

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the course of December, continuing on the path of increasing tensions, Puntland State underwent a period of major political developments and security upheaval. In Mudug region, heavy fighting between rival militias led to over 20 deaths and prompted intervention from Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). In Galkayo, a suicide bombing targeting Somali National Army (SNA) commanders killed at least 9 people, while unidentified assailants through hand grenades at Galkayo central police stations. ISIS militant group claimed responsibility for assassination of two Puntland police officers in Bossaso in a guerrilla-style attack. Also, in Bossaso, state security services dismantled a roadside bomb and no one was hurt. There was a small mutiny by Puntland troops complaining over unpaid wages, which was resolved shortly thereafter, and some uncorroborated reports that 150 Puntland soldiers in Sool region ‘defected’ over to Somaliland.

Puntland was also dealing with the catastrophic aftermath of Pawan tropical storms, which hit eastern coast of Puntland with heavy rains and strong winds. Local communities in Gardafui, Nugal and other areas of Puntland were cut off from the rest of the region. This monthly report analyzes the state government’s response and overviews response achievements, limitations, and preparations for natural emergencies in the near future. In Mudug region, Puntland accused Galmudug of supporting one of the rival militias fighting in Towfiq and Afbarwako towns in eastern Mudug region; meanwhile, SNA commanders who were in Mudug region to intervene in the local fighting were targeted by suicide bombers in Galkayo. The report follows up on any linkages between Mudug violence and preparations for federal elections; in 2015, one year before the federal election, heavy fighting erupted in Galkayo, and fighting in December resembled a similar pattern including timeframe, geographic location and exploitation of local rivalries. Puntland government continued its rejection of National Electoral Law, and two international delegations arrived in Garowe during the month to engage in discussions with Puntland state leadership on supporting the federal electoral process. However, the political dispute was unresolved as the new year 2020 arrived.

Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) announced its work plan and opened the doors to registration of political associations in the lead-up to Local Council Elections, which are scheduled for 2021 according to TPEC work plan. The report overviews the electoral work plan and analyzes possibility of multiparty elections from historic and contextual viewpoint, studying whether the potential of implementing multiparty elections in a two-year timeframe is plausible including funding, institutional capacity and public awareness, and whether the role of clan-based politics is diminishing or remains steady.

Puntland government, through the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Airports, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Hong Kong-based Frontier Service Group (FSG) for management of Gen. Mohamed Abshir Garowe International Airport; a similar deal was signed with UAE-based firm in November, and the monthly report presents the airport deal, studies its comparative advantage and puts the deal in the context of other infrastructure agreements including Bossaso port expansion. The report makes the linkage between growing political opposition in Bari region and the Bossaso port deal, and analyzes whether the Bossaso and Garowe airport deals could further exacerbate the political situation or help contribute positively to local jobs, skills transfer and economic growth as result of infrastructure expansion deals.

## 2. PEACE AND SECURITY

2.1 **Key Developments:** During the reporting month of December, there were a total of 38 violent deaths reported in Puntland and surrounding regions, representing a significant increase from previous months. About 60.5% of all reported violent fatalities were attributed to new conflict in the regional fault-lines, especially in eastern Mudug region, etched between Puntland and Galmudug states. VEO attacks accounted for about 34% of all reported violent fatalities, while 5.5% was attributed to local/clan conflicts in Mudug and Ayn regions of Puntland. State police were targeted in two assassinations in Bossaso and one bomb attack against a police station was reported in Galkayo.

2.1.1 **Sub-National Conflict:** On Dec. 2, local media reported that a batch of Puntland soldiers had ‘defected to Somaliland’ in Sool region.<sup>1</sup> Somaliland information minister Saleban Yusuf Ali Koore, who attended the ceremony in Taleh district, said 150 soldiers had defected to join Somaliland. Minister Koore claimed that the defecting soldiers were based at God-Qabobe village, east of Tukaraq, a military flashpoint area between Somaliland-controlled Las Anod and Puntland capital Garowe. Tukaraq was the flashpoint town in Somaliland-Puntland military clashes, in mid-2018, in a conflict where over 300 soldiers were killed. Puntland information minister Ali Sabarey denied that state forces had defected over to Somaliland, saying that Somaliland “presented clan fighters dressed in military uniforms” in Taleh district.<sup>2</sup>

2.1.2 **Regional Fault-Lines:** During December, heavy fighting erupted in eastern Mudug region, in a jurisdictional boundary etched between Puntland to the north, and Galmudug to the south. The fighting near Towfiq and Afbarwako towns of eastern Mudug region initially commenced with armed fighting between two rival clan militias over disputed piece of land.<sup>3</sup> However, as the fighting continued, there was growing speculation of proxy fighting between Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) supporting one militia, and Puntland backing the rival militia. Fighting in the area erupted on Dec. 5 and continued until Dec. 10; at least 23 people were reportedly killed, but some estimates put the figure at over 30 casualties.<sup>4</sup> On Dec. 12, Somali National Army (SNA) Land Forces commander Gen. Abdihamid Mohamed Dirir and other SNA commanders traveled to the region to intervene, and by Dec. 17, the FGS declared that the SNA commanders successfully secured a peace deal among the warring militias.<sup>5</sup> In July 2019, the two rival militias clashed for the first time with at least 3 casualties.<sup>6</sup>

On Dec. 16, a new anti-Somaliland rebel group against was declared in Buhodle district.<sup>7</sup> Mohamed Ahmed Ali, leader of the new, self-proclaimed rebel group named ‘Sool, Sanaag and Cayn’ (SSC), announced that they intend to fight for the self-rule of Sool, Sanaag and Buhodle (Cayn) areas, and against Somaliland presence in theregions.

On Dec. 26, supporters of deposed Puntland parliament speaker Abdihakim ‘Dhoobo’ Mohamed Ahmed organized local anti-Puntland demonstrations in Hingalool town, of eastern Sanaag region.<sup>8</sup> Local media reported that new Puntland Parliament Speaker, Abdirashid Abwaan, was expected to visit Hingalool town in the coming weeks. On Dec. 26, local reports noted that there are renewed tensions in El Afweyn district of western Sanaag region, between two rival militias who have clashed several times in the district in 2019.<sup>9</sup> However, there were no reports of armed clashes.

2.1.3 **Violent Extremist Organizations:** On Dec. 8, two Puntland soldiers were killed when unidentified fighters opened fire on Darawish force convoy travelling through Bossaso near Netco area.<sup>10</sup> ISIS group claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>11</sup> On Dec. 12, Puntland Darawish military officer was shot and killed by unknown gunmen in Bossaso who fled the scene.<sup>12</sup> Government media reported that terror groups were responsible for the assassination.

On Dec. 15, unknown assailants threw hand grenades at Galkayo central police station, wounding 2 police officers and 1 civilian.<sup>13</sup> No group claimed responsibility for the attack. Mudug regional governor Ahmed Muse Nur said it was “not terrorism” but “politically motivated attack” on Galkayo police station.<sup>14</sup>

On Dec. 21, Al Shabaab suicide bombers struck a car bomb at a hotel in South Galkayo (under Galmudug administration) targeting SNA military commanders, including the Land Forces Commander.<sup>15</sup> At least 9 persons including 2 soldiers were killed in the bombing and more than 40 persons wounded mostly civilians and women.<sup>16</sup> The SNA Land Forces commander has been in Mudug region to help diffuse violent tensions in eastern Mudug region. On Dec. 25, a young man was shot and killed by unknown in Bossaso.<sup>17</sup> The killers escaped and no group claimed responsibility for the killing. The victim was the son of a well-known local elder in Bari region.

2.1.4 **Counter-Terrorism:** On Dec. 18, Puntland Security Forces (PSF) dismantled a roadside bomb inside Bossaso before detonation.<sup>18</sup> The attack was foiled and no one was hurt after local community members informed police of the hidden explosive device.

2.1.5 **Local/Clan Conflicts:** On Dec. 9, unidentified militia opened fire on a civilian vehicle in Dagoori, village south of Galkayo. At least one person was killed and 3 other civilians opened.<sup>19</sup> On Dec. 23, local reports noted that there were security tensions in Horufadhi village of Ayn region of Puntland, after 1 civilian was killed and rival clan militias armed themselves to prepare for a fight.<sup>20</sup> During the week there were no reports of fighting, however, tension was high.

2.1.6 **Security Sector Governance:** On Dec. 8, Puntland police commissioner Gen. Muhyadin Ahmed Muse restored to work Nugal Regional Police commander Col. Mumin Abdi Shire after suspending him from work on Dec. 4.<sup>21</sup> The Nugal regional police commander was accused of rejecting the Commissioner’s order. Ten days later on Dec. 14, Puntland Police Commissioner Gen. Muhiyadin Ahmed Muse once again ‘suspended’ the work of Nugal regional police commander Mumin Abdi Shire over an internal dispute.<sup>22</sup>

On Dec. 23, Puntland soldiers staged a mutiny and cut off the Garowe-Bossaso highway temporarily complaining about unpaid wages.<sup>23</sup> The main highway was reopened later in the day. President Deni recently declared that Puntland government regularly and promptly pays soldiers salaries. On Dec. 24, President Deni met with Puntland Darawish Commanders in Garowe, where discussions focused on improving the security institutions, including training, equipment and accountability.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.2 Security Forecast

2.2.1 **Sub-national Conflict:** The sub-national conflict between Somaliland and Puntland has been largely subdued, but it continues to simmer in the background. The alleged defection of Puntland troops from Sool region to Somaliland may seem inconspicuous, however, the move can have adverse effects on wider sub-national conflict that has remained a tense military standoff. The defection comes after a series of defections from Somaliland troops in Sanaag region to Puntland. Since then, the region that has for years been flown under the radar as a territorial dispute between Somaliland and Puntland began to escalate with a series of military skirmishes recorded in 2019. Some of the armed clashes were credited to the defection of Somaliland soldiers in Sanaag region, but also hints at broader underlying shift of socio-political forces. Whatever the case, sub-national tensions between Somaliland and Puntland in the contested areas is anticipated to continue and, although unlikely, could potentially transform into full-scale military conflict, as experienced in 2018.

2.2.2 **Regional Fault-lines:** Mudug region, located in the center of Somalia, has always been a flashpoint. Throughout the year, NAI has been reporting on an increasingly worrying rhetoric and acts of violence. The conflict in eastern Mudug region is not new, and has been reoccurring since 2002,

when two days conflict left more than 40 dead and 60 wounded.<sup>24</sup> Despite the tangible success of Joint Security Forces (JSF) in Galkayo and the improved collaboration of Galmudug and Puntland state, Galkayo's security has continued to disintegrate throughout the latter half of 2019. To make matters worse, in June there were reports of Somali diaspora hailing from Galmudug claiming that Towfiq was part of Galmudug; this public claim prompted a frustrated response from a Puntland commander in Towfiq.<sup>25</sup> Shortly after the public fray, a brief conflict erupted in the area, which was quickly subdued. But the latest acts of violence seem to have caught Galmudug and Puntland off guard, as each state is preoccupied with internal politics. The FGS intervention in the area has led to a temporary cessation of hostilities, nonetheless, a sustained focus from both Galmudug and Puntland, as well as its traditional elders on both sides, will be needed. A multipronged approach is necessary, joint efforts to secure Galkayo are paramount, but efforts to reconcile grievances in rural areas will also be crucial in ensuring that conflicts in rural areas do not spillover to Galkayo. It is unlikely that both state administrations will pay much attention to the Towfiq conflict, as the intervention by elders and FGS has been successful and it is likely that the stability of Galmudug and Puntland will be tested if serious reconciliation is not made.

**2.2.3 Violent Extremist Organizations:** There has been increased activity of VEOs since October. In November and October, the focus shifted from Bossaso to Galkayo, where there was a string of attacks targeting government officials. But it seems that VEOs are escalating their attacks and the variety of attacks, as the Puntland military also came under attack in AfUrur in November. After a brief hiatus in VEO related incidents in Bossaso over the past months, December saw three separate incidents that bear the hallmarks of VEOs in the port city. The intensification of incidents may signal that militant groups have shifted their plans in the face of increased security operations in Bossaso; VEOs seem to be using new strategies to undermine security progress. VEO's attacks are expected to continue and potentially intensify, and it will be crucial to see what strategies the Puntland government comes up with to ensure security in Bossaso and Galkayo.

**2.2.4 Local/Clan Conflicts:** Clan conflict in Buhodle is usually known for taking on connotations of an administrative struggle between the people of Buhodle and Somaliland. Puntland also lays claim to Buhodle, increasing the complexity of the power struggles in the area. With the emergence of administrations and state governments, clan conflicts are susceptible to politicization. Thankfully, tensions did not result in all out conflict and have been resolved; more efforts are needed to ensure that clan dynamics do not translate into regional flashpoints and that traditional justice systems are fostered.

**2.2.5 Security Sector Governance:** As the Puntland administration prioritizes administrative and security reforms, reports surfacing of internal squabbles within the Puntland state police are a major setback to reform goals. The halting of the Nugal Regional Police Chief twice in a span of weeks should not have occurred in such a public manner. The Puntland Police Commissioner reserves the right to operate his police force in the manner he sees fit, however, reinstating and halting a regional police chief's work within a week signals to the public there is internal strife that continues to flare up. The Puntland government has sold the public on its reform objectives, however, internal squabbles with certain security apparatuses will likely damage public confidence in the security sector.

## 3. POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

### 3.1 Puntland Unprepared for Tropical Storms Emergency

**3.1.1 Key Developments:** During early December, coastal areas in Puntland, Somalia, were hit by a powerful tropical storm 'Pawan', leading to major property damage and loss of life. The UN issued storm alerts and Puntland state government made efforts to inform coastal communities to brace for impact.<sup>25</sup> However, due to the poor emergency preparedness of coastal areas, the storm's impact was vast and devastating to those communities. On Dec. 7, movement of goods and services on Puntland

roads was suspended temporarily by the state government due to heavy rains that caused extensive damage to the main highway and the unpaved feeder roads.<sup>26</sup>

That same day, Puntland Interior Ministry reported on the damage from heavy rains which included 17 homes destroyed in 3 villages, 1 child and 1 Yemeni fisherman died, and 6 families lost all their livestock.<sup>27</sup> In Sanaag region, a local mayor announced 2 persons missing and all roads into town destroyed.<sup>28</sup> The storm's impact was not limited to the roads only. On Dec. 8, Puntland Aviation Minister Ilyas Osman Lugator told media that Puntland airports were open and operational, and rejected reports that international flights were suspended. The minister noted that Ethiopian Airlines suspended its daily flights to Garowe Airport for a single day due to heavy rains.<sup>29</sup> On Dec. 11, tropical storm 'Pawan' continued in parts of eastern coast of Puntland, causing major damage to rural and coastal areas.<sup>30</sup>

On Dec. 12, Somali Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire ordered FGS institutions to provide assistance to Puntland coastal areas affected by tropical storms.<sup>31</sup> Two days later, surprisingly, Puntland's Bari regional governor Abdisamad Yusuf Mohamed 'Abwaan' accused the FGS of "blocking" aid to victims of tropical storm that hit parts of eastern coast of Puntland.<sup>32</sup> Governor Abwaan said the FGS rejected aid to be transported to Puntland and made allegations that international donations were "stored at warehouses in Mogadishu". The FGS did not officially respond to the allegations.

On Dec. 22, Puntland government delegation led by Vice President Ahmed 'Karash' Elmi Osman extended humanitarian assistance including food aid to Gardafui region, which was hit by heavy storms earlier this month and cut off from regional road networks.<sup>33</sup> It was the first time the state government had delivered relief aid to cut-off coastal parts of Puntland state.<sup>34</sup>

3.1.2 **Analysis:** Puntland was not prepared for major tropical storms or other climate emergencies. The state's key institutions, including Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management Agency (HADMA), is under-funded and understaffed with little potential for growth in the foreseeable future. As such, HADMA like many other state institutions, is continually underperforming and in dire need of restructuring, capacity enhancement and increased funding. The economic damage from the heavy rains and floods, and the coastal areas that were disconnected, requires better planning and improved infrastructure of roads especially towards rural and coastal areas. In this respect, and to deal with future emergencies whether natural or man-made disasters, the state needs to build district-level supplies that are continually refilled and reused and to institute better emergency planning, including preemptive construction. This vast territory, with Somalia's longest coastline, cannot rely on international assistance each time there is a disaster; rather, the state should empower HADMA, Local Councils and other key institutions to organize and maintain emergency supplies so that local residents do not have to suffer for weeks without any aid. Secondly, improving feeder road networks can be low-cost and very useful in the long-term, especially with contributions from local communities, state government and international donors. However, the key is better planning and governmental accountability.

3.1.3 **Forecast:** In the short-term, at least, it remains unlikely that Puntland state will significantly improve governance capacity and institute emergency planning mechanisms. In such case, the state is expected to continue its ad-hoc emergency response plans in the event of actual emergencies.

## 3.2 Federal Elections and Violence in Mudug Region

3.2.1 **Key Developments:** Throughout the month of December, two major issues were running parallel: discussions on resolving the political dispute over the National Electoral Bill submitted to Federal Parliament, and efforts to end violence between rival militias that erupted in parts of eastern Mudug region. On the surface, it seemed that the two matters were unrelated, although some theories suggested some connections between the two.

In late 2015, in the lead-up to the 2016 federal elections, heavy fighting had erupted in Galkayo, Mudug region, leading to hundreds of deaths and tens of thousands of displaced civilians. Again, one year before the federal election, a new round of violence erupted in parts of Mudug region between rival militias based in Federal Member States of Puntland and Galmudug. Towfiq and Afbarwako towns are located in eastern Mudug region, etched between the undefined state boundaries between Puntland and Galmudug. Over 23 people were killed in the week-long fighting, with dozens wounded. On Dec. 9, Puntland Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs and Democratization issued a scathing statement blaming Galmudug forces for engaging fighting in Towfiq district of Mudug region.<sup>35</sup> On the same day a Galmudug press statement called for peace, demanded that the fighting sides stop the violence “unconditionally” and encouraged local communities to “strengthen their unity in the fight against the enemy of Somali people – Al Shabaab”.<sup>36</sup> On the next day, Dec. 10, Puntland government issued a second press statement calling for “peace” in Mudug region.<sup>37</sup> Then, on Dec. 11, Puntland Interior Minister Mohamed Abdirahman Dhabanad accused FGS of complicity in Mudug violence, saying: “Galmudug has a state administration that works on governance...The existing situation [in Galmudug] of weak administrative structures is result of FGS which removed [state] officials working in security, peace and governance structures.”<sup>38</sup>

On Dec. 17, after an intervention by the FGS, a delegation led by Somali National Army Land Forces commander Gen. Abdihamid Mohamed Dirir succeeded in bringing together the warring sides and signing of a five-point agreement to end the violence.<sup>39</sup> Some reports noted that local elders from Puntland and Galmudug were part of the peace talks and monitoring the implementation of the ceasefire agreement.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, Puntland government continued its rejection of federal laws including National Electoral Law, and Petroleum Law, among others. On Dec. 15, Puntland President Deni declared that the National Electoral Bill “does not concern Puntland” as the state government was “not consulted” in the electoral model. He called for “dialogue” with FGS to agree on federal electoral model for 2020/2021 elections.<sup>41</sup> Three days later, on Dec. 18, a high-level delegation from UN, IGAD and EU visited the Puntland leadership in Garowe to discuss “one-person, one-vote elections,’ finalisation of the Federal Constitution, continued progress towards debt relief, and the fight against Al-Shabaab”, according to UNSOM statement.<sup>42</sup> The international partners travelled to Mogadishu, Puntland and other Federal Member States, for consultations with political actors about federal electoral model 2020/2021. Again, on Dec. 23, President Deni welcomed to Puntland State House in Garowe UN Deputy Special Representative Adam Abdelmoula, where discussions focused on humanitarian aid, good governance and democratization, security, federal-state relations, and federal elections in 2020/2021.<sup>43</sup>

**3.2.2 Analysis:** Mudug region is located the very center of Somalia. This important region suffers from a long history of political violence and exploitation. Proxy wars by the FGS, Puntland, Galmudug, Ahlu Sunna faction, militant groups such as Al Shabaab, and even Ethiopia, have a long history of creating instability which has come to define Mudug region. However, most worrisome, this trend of increased violence in the lead-up to federal elections adds a new dynamic to an already explosive situation including triggering clan conflicts over land in pursuit of constituency-based federal parliamentary seats. This dynamic of instability has been exploited by insurgency groups, as demonstrated by the deadly suicide bombing attack in December. As such, a continuation and extension of mildly successful peace processes in Galkayo should be extended to other parts of Mudug region and a process to delineate state boundaries between Puntland and Galmudug should commence at the conclusion of local reconciliation initiatives. Building long-lasting peace requires an agreement and commitment to the principles of that agreement.

**3.2.3 Forecast:** Political unrest and instability in Mudug region is projected to continue in the coming weeks, as the Galmudug political process unfolds with growing rivalry between FGS leadership and



Galmudug interim president Ahmed Duale Haaf deepens. Local and clan conflicts in Mudug region are anticipated to continue as proxy fighting widens among political stakeholders.

## 4. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

### 4.1 Puntland Multiparty Elections Process Begins

4.1.1 **Key Developments:** As Puntland continues to press forward with its democratization process, questions remain as to how the process will remain transparent, inclusive and democratic, so that it does not sow new social discord. After the Transitional Puntland Electoral Commission (TPEC) was appointed in September, the independent electoral body before launching its strategic plan for Puntland, held a number of consultative events where government officials, civil society and international stakeholders were consulted. On Dec. 14, President Deni officially launched TPEC's Electoral Plan at an event in Garowe. TPEC officially announced the opening of registrations for political associations ahead of Local Council elections in Puntland, tentatively scheduled for 2021.<sup>44</sup> The registration of political associations was officially opened on Dec. 15 and will last until Mar. 15, 2020. On Dec. 14, TPEC also publicly released the requirements to registering a political association along with the application form, which was posted on its website.<sup>45</sup>

4.1.2 **Analysis:** Puntland state has attempted the transition to democratization in the past, specifically in 2012, with then-President Abdirahman Mohamed Farole. However, a number of important factors, including time limitations, had largely contributed to ensuring that the process did not continue as planned. Learning from the previous lessons, the current administration in Puntland has attempted to ensure that it begins the process as early as possible, which is commendable. Indeed, beginning a process early builds public support and trust and allows for the process to mature over time; but it is not the deciding factor.

Many researchers agree that the democratization process in any fragile state is a two-edged sword that may improve accountability, but can also become one that sows discontent and disagreement, which in fragile settings can lead to political violence. Timing of the process is important, but what is more important is how that transition occurs. Is it a 'wave of democracy', witnessed in the 'Arab Spring', or is it a procedural democracy led and driven by political actors? The process in Puntland should work from both angles, as there is not one proven method to transitioning. Ensuring that the transition into a more democratic society is effective will require gradualism, according to Thomas Carothers, author of, "*Confronting the Weakest Link: Aiding Political Parties in New Democracies.*" He suggests that democratic gradualism, which iteratively and cumulatively contributes to the development of a fair and open process of political competition and choice, is the preferred modus. Other specialists reaffirm this position by arguing that it is "dangerous to push states to democratize before the necessary preconditions exist."<sup>46</sup>

TPEC has outlined in its requirements a set of rules that political associations have to abide to be registered, such as "a copy of 10 articles which are the bylaws of the political association" and the "Central Committee of the association will be elected in the first convention of the political association".<sup>47</sup> Both articles are ambiguous and lack decisiveness in showing how political associations should appropriately put the articles into practice. The document also lacks explaining what determines a rejection of a political association's registration. Without clearly defining these points, and expounding on the appropriate methods of registering a political association, any rejection of a political association by TPEC, may be construed as arbitrary and politically motivated. It would be prudent of TPEC, which granted three months for political associations to register, to ensure that political associations know how to properly register in a bid to foster transparency and openness and steer clear of any issues that may lead to discord.

A political process such as democratization requires quite a bit of consultation to foster public support for the process. TPEC has made efforts to consult with civil society, government and international partners, before launching their strategic plan. This is a good approach to build consensus, however, there is also a need to ensure that there is broad public support for the process. Civil society groups and government officials are sometimes far removed from the public. By focusing consultations on select groups, the process may be deemed an elite political exercise and runs the risk of creating what Paul Collier terms a ‘selectariat’ group.<sup>48</sup> One method of ensuring that there is broad consensus is making the strategic plan available to the public, which TPEC has not done yet. This should be prioritized to ensure that the public understands the objectives of the transition towards multiparty politics. This would also start the process on the right foot by fostering openness and accountability.

Overall, TPEC is making great strides in the democratization process and public anticipation is very high; nonetheless, the electoral body should practice prudence and ensure transparency, while maintaining a gradual and reasonable timeframe. Most importantly, TPEC should continue tweaking and improving its methodology when embarking on this transition process.

- 4.1.3 **Forecast:** TPEC will likely continue its consultations with civil society, government and international stakeholders. The registration of political associations will likely kick into high gear over the next month.

## 4.2 Puntland Admin Sign another Airport Expansion Deal

- 4.2.1 **Key Developments:** On Dec. 1, the Puntland government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Hong Kong-based Frontier Services Group (FSG), for the expansion and management of Garowe Airport.<sup>49</sup> The deal was signed by the Puntland Ministry of Civil Aviation and Airports and FSG. The details of the MoU include a three-phase construction period, which will establish a new airport terminal, VIP section, cargo terminal and a 1.6km-long runway expansion.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, on Dec. 18, the Puntland government announced that Air Djibouti would commence weekly flights connecting Djibouti-Garowe-Mogadishu. Air Djibouti becomes the second international airline, after Ethiopian Airlines, to commence flight services in Garowe Airport.<sup>51</sup>

The aftermath of public outcry over Bossaso airport expansion deal continues, as elders and a former politician were arrested. On Dec. 2, a former politician who was previously arrested re-arrested yet again in Bossaso on charges of public incitement.<sup>52</sup> The arrest of Muse Ali Jama came three days after two elders were arrested in Bossaso for the same charges.<sup>53</sup> The arrested men were very vocal about their objection to the Bossaso airport deal. On Dec. 20, Puntland Non-State Actors Association (PUNSAA) accused the Puntland government of “violating” the civil rights of political figures arrested in Bossaso for more than 30 days. PUNSAA Chairman, Faisal ‘Qaran’ Ahmed Warsame signed a statement accusing the government of violating Article 14 of the Puntland state constitution, which grants civil rights to citizens.<sup>54</sup>

- 4.2.2 **Analysis:** Over the course of the year, the Puntland administration has focused its efforts on developing the state’s economic infrastructure. Following the state’s first-ever Puntland Investment Forum and a number of airline deals, this administration has made economic development one of its main priorities. One of its major achievements with regard to economic development has been improving accessibility to Puntland by the introduction of Ethiopian Airlines, and the more recently, Air Djibouti. Puntland has had limited accessibility in the past and this has had negative impact on investment. By increasing accessibility via civil aviation, Puntland is better situated to showcase its investment opportunities to Somali diaspora and foreign investors. While Puntland is making strides in economic development, unfortunately the state has not made strides in improving the industry’s legal and regulatory frameworks that would ultimately enable and regulate economic development, and assuage public concerns.



PSR September and October reports detail the backlash of the handling of the Bossaso Airport deal and its impact on social cohesion in Bari region. The administration's rather reticent manner on the details of the airport deal led to negative sentiment, which continues to linger. Eventually, with growing opposition, elders and former politicians were arrested for what government prosecutors allege was public incitement. It seems that the administration learned from some lessons from the Bossaso Airport deal and emphasized the details of the new Garowe Airport deal. The details of the MoU and the company were made public and social cohesion was not tested. Comparatively, Bossaso was still suffering from a contentious port expansion deal, which had little public support; then, the public were unhappy to hear that the current administration signed on another obscure airport deal with a UAE-based company.

The Puntland government will need to ensure that it continues to improve transparency, as it did with the Garowe Airport agreement. Likewise, Puntland also needs to address previous grievances adequately. In its bid to be more transparent, the state government will have to communicate to its public the benefits of these infrastructure deals on employment, skills transfer and economic growth.

- 4.2.3 **Forecast:** Going into 2020, Puntland will likely continue its economic development drive with particular focus on infrastructure. It will be crucial to watch how committed the Puntland government will be to transparency of investment deals, as well as the efforts that are made in improving the legal and regulatory frameworks that guide and protect investments.

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*New Access International (NAI Somalia), founded in 2012, is a Civil Society Organization (CSO) based in Somalia. NAI Somalia specializes in research, organization and policy development, and advocacy programs, and launched its **Somali Law and Policy Program** in January 2019, publishing the monthly **Puntland Situation Report** that focuses 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 Puntland State, Somalia.*

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## ENDNOTES

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