



PUNTLAND SITUATION REPORT

Somali Law & Policy Program

November 2020

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the reporting month of November, Puntland state territories in Somalia remained relatively stable. There was a major security incident in the regional fault-lines (areas controlled/disputed with Somaliland/Galmudug), including an incident of clan violence that led to over 40 fatalities. Additionally, in the regional fault-lines, unknown attackers killed a Somaliland judge in Las Anod, in a development that forms part of targeted assassinations of Somaliland senior officials in Sool region by unidentified gunmen. Somalia's women development minister and Puntland state's Human Rights Defender's Office called on the government to act to protect women and girls against a spate of attacks, including violent rape and killings. Separately, insurgent groups also carried out bombing attack and assassination in Galkayo, while Puntland state forces carried out security operations in Sanaag region, and nabbed suspects in Galkayo and Bossaso.

Regarding the Somali federal election processes, Federal Member States (FMS) of Puntland and Jubaland continued to be locked in dispute with the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). During the month, an international delegation representing the Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the United Nations, and European Union visited Garowe and met with Puntland state leadership to discuss the contentious issues to resolve the electoral impasse. Despite the electoral dispute, FGS and Puntland officials continued technical level cooperation in a new initiative related to construction of the state's judiciary center in Garowe.

In addition, Puntland state continued to enact new policies to mitigate challenges directly linked to rising inflation, as local businesses rejected usage of Somali Shilling currency. This month's *Puntland Situation Report* provides a brief critical analysis of the inflation challenges and the government's ongoing efforts. Moreover, the *Report* provides a critique to the state government's approach to handling the rising inflation crisis, as the government did not provide adequate attention to this matter from election day onwards. Thus, the growing challenge of inflation only worsened in the two years since the election.

The *Report* provides an overview of the growing unrest inside Puntland state parliament, as a number of dissenting legislators complained about being silenced by the parliamentary leadership – which they alleged was in cahoots with the state administration. The *Report* presents recent developments and provides a brief analysis of the situation in parliament, while emphasizing the need to resolve these political issues before matters worsened.

Finally, cyclone GATI, its impact and the government's coordinated response with international assistance is presented with an overview of recent developments. In addition, the *Report* analyzes the need for improving state emergency response capacity as a number of natural emergencies had caused loss of life and property over the past two years in Puntland. The *Report* warns that the state government needs to be better prepared by improving planning, capacity to respond and emergency management capacity to be prepared for the next natural emergency – from cyclones, to flooding to public health emergencies, such as COVID-19 pandemic.

2. PEACE AND SECURITY

- 2.1 **Key Developments:** During the reporting month of November, a total of 49 fatalities (dead and wounded) were reported in Puntland and the regional fault-lines, representing a significant increase of 390% from reported fatalities in October. The vast majority of fatalities, about 83.7%, were attributed to attacks in the regional fault-lines (areas disputed/controlled by Somaliland or Galmudug); about 8.2% of fatalities were attributed to VEO attacks; 6.1% was attributed to violence related to local/clan conflicts; and about 2% was attributed to violence against women. Puntland security forces conducted security operations in Bari and Mudug regions, leading to arrests of terrorism suspects in both regions.
- 2.1.1 **Violence Against Women:** On Nov. 1, the director of Puntland Human Rights Defender's Office, Mr. Said Abdi Mumin, issued a press release stating that the office would conduct independent investigation into the rape-murder of a young girl in Bossaso, and the killing of a court assistant in Garowe.¹ Since his election in July 2020, it was the first time the Human Rights Defender's Office had issued such a statement.² On Nov. 17, the Somali federal government's women's development minister Hanifa Habsade appealed via media outlets to Puntland state authorities to arrest a government security officer who allegedly shot and wounded a 20-year-old female named Maryan Mursal.³ The minister said the wounded girl was recovering at a Mogadishu hospital. Puntland officials did not publicly respond to the minister's appeal.
- 2.1.2 **Sub-National Conflict:** On Nov. 18, Puntland government commanders announced that they had "transferred" to Somaliland authorities in Sool region a suspected killer, who escaped after allegedly killing a person in Hargeisa.⁴ While government did not provide a legal agreement for the transfer, it marked the first time that such a transfer had occurred.⁵ On Nov. 25, a delegation led by Mr. Yonis Shaare, Galmudug state parliament's social services subcommittee chairman, arrived at Garowe to take custody of piracy prisoners from Puntland authorities.⁶ According to media reports, the piracy prisoners were held in Puntland jails after being transferred from Seychelles Islands under a 2011 agreement. However, after Puntland state parliamentarians voted to suspend the agreement with Seychelles government in August 2020, Galmudug authorities found an opportunity to seek the early release of convicted pirates completing their prison terms in Puntland prisons.⁷
- 2.1.3 **Regional Fault-lines:** On Nov. 12, Somali media reported that at least 10 persons were killed and 30 others wounded in clan fighting in Hul-Doyale, in southern Mudug region, an area under jurisdiction of Galmudug administration.⁸ After nearly 3 consecutive days of fighting, Somali federal government's deputy information minister Abdirahman Yusuf Al-Adala appealed for local peace between warring clans in Hul-Doyale area.⁹ On Nov. 18, local media reported that unknown attackers shot and killed Somaliland court judge Abdullahi Salad in Las Anod, in an overnight attack as the victim was heading home.¹⁰ In March 2020, two senior Somaliland officials – the regional judge of Sool region and the regional intelligence director – were both assassinated by unknown assailants in Las Anod and the two cases remained unsolved.¹¹
- 2.1.4 **Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO):** On Nov. 21, Puntland police arrested 3 suspects in Galkayo after suspected militants threw hand grenades at local police on street patrol operations the night before.¹² At least 1 civilian was killed and 2 police officers wounded in the attack.¹³ On Nov. 28, a local elder Nadir Sheikh Mohamed was killed in Galkayo by unknown gunmen who fled the scene before police arrived and investigations were underway.¹⁴ Although no group claimed responsibility for the attack, Al Shabaab group has conducted assassinations in Galkayo in the recent years.¹⁵
- 2.1.5 **Counter-Terrorism:** On Nov. 2, Puntland state government's Darawish force commenced security operations in parts of Las Qorey district, a coastal area 90km west of Bossaso in Sanaag region.

Security officials described troop movements as an anti-terrorism operation, after Al Shabaab group claimed its fighters captured a town in Sanaag region.¹⁶ On the same day, Puntland special forces PSF arrived at Cawsane village, near Badhan, in Sanaag region, for a similar security operation.¹⁷

On Nov. 10, Col. Mumin Abdi Shire, Puntland state police commander in Mudug region, told local media in Galkayo that police had arrested 7 Al Shabaab suspects connected to murders in Galkayo dating back to 2017.¹⁸ The commander added that the terrorism suspects would be brought to trial at a Puntland military court. On Nov. 14, local media reported that 6 suspects were released by Puntland state police in Nugal region, after police investigations found no link to the suicide bombing fatal attack on the late Nugal governor Abdisalam Hassan ‘Gujir’.¹⁹ On Nov. 22, Puntland police in Bossaso announced that local authorities seized a cache of weapons; police officials said the weapons were used to destabilize the port city, with the regional police chief saying that the weapons were seized during search operations of homes, businesses and vehicles. Bossaso, the state’s commercial hub, was strengthening local security ahead of planned 2021 federal parliamentary elections.²⁰

- 2.1.6 **Local/Clan Conflicts:** On Nov. 9, Puntland media reported that an unidentified body was found along the beach in Eyl district, in Nugal region.²¹ Speaking on BBC Somali Service, Eyl Mayor Muse Osman Yusuf said that the dead body was wrapped and thrown onto the beach from the ocean, and that local authorities were trying to identify the dead male body. On Nov. 14, local reports noted that two young men were stabbed to death in Bossaso; state police officials described the killings as part of a “neighborhood fight” among local youth.²²
- 2.1.7 **Maritime Security:** There were no major incidents to report linked to maritime security during the reporting period.
- 2.1.8 **Security Sector Governance:** There were no major reports stories to report related to security sector governance coverage during the reporting month in Puntland state, Somalia.

3. POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

3.1 Puntland Supports Jubaland in New Election Dispute with FGS

3.1.1 **Key Developments:** In continuation of federal election dispute, Puntland government continued its support to Jubaland state in the latter's dispute with the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). On Nov. 21, FGS and Puntland state officials held a joint event to lay the foundation rock for construction of Puntland judiciary center, in a move that was seen as continuity of technical cooperation between federal and state-level governments despite the election deadlock.²³ Senior officials from both sides attended the ceremony, including Puntland vice president Ahmed 'Karash' Elmi Osman, FGS attorney-general Ahmed Ali Dahir and Puntland Cabinet members led by justice minister Awil Sheikh Hamud. On Nov. 22, at the conclusion of consultative conference among Somali presidential candidates in Mogadishu, the communique appealed to Puntland and Jubaland administrations to "exclude" civil servants from federal electoral committees.²⁴ On Nov. 29, Puntland state president Said Deni received at State House in Garowe an international delegation representing East African regional block IGAD (Inter-Governmental Authority on Development), UN and EU diplomats. State media reported that discussions centered around matters specifically related to the upcoming Somali federal elections and find a resolution to the election deadlock.²⁵

3.1.2 **Analysis:** Somalia's electoral deadlock has dragged on since mid-2019. There are a number of contentious issues that remain unsolved between FGS and Federal Member States (FMS), especially Puntland and Jubaland. The two FMS administrations have supported each other in their electoral dispute with federal leadership in Mogadishu. Despite the deadlock, it was a positive sign of technical cooperation to see FGS and Puntland officials working together to build the state's judiciary center in the capital Garowe. However, Puntland and Jubaland seemed reluctant to accept the proposal by presidential candidates in Mogadishu, who appealed to the two state governments to "exclude" civil servants from state-level electoral bodies; the presidential contenders also issued a similar request to the FGS. This was indication that FMS leaders in Puntland and Jubaland states, and presidential candidates in Mogadishu, were in agreement on some aspects of the electoral deadlock, but did not seem to agree fully on all matters including membership of state-level electoral bodies. A delegation of international diplomats visited Puntland state to discuss resolving the electoral dispute, although no tangible agreement was reached at direct talks between Puntland leaders and the international community delegation that visited Garowe in November.

3.1.3 **Forecast:** The federal electoral dispute is expected to drag on for the next month, while Puntland and Jubaland states are anticipated to continue supporting each other in their dispute with FGS leadership in Mogadishu for the upcoming Somali federal elections.

3.2 Puntland Makes New Policy to Mitigate Inflation

3.2.1 **Key Developments:** Puntland state authorities continued to face rising inflation in local markets. On Nov. 12, for example, Puntland officials reported that state police seized 860million of counterfeit Somali Shillings (about \$22,000 USD) in Qardo.²⁶ Government officials said the counterfeit currency was intended to be "illegally distributed" in local markets in Bossaso. Puntland has been struggling with high inflation in recent months.²⁷

On Nov. 25, Puntland-appointed Mudug governor Abdilatif Muse Nur 'Sanyare' told reporters that local businesses "must accept Somali Shilling currency" and complained that their rejection was "worsening inflation" in local markets.²⁸ Since August, the Somali Shilling to USD exchange rate had risen sharply from about 37,000 Shillings per 1 USD to over 41,000 Shillings per USD. State authorities were enacting new policies to try and manage the challenge of rising inflation when, on

Nov. 30, Puntland announced that Bossaso port authority shall be conducting business transactions in US dollar only, and it was not immediately clear if the new policy would have a positive effect on the local economy.²⁹ In a separate and unrelated matter, on Nov. 30, Puntland leader Said Deni issued a decree ordering P & O Ports company, the UAE-based firm that manages Port of Bossaso, to deposit all its fee earnings into a port authority bank. The government decision aimed to ensure transparency of financial transactions, so Puntland authorities could remain updated of port fee earnings.³⁰

3.2.2 Analysis: According to Somalia's Provisional Federal Constitution, currency regulation is a federal jurisdiction but the country's Central Bank has not minted new currency for over 30 years. This has allowed for the continued depreciation of the Somali Shilling currency against the US dollar. Puntland officials were making efforts to fight against importation of counterfeit currency, which would only worsen matters in local markets. The government's decision to combat counterfeit currency is a step in the right direction, but only provides a band-aid solution to a long-running problem that was harming the local economy and livelihoods. Puntland authorities should have acted swiftly and comprehensively from election day, as the problem of rising inflation has existed in Puntland for over a decade. Instead, the state government allowed for the problem to persist throughout 2019 and 2020, and began acting to resolve some of the long-term challenges in late 2020 which may be a positive albeit late step of corrective action. In addition, the government should have empowered the State Bank to collect and maintain largest reserves of Shilling currency in order to exercise some control over the exchange rate; it is noteworthy to mention that Puntland state is the largest territory in Somalia where the Shilling currency remains in wide circulation.

The government's decision in late November, which was to collect port transactions in US dollar, could have immediate adverse effect on the local economy and potentially lead to worsening inflation. It was not clear if the decision was issued after a series of lengthy discussions and policy formulation debates, which would involve government institutions and economic experts, including from civil society and academics. It seemed like a decision that was made to have immediate positive effect, but which could backfire since the process of deliberations and policy formulation was not evidently followed. Already, the government was struggling to convince local businesses to allow usage of Somali Shilling currency, as evidence when Mudug governor vowed to pressure local businesses to use Shilling currency. With regard to port of Bossaso, the government's letter demanding that P & O Ports deposit its fee earnings into a government account could likely be an internal matter, and it was unclear the cause or intent of the decision. However, without a holistic approach that incorporates the ideas and expertise of people knowledgeable about local inflation, it looks unlikely that the government's new decision would have positive impact in the near-term.

3.2.3 Forecast: As the month of November came to an end, Puntland authorities continued efforts to try and mitigate the impact of rising inflation by introducing new policy; however, since the new policy was issued without the evident broad consultations and input of subject-matter, it looked unlikely that the new policy would have the impact short-term solutions to the problem of rising inflation.

3.3 Unrest Grows Inside Puntland Parliament over Policy Issues

3.3.1 Key Developments: The Puntland parliament opened its second annual session in October. However, there was growing unrest inside parliament as some MPs were openly critical of the state government and its policies, especially in matters concerning UAE-based company P & O Ports and its management contract of Bossaso port. On Nov. 14, state parliamentarians approved the Telecom Law by 36 yes votes, 1 no vote and 1 abstained vote. Parliament officials announced that the new law replaced the state's old communications law of 2007.³¹ On Nov. 30, the parliament erupted in dispute with MPs yelling at each other and Speaker Abdirashid Jibril 'Abwaan' calling for a suspension of the meeting.³² Local media reported that the dispute was rooted in the parliamentary agenda and dissenting MPs accused Speaker Abwaan of deploying security forces inside parliament. On Nov. 15, Puntland Council of Ministers meeting, chaired by Vice President Ahmed 'Karash'

Elmi Osman, debated and voted to approve the 2021 annual budget of \$341,861,037 USD, reflecting a 5% annual increase according to Finance Ministry officials.³³ On Nov. 25, Puntland state parliamentarians approved the 2021 state budget during the ongoing 47th session of parliament.³⁴

3.3.2 **Analysis:** Without a doubt, the parliamentary dispute in Puntland dates back to November 2019, when former Speaker Abdihakim ‘Dhoobo’ Mohamed Ahmed was unseated unceremoniously after a violent clash outside parliament hall. The new dispute is linked to a disagreement over the parliament agenda, with some MPs accusing Speaker Abwaan of being too close the administration by removing parliamentary agenda any discussion over the P & O Ports contract for Bossaso port. Previously, Puntland ports minister had requested Parliamentarians to await the government’s meeting with P & O Ports representatives in UAE; however, such meeting did not materialize up to November 2020 and pressure was growing. The loud dispute inside parliament hall on Nov. 30 was indicative of the growing dissent among state MPs, and signaled the administration’s frustration with dissenting parliamentarians. If the dissenting parliamentarians’ allegations that Speaker Abwaan was to the state administration become true, it would constitute a direct violation of the Puntland constitution’s requirement of checks and balances between the three branches of government. This realization would in turn potentially lead to a wider dispute in parliament.

3.3.3 **Forecast:** Since the parliamentary dissent has not ease since November 2019, it is unlikely that the current dispute in parliament would simply go away and more likely that the dispute may widen over the next one or two months, unless the parliamentary leadership acted accordingly and addressed some of the dissenting MPs concerns.

4. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

4.1 As GATI Hits Puntland, Authorities Struggle with Disaster Management

4.1.1 **Key Developments:** Puntland state territories continued to face the aftermath of natural disasters during November. On Nov. 23, cyclone GATI hit parts of the state’s northern and eastern coastal areas, from Alula to Bender Beila district on the Indian Ocean. Local media reported that the cyclone brought heavy winds, rains and flooding to coastal areas and causing destruction to life and property.³⁵ The mayor of Hafun coastal town told media that 6 Yemeni fishermen were “found dead” along the coast.³⁶ On Nov. 27, at least 9 persons were reported dead when the cyclone hit parts of Puntland coast and some 180,000 persons were affected.³⁷ International media reported that it was the deadliest storm to hit Puntland in 2020.³⁸

4.1.2 **Analysis:** As the world battles global warming it is increasingly becoming normal for countries to have abnormal weather patterns caused by the anthropogenic climate change. The impacts of this can be seen in Somalia, where over the past two years there has been increase in cyclones, delayed rainy season and massive flooding. For the most part government institutions in Somalia have not dealt well with the management of natural disasters as they lack suitable disaster management systems. The Puntland government has had its fair share of natural disasters and in 2005 it created agencies such as Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management Agency (HADMA) who have in the past led programs to coordinate emergency relief for disaster victims. But, increasingly HADMA, has primarily devolved to coordinate humanitarian affairs and less with disaster management. More troubling is the issue of sustainability. HADMA and other agencies in Puntland rely heavily on donor funding to provide disaster management and emergency relief. This is not sustainable nor does it allow for speedy delivery of aid to disaster victims.

To its credit, HADMA and the Puntland government have set up an early warning system which sends texts to residents of areas that may be impacted by an impending disaster.³⁹ The system set up with the assistance of UN agencies has helped residents from the brunt of disasters and can be accredited to saving lives. But it is not the early warning systems that need improvement; rather, it is

the state's disaster management capacity that requires rethinking. To ensure that disaster victims get the assistance, they cannot rely solely on early warning systems alone. HADMA and other disaster relief agencies within Puntland state institutions need to improve their capacity to plan and sustainably and effectively provide immediate relief, without relying on external assistance.

- 4.1.3 **Forecast:** As the weather patterns continue to be sporadic and unpredictable, the early warning systems will be key going forward. In the short-term, it is unlikely that the Puntland government will address the capacity of emergency preparedness of government agencies, which is required to improve planning, and to build its sustainability and self-reliance in the short term.

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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