Puntland will embark on these policies in the next reporting period.

3. POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

3.1 FGS-Puntland Tensions Play Out Amidst Crises

3.1.1 Key Developments: On May 1, Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) ministerial delegation arrived in Qardo to join the Puntland president and his delegation, who were already in Qardo to oversee the aftermath of the flash flooding that caused fatalities and major property destruction.³⁷ The FGS delegation's arrival was seen as an opportunity to restart cooperation between the two parties. The next day, however, Puntland interior minister Mohamed Dhabanad told reporters in Qardo that "reports that federal officials brought aid from the Federal Government is not the case; the aid came from UNHCR".³⁸ On May 2, UNHCR Somalia Country Representative Johann Siffointe wrote on Twitter social media app, to respond to the Puntland minister:

*"#UNHCR is pleased to support efforts of the federal gvt and Puntland state in response to the Qardo flood emergency situation. On allocation of an initial 920 family essential kits by UNHCR, the federal government promptly took responsibility and organized the airlifting of the family kits to Garowe. UNHCR will continue to remain engaged in the flood response under the leadership of the Federal Government of Somalia and in close coordination with the Puntland Federal Member State."*³⁹

On May 11, Somali Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khairi, Puntland President Said Deni and members of international community, including ambassadors from donor nations, held a virtual meeting to discuss coordinated assistance for flood victims in Qardo, where some 8,000 families were affected and government estimated about \$40million USD of damage to homes, businesses, and farms.⁴⁰ On May 18, FGS delegation led by Fisheries Minister Abdullahi Bidhaan landed at an airstrip in

Buhodle district (an area claimed by both Somaliland and Puntland) to deliver COVID-19 supplies to local communities.⁴¹ On May 23, President Deni told BBC Somali Service that the FGS is “undermining the federal system and not working with the Federal Member States”,⁴² that “unknown forces are using Al Shabaab to destabilize Puntland” and that “Puntland wants the national elections to be held on time”.⁴³ During same interview, President Deni claimed that the Federal Government “had bypassed Somaliland government and is dealing with local clans directly to turn the public against the [Somaliland] government”.⁴⁴

3.1.2 **Analysis:** The long-running political dispute between the FGS and Puntland did not subside during May, and even as major crises of COVID-19 pandemic and Qardo flash floods hit, the two sides seemingly continued to disagree publicly over policy matters. The FGS should be commended for allocating \$1million USD in emergency relief support for victims of Qardo flash floods.⁴⁵ FGS ministers also accompanied aid planes that arrived at Garowe International Airport, as part of continued engaging between FGS and Puntland authorities. However, when the Puntland interior minister claimed that “the aid came from UNHCR”, and a UNHCR senior officer responded publicly, it became indicative of the behind-the-scenes infighting that continued unabated. In a moment of crisis, it was unwise for Puntland officials to draw negative attention to the seemingly positive role the FGS was playing, with regard to Qardo floods response and COVID-19 prevention cooperation. When the FGS fisheries minister accompanied COVID-19 supplies airlifted to Buhodle, Puntland government’s response that the FGS “bypassed Somaliland” could be misinterpreted as Puntland accepting latter’s *de facto* legality over Buhodle district. The FGS facilitated aid supplies to be airlifted to Qardo and Buhodle; in one case, Puntland claimed that the aid was not from FGS, and in the other case, Puntland claimed that the FGS had “bypassed” Somaliland government. It seems plausible that the Puntland administration’s policy was not underpinned by a comprehensive communications strategy, regarding evolving relations with the FGS, as conflicting messages from Puntland weakened the state’s claims against FGS interference and politicization of aid.

3.1.3 **Forecast:** The FGS and the Federal Member States, including Puntland, are expected to hold a consultative conference over the coming weeks. Discussions for conference venue include Garowe, Galkayo, Baidoa, and Mogadishu. Somalia’s international partners have also strongly called for federal-state conference to be held to agree on an election plan and timetable for 2020/2021 election.

3.2 President and Vice President Dispute in Puntland

3.2.1 **Key Developments:** On May 15, Puntland Vice President Ahmed ‘Karash’ Elmi Osman issued a decree “suspending” President Deni’s nomination of Presidential Guard commander and deputy commander. The vice president stated that the president “did not consult” with him before the nomination.⁴⁶ One week earlier, Presidential Guard force commander Col. Barkhad Abdullahi Yusuf resigned from his position without reason.⁴⁷ On May 22, President Deni issued a minor reshuffle of Cabinet ministers and replaced 8 members of Cabinet, including two ministers.⁴⁸ New ministers were nominated for the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, and Ministry of Information, Telecommunication, Culture and Heritage, while deputy ministers for appointed for: Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Security; Ministry of Petroleum, Mining and Water; Ministry of Agriculture and Environment; Ministry of Labor, Youth and Sports; and Ministry of Planning, Economic Development and International Cooperation.

On May 23, Vice President Karash issued a letter to speaker of Puntland Parliament,⁴⁹ noting that he was “not consulted” regarding President Deni’s Cabinet appointments the day earlier and therefore the Cabinet reshuffle was “in violation of Article 80 and Article 81” of the Puntland Constitution.⁵⁰ On May 24, the Puntland vice president confirmed to BBC Somali Service that there was a “dispute” between him and President Deni over recent Cabinet appointments.⁵¹ On May 27, Puntland Non-state Actors Association (PUNSAA),⁵² a civil society umbrella group, issued a statement noting that President Deni and Vice President Karash “had pledged” to meet and discuss the two leaders’

disagreement over recent Cabinet appointments. PUNSAA Chairperson Faisal Ahmed Warsame told BBC Somali Service that the public will hear “good news soon”.⁵³

- 3.2.2 **Analysis:** By the end of May, local media was reporting that the state’s parliamentary leadership had “requested” titled elders (*Issimo*) of Puntland “to mediate” between President Deni and Vice President Karash. It was the second misunderstanding between the two Puntland leaders; in Aug. 2019, the two leaders disagreed over President Deni’s nomination of Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) members, but that dispute was resolved quietly. The wider disagreement is rooted in a number of factors, including the working relationship between the president and vice president. Other factors include lack of a State Constitutional Court that can adjudicate between the two parties, the fact that the two leaders were not elected on a “single ticket” because Puntland does not have a multiparty political system, and, the state constitution vests executive power with the office of the president, while reserving a minor role for the office of vice president. Deni and Karash are not the first president and vice president of Puntland to engage in disputes; however, it is the first administration whose disagreement has become public within the first year of office. It is not clear what mediating role the titled elders can play, given that the matter is a constitutional dispute and not a cultural one; however, the case brings to the forefront concerns over Puntland state’s political maturity after 21 years since its formation. The state would be wise to strengthen its institutional governance to protect checks and balances and empower oversight mechanisms.
- 3.2.3 **Forecast:** The dispute between President Deni and Vice President Karash is likely to be resolved in the next month, and depending on how a resolution is reached, the dispute may resume if the core issues are not addressed adequately and conclusively.

3.3 Puntland Pushes Forth Democratization Process

- 3.3.1 **Key Developments:** On May 17, Puntland Parliament’s ordinary session agenda was shared with local media and included review of laws, new agreements and accountability with the government.⁵⁴ The parliamentary agenda looked similar to the agenda from November 2019 (*see: PSR November 2019*). On May 27, Puntland electoral body TPEC announced that the state’s political associations should submit second phase conditions to meet registration requirements.⁵⁵ The commission’s declaration reneged on an earlier announcement postponing phase two due to COVID-19 concerns; however, the commission has announced that phase two conditions should be submitted by June 22, 2020, at the latest. On May 28, local media reported that a “protest” occurred in Bender Beila district of Puntland after locals demonstrated against registration of Kaah political association (the administration’s political association).⁵⁶ However, Kaah representatives have rejected reports that any party officials were in Bender Beila.
- 3.3.2 **Analysis:** The Puntland Parliament’s ordinary 46th session opens on June 15. The parliament’s proposed agenda is very similar to the agenda of last session, when a dispute led to armed clashes at parliament hall, followed subsequently by the unseating of then-Speaker Abdihakim Mohamed Ahmed ‘Dhoobo’. Some reports suggested that parliamentarians are “frustrated” with some Cabinet ministers and were reportedly pressuring the government to reshuffle the Cabinet.

With regard to the democratization process, TPEC has continued to advance the process towards Local Government elections; however, COVID-19 pandemic poses a serious public health risk and the timing of TPEC announcement seems rushed. Phase two registration could have been delayed for another month or two, ensuring that COVID-19 threat is eliminated or at least on a downward trend. With COVID-19 cases on the rise in Puntland, it seems unwise for TPEC to push political associations to phase two of registration. The media reports that Bender Beila residents “protested” against Kaah political association have been rejected by Kaah officials, who denied that their representatives were in the district or planned to open an office. Whatever the case, with political associations opening offices across the regions and districts in Puntland, it seems that if there was

any protest, it was not against the democratization process as a whole, but more likely residents expressing disappointment over local issues to the political association linked to the government.

3.3.3 **Forecast:** Puntland Parliament's 46th ordinary session is anticipated to challenge the administration on a number of areas, while it is entirely plausible that the administration and parliamentarians reach an agreement prior to the parliament's opening session. Puntland electoral commission TPEC is expected to continue finalizing phase two of political association registrations and, so far, the Puntland public has indicated growing support for implementing the democratization process.

4. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

4.1 Puntland Struggles to Combat COVID-19 Pandemic

Key Developments: Puntland state continued to struggle against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, with increasing number of infections and high-profile cases announced throughout the month. On May 1, the state recorded its first confirmed death related to COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁷ On May 28, Puntland COVID-19 Prevention Committee announced that total cases in Puntland reached 185 persons, with 16 recoveries and 6 deaths, according to the Health Ministry.⁵⁸ On May 7, Puntland health minister Jama Farah Hassan confirmed that at least two Cabinet ministers were COVID-19 positive.⁵⁹ On May 10, Puntland commerce minister Abdullahi Abdi Hersi confirmed to media that he was COVID-19 positive and had self-quarantined.⁶⁰ On May 22, Puntland ordered a special plane to transport another Cabinet minister, environment minister Ismail Dirie Gamadid, to a hospital in Mogadishu.⁶¹ The minister was one of the first Puntland officials to test positive for COVID-19. Three days later, on May 25, Minister Gamadid died at a hospital in Mogadishu.⁶²

The pandemic's impact on trade and movement has also taken its toll on local communities. On May 18, state officials announced that the ban on import and sale of khat drug had been "lifted".⁶³ The government banned the trade on Mar. 28. The government also "eased restrictions" on movement in towns and lifted the curfew, although local police struggled to enforce the rules.⁶⁴ Airports have remained closed since mid-March, and on May 21, Puntland justice minister Awil Sheikh Hamud declared that the government will not permit Eid prayer to be held at major congregations due to prevent spread of COVID-19.⁶⁵

The state received aid from the UAE government when, on May 9, aid planes arrived at Bossaso airport and local media reported the delivery included test labs and other medical equipment,⁶⁶ medicine, food and tents for communities affected by recent floods.⁶⁷ On May 21, the FGS sent a planeload of supplies to fight COVID-19 pandemic to Badhan, Sanaag region.⁶⁸

4.1.1 **Analysis:** The Puntland government's initial response to COVID-19 was prompt and necessary, taking preventative measures such as banning public gatherings and implementing a curfew throughout Puntland. Despite challenges in implementation, the policies enacted by the Puntland government helped limit the exponential growth of the coronavirus. The policies also signaled to residents of Puntland the seriousness of COVID-19, which residents initially downplayed due to mass misinformation being propagated mainly through social media. The policies conducted in March and April were all but overturned after the Puntland government eased restrictions to accommodate the Eid celebrations that were approaching. The move to do so could arise from a number of factors. Towards the end of May, the exponential growth of COVID-19 continued to decrease in hard-hit countries, and talks of reopening markets were abuzz around the globe. At the same time, the Eid celebration were approaching, which provides a big stimulus to the local economy; restricting movement would definitely hurt local businesses that were suffering during the lockdown period.

Local businesses were not the only ones hurt by the lockdown policies, but so too was the government that anticipated a steep decline in revenue. All of these factors contributed to the easing of restrictions, which could cause more harm than benefit in the long-term. The health infrastructure in Somalia is especially weak and a second wave of COVID-19 could spell disaster not only for the health sector, but also for the local economy. Countries around the globe are struggling with dealing with the consequences of a shrinking economy and the impact on livelihoods over the possibility of serious outbreaks, which would cripple an under-funded health system. Puntland and Somalia as a whole have an entirely more complex situation with even more deadly consequences. If Puntland state wants to utilize a laissez-faire attitude to COVID-19 prevention, the state will need to supplement this with rigorous contact tracing and testing. In addition, Puntland state will need to implement sustained awareness raising to ensure that citizens behave appropriately and responsibly to ensure the spread is contained while easing restrictions.

4.1.2 **Forecast:** Drastic behavioral change is unlikely to occur in a short time period, which may put Puntland's policy of easing restrictions in jeopardy. If there is exponential growth of COVID-19 cases, Puntland is likely to reinstate lockdown policies to curb the pandemic.

4.2 Improved Management Practices for Qardo Floods Response

4.2.1 **Key Developments:** Throughout May, Puntland received donations from all over the globe to respond to the floods that ravaged Qardo, causing deaths, extensive property damage and displacement. As a response to the Apr. 27 floods, President Deni nominated a 24-member committee to manage the government's response of the floods.⁶⁹ The committee is comprised of government officials, religious leaders, women and other prominent members of the community. On May 2, Sheikh Fuad Aflow, speaking for the government appointed committee, told local media that the committee would be holding regular press conferences to update the public on the donations being received.⁷⁰ During May, it was reported that 3,000 of the 8,000 families affected by Qardo flash floods were residing at public schools.⁷¹ Speaking on May 19, Sheikh Fuad provided more detail on donations being made by the Somali people inside and outside of the country.⁷² Donations of food and supplies came from a number of cities in Somalia, from Las Anod in Sool region to Beledweyne in Hiran region, and from the Somali diaspora. But the exact total of the donations was still unclear, as the month came to an end.

4.2.2 **Analysis:** The committee has made verbal commitments to transparency and has held press conferences detailing who, where and how much the donations were that the committee received. The committee's pledge to conduct the conferences regularly has been largely upheld with regular press conferences occurring throughout May, as donations continued to pour in. Yet, the press conferences detailing the amounts donations will do little to mitigate the risk of corruption and is unlikely to significantly reduce public concerns over mismanagement. A more vital step to ensuring transparency will be to detail where and to whom the donations were allocated to, in a verifiable manner. Moreover, the justification for the allocation of money will be crucial for the public record.

Prior to setting up the committee, the government should have implemented transparent financial management procedures to build public confidence and to effectively monitor the committee's management of donations. Allegations of corruption in Gardafui region resulted in a shooting and robbery. Emergency response can be a contentious issue that can manifest into a conflict driver, if the process is not properly implemented.

Experience in emergency management is crucial when dealing with natural disasters of this nature. It is unclear if any role was given to Puntland government agencies, such as Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management Agency (HADMA). The state opted to create an ad-hoc committee of civilian and non-civilian members to manage the disaster response, for families impacted by cyclones in Gardafui region and flash floods in Qardo. The committee and its composition would be better suited

to act as an oversight body, rather than management body of emergency relief as their ability, experience and understanding of emergencies can be called into question. Puntland will need to be better prepared for natural disasters and other emergencies in the future and the state will need to transition from ad-hoc committees nominated after an emergency occurs to functional institutions that are prepared to handle emergencies as they emerge.

- 4.2.3 **Forecast:** While rapid institutional reforms are unlikely, it is likely that the Puntland government will require more details on the emergency aid management in the next reporting period.

*New Access International (NAI Somalia), founded in 2012, is a research and development Agency based in Somalia. NAI specializes in policy research, organizational development, advocacy, and project consulting work. NAI Somali Law and Policy Program publishes the monthly **Puntland Situation Report** and the **Somali Federalization Monitor** that focus on collecting, observing, recording, and analyzing all major events and developments linked to matters of law and policy, and its impact on peace, politics and development in the Federal Republic of Somalia.*

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