



PUNTLAND SITUATION REPORT

NAI Somali Law & Policy Program

October 2020

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the reporting month of October, Puntland state continued to remain in a state of relatively stability. The total number of month-to-month fatalities decreased by a significant 56.5%. Militant groups were blamed for two targeted killings in Galkayo and Garowe. The Puntland military courts handed down heavy verdicts, including two men sentenced to death on terrorism charges. Puntland regional commanders in Sanaag region denied reports that Al Shabaab fighters had seized control over a town in Sanaag region; commanders claimed that the area remained in the hands of Darawish forces. Further, the state's elite maritime unit PMPF reportedly conducted security operations in mountainous areas of Sanaag and Bari regions as part of counter-terrorism efforts in the region.

In Bo'ame, a district in southern Sool region, media reports claimed that Somaliland authorities were making efforts to "organize militia" in the district that was loyal to Hargeisa. Other reports said that Somaliland forces had "moved" to the area, although both reports could not be independently verified.

Regarding the 2020/2021 Somali federal elections, Puntland state appointed its representatives to two federal electoral bodies: the Federal Independent Election Commission (FIET), and the Federal Election Conflict Resolution Committee. The appointments were in accordance with the September 17 Mogadishu Agreement between leaders of the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Federal Member States (FMS). This *Report* suggests that the September 17 Mogadishu Agreement was not comprehensive and warns that this could trigger a new round of political friction.

Further, the *Report* overviews the legacy and impact of the late Dr. Ali Khalif Galayr, a former Somali interim prime minister and founder of Khatumo state. In particular, Dr. Galayr's lasting impact on Khatumo and its relations with Somaliland after the 2017 agreement is analyzed, as well as factions within Khatumo that have caused the group to sub-divide into a number of rival factions.

This *Report* also covers the continued challenge of rising inflation in Puntland and assess its impacts on the local economy, while overviewing the state government's response. The looming inflation crisis has been growing for months and, without adequate government action, brought new risks to a delicate economic situation.

Finally, the state's struggle against the triple threats of COVID-19, locusts and flooding is continued through presentation of events and a brief analysis of the government's response, through the prism of implementing effective policies in emergency preparedness, planning and response. Since 2019, as a number of natural disasters and the public health crisis of COVID-19 have threatened Puntland, it has become imperative that the government enact effective measures to be better prepared to respond to and manage crises at the emergency level, and to lead by example.

2. PEACE AND SECURITY

- 2.1 **Key Developments:** During October, a total of 10 fatalities (dead and wounded) were reported in Puntland, representing 56.5% decrease from total fatalities reported last month. About 50% of all fatalities were attributed to violence related local/clan conflict, 20% attributed to VEO attacks and police action, and 10% attributed to acts of violence against women. There were no major developments in the regional fault-lines (areas controlled/disputed with Somaliland or Galmudug). Puntland forces were conducted security operations in mountain areas of Sanaag and Bari regions, in response to reports that Al Shabaab fighters seized control of a village in Sanaag region. Puntland military courts convicted 5 men of terrorism charges and sentenced them to judgments ranging from execution to rehabilitation for a minor convict.
- 2.1.1 **Violence Against Women:** A report by Radio Ergo, published on Oct. 24, indicated that some of Somalia's trafficked children were ending up in Puntland regions.¹ On Oct. 25, an unidentified dead woman's body was found near coast off Bossaso. Initially, Bari regional deputy governor Ahmed Mohamud Ahmed reported that authorities suspected it was a tragic car accident where the culprit or culprits escaped.² Locals protested in Bossaso against the unexplained death and police commanders called for calm as investigations continued.³ Subsequent police investigation found signs of "sexual assault and murder," police sources told NAI on condition of anonymity.⁴
- 2.1.2 **Sub-National Conflict:** On Oct. 15, media reports noted that local militia were "organizing" in Bo'ame district, in southern Sool region, 90km southwest of Garowe.⁵ Other sources reported that Somaliland forces had "moved towards Bo'ame district". The district has been under control of Puntland and allied local forces for years, but Somaliland authorities have increased their involvement in recent years.⁶
- 2.1.3 **Regional Fault-lines:** There were no major incidents to report from the regional fault-lines (areas disputed/controlled by Somaliland or Galmudug) during the reporting period.
- 2.1.4 **Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO):** On Oct. 10, local civilian Said Jama Mohamed 'Maradona' was killed by unidentified assailants in Galkayo. The victim was inside Abu Hureira Mosque at the time.⁷ Puntland police investigations were underway and, on Oct. 12, Al Shabaab claimed responsibility for the fatal attack.⁸ The victim was a small business owner who commercial vehicles.⁹ On Oct. 21, Puntland authorities reported that police were investigating killing of court official Mohamed Mohamud Abdi Jamus, who was killed in front of his house in Garowe.¹⁰
- 2.1.5 **Counter-Terrorism:** On Oct. 11, First Instance Puntland Military Court of Nugal and Sool regions convicted three terrorism suspects to prison sentences.¹¹ Ismail Abdullahi Ibrahim, 18, and Hassan Ulow Ibrahim, 19, were convicted on terrorism charges and sentenced to life in prison. Court judge Abdirahman Isse Hussein said that the third suspect, 16-year-old Mohamed Ibrahim Isak, was transferred to Puntland Ministry of Justice and Rehabilitation since he was a minor under 18 years of age. Government prosecutors said all three convicted men were arrested in August 2020 by Puntland forces near Galgala mountains of Bari region.

On Oct. 25, Puntland officials denied reports that Al Shabaab fighters seized control of a village in eastern Sanaag region.¹² Gen. Abdullahi Anshur, Puntland Darawish Sanaag regional commander, rejected the media reports and claimed Puntland forces were in control over the area.¹³ On Oct. 27, the state's maritime security force (PMPF) announced it carried out anti-terrorism security operations in towns and villages in Sanaag and Bari regions.¹⁴

On Oct. 27, Puntland Military Court for Bari, Sanaag, Karkaar and Gardafui regions sentenced two men to death for terrorism crimes on behalf of Al Shabaab. The three convicts were identified as: Aden Mohamed Hassan, 28, from Kenya;¹⁵ Abshir Mohamed Abdirahman Toshle, 47, from Puntland, Somalia.¹⁶ On Oct. 28, Puntland special forces (PSF) announced in a media release that its forces detained and brought to military court a “terrorist network” which was responsible for “over 25 killings in Puntland”.¹⁷ In Puntland, the state’s military court is responsible for handling cases related to crimes committed by members of the security forces, terrorism or piracy.¹⁸

- 2.1.6 **Local/Clan Conflicts:** On Oct. 13, local media reported that Puntland police and local militia clashed over a land dispute in Burtinle district of Nugal region. At least 2 fighters, including a police officer, were killed and 3 others wounded.¹⁹ The fighting stopped after police reinforcements arrived and local elders intervened. On Oct. 18, at least 2 nomadic persons were killed in Saho district of Mudug region, in an attack local media attributed to clan-related violence.²⁰ Puntland forces were recently deployed to the district to prevent clan violence among rival militias in the area.
- 2.1.7 **Maritime Security:** On Oct. 17, Somali media reported an increase in illegal fishing activities off the coast of Somalia’s Puntland state, especially the coastal areas off of Gardafui region.²¹ On Oct. 28, Puntland security forces detained Yemeni boats who were allegedly transporting illegal weapons, near Elayo coast, an area west of Bossaso.²²
- 2.1.8 **Security Sector Governance:** On Oct. 3, a delegation of Puntland state MPs visited Badhan, Sanaag region, where new police force recently trained at Horgoble camp in Garowe were deployed as part of the government’s ongoing security sector reforms.²³ On Oct. 17, Somali media reported that a man named Farah Abdi Agane, who was convicted of killing his own mother in Jalam, a town south of Garowe in Nugal region, was executed under judgment by the Puntland Military Court.²⁴ On Oct. 18, Puntland forces who were complaining about unpaid salaries briefly seized control of the Ministry of Fisheries compound in Bossaso in protest and blocked officials from entering or leaving, as per media reports.²⁵ No one was hurt during the brief mutiny, which was later reportedly resolved through mediation by government officials and local elders.²⁶ On Oct. 21, a young man was killed in the crossfire after a shootout between Puntland police and a “group of drunkards”, according to media reports.²⁷

3. POLITICS AND GOVERNANCE

3.1 Puntland Names Representatives to Federal Electoral Bodies

- 3.1.1 **Key Developments:** The September 17 Mogadishu Agreement between FGS and FMS leaders set the course for the 2020/2021 electoral process. On Oct. 22, Puntland state named its four representatives to federal electoral bodies, the Federal Independent Election Commission (FIET) and the Federal Election Conflict Resolution Committee.²⁸ The nominated officials include a former deputy environment minister, a former Bari governor, the Puntland president's deputy chief of staff, and a presidential adviser. The two federal-level committees are tasked with partaking in finalization of the 2021 Somali national electoral process.
- 3.1.2 **Analysis:** The Puntland government's nomination of its representatives to two federal electoral bodies responsible for guiding Somalia's electoral process is aligned with the September 17 Mogadishu Agreement and follows the protocols agreed among FGS and FMS leaders. Other FMS leaders have also nominated their representatives to the federal electoral bodies; however, as the month of October ended, reports were surfacing of growing discord between the FGS and the Jubaland leadership, regarding management of parliamentary elections in Jubaland. If a new discord arises, it would be as a result of the September 17 Mogadishu Agreement, which did not clearly identify specific tasks and delineate roles and responsibilities between FGS and FMS electoral bodies. In short, the September 17 Mogadishu Agreement was not comprehensive, and its underlying flaws could possibly trigger a new round of political infighting.
- 3.1.3 **Forecast:** The federal electoral process is expected to continue unfolding over the coming weeks; however, it is likely that the real schedule shall lag behind the timelines set forth in the September 17 Mogadishu Agreement.

3.2 Future of Khatumo Movement After ex-PM Galayr's Death

Key Developments: On Oct. 9, in an article entitled "Where will the agreement between Somaliland and Khatumo end?", BBC Somali Service analyzed the political aftermath of the death of former Somali prime minister and political veteran, Dr Ali Khalif Galayr.²⁹ On Oct. 11, Puntland Vice President Ahmed Elmi Osman traveled to Mogadishu to attend the state funeral for former Prime Minister Galayr, who died on Oct. 8 in a hospital in Jigjiga, eastern Ethiopia.³⁰ The Puntland vice president met with and shared condolences with members of the late prime minister's family and relatives at the funeral.³¹

- 3.2.1 **Analysis:** Dr. Galayr was a long-serving Somali veteran politician who spent decades in Somali politics, serving in key governance posts ranging from Somali industry minister in 1980, to prime minister of Somalia's interim government in 2000.³² He continued in serving politics long after his premiership ended, serving as a member of Somalia's federal parliament in 2012, and was later elected president of Khatumo administration in August 2014. Khatumo initiated as a movement led by political forces in Sool, Sanaag and Cayn (SSC) regions – areas disputed between Somaliland and Puntland sub-national entities. The Taleh conference of 2012 led to the formation of Khatumo as a state administration for SSC regions, with a rotating presidency.

Since its formation, however, Khatumo has faced numerous challenges in efforts to consolidate its territorial authority in SSC regions and to expand to new areas. The nascent administration's governance efforts faced strong resistance from Somaliland from the onset, with reports of armed clashes between the two sides in the weeks following formation of Khatumo in January 2012.³³

By 2017, Khatumo had sub-divided into a number of factions, with Dr. Galayr leading the most prominent faction which, in October 2017, signed an agreement with Somaliland to integrate their political organization into Somaliland governmental institutions through constitutional reforms. The agreement was widely welcomed in Somaliland, but other Khatumo factions remained staunchly opposed to the agreement. According to the BBC report, Somaliland UCID opposition party chairman Faisal Ali Warabe said that Khatumo faction was granted four Cabinet posts in Somaliland's government, including minister of constitutional affairs.³⁴ The move signals that the Somaliland administration had already started integrating Khatumo representatives into government posts. But other elements of the Khatumo-Somaliland Agreement of 2017 were not fulfilled, including provisions relating to enacting constitutional reforms towards more inclusive government.

By 2019, another breakaway Khatumo faction proclaimed itself as 'Khatumo Liberation Front' (KLF) and claimed responsibility for a number of guerilla-style attacks on Somaliland forces in parts of Sool region.³⁵ It became clear that the Khatumo movement did not achieve its initial goals towards attaining self-rule for SSC regions; rather, the movement became victim to divisions among SSC politicians and was later hijacked by a number of political figures, thereby gradually dismantling the movement's foundational philosophies and limiting its impact and political footprint.

- 3.2.2 **Forecast:** The future of Khatumo movement, after the death of the movement's founder Dr. Galayr, will largely depend on rebuilding political consensus among the Khatumo political factions. This development is unlikely, in the short term, as the movement is anticipated to enter a period of transition seeking new leadership and vision.

4. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

4.1 Puntland Blames 'Counterfeit Shillings' for Rising Inflation

- 4.1.1 **Key Developments:** The Puntland local economy continued to struggle with rising inflation throughout the state's major urban centers. The inflation problem has been developing and worsening in recent months, and the state government's reaction to tackle the burgeoning financial crisis had been delayed or altogether lacking in some respects. On Oct. 3, Puntland media reported that rising inflation was directly affecting commodity prices, and especially harming the livelihoods of small traders and low-income families.³⁶ On Oct. 4, Puntland deputy finance minister Abdi 'Qowdhan' Ibrahim Warsame told BBC Somali Service that Puntland "blames" the FGS for failing to manage Somalia's currency policy.³⁷ The deputy minister noted that Puntland is the "only place" [in Somalia] where "tax is collected and salaries paid in Somali Shillings", and further complained that "counterfeit currency was imported to Puntland".³⁸ The minister did not detail wherefrom the counterfeit currency was made, or imported from.

On Oct. 8, Bossaso mayor Abdisalam Bashir weighed in on the rising inflation crisis. He told a press conference that the local government had "suspended" collection of house tax, citing "growing complaints" from Bossaso residents.³⁹ On Oct. 10, Puntland finance minister Hassan Shire told journalists in Garowe that counterfeit Somali shilling "imported from southern Somalia" was "responsible" rising inflation in Puntland regions.⁴⁰ Minister Shire reiterated the state government's previous claim by directly blaming the FGS for rising inflation in Puntland state's local markets. Somali Shilling to USD exchange rose from 35,000 Shillings to 45,000 Shillings since 2019 in Puntland regions; by comparison, the exchange rate in Mogadishu markets has remained between 24,000 to 26,000 Shillings per one USD.⁴¹ On Oct. 13, *Puntland Post* website reported that President Deni was in Nairobi and met with former Puntland state leader Dr. Abdiweli Mohamed Ali 'Gaas', to "discuss" the government's efforts to manage rising inflation in local markets.⁴²

4.1.2 **Analysis:** Puntland state government has been struggling to contain the economic impact from rising inflation on local markets. Since September, rising inflation has been at the epicenter of challenges facing the administration. Throughout October, as rising inflation affected local markets, small traders and low-income families, Puntland officials addressed the media to combat misinformation about rising inflation and took the opportunity to blame the financial crisis on counterfeit currency that has been flooding local markets, according to Puntland authorities. This point may partially explain the crisis, however, on the wider question of economic stability, did little to assuage public concerns and worries among traders and companies.

Puntland government can be commended for tax collection and salary payment in Shilling currency. In the same spirit, the Bossaso local government's action to suspend tax collection during a time of inflation is a positive and forward-looking policy, that helps to reduce pressure on local communities. At the same time, however, the state government must do more to prevent the importation of counterfeit currency through the robust action and coordination between state police and Ministry of Finance. Further, the government should institute strict laws that criminalize activities related to counterfeit currency, including its import, transport or storage. This criminalization may discourage people from joining criminal networks that profit from counterfeit currency illegal business.

Puntland officials' blame on FGS for the inflation problem is partly correct. Under Somalia's Provisional Federal Constitution, adopted in 2012, currency policy is among four exclusive national powers relegated to the Federal Government. Despite this constitutional authority, successive federal administrations in Mogadishu have not actively pursued long-term monetary policy that helps to stabilize the Somali local economy. The Somali Shillings has not been minted officially since before 1991, a fact that has ensured that counterfeit Shillings minted by various business groups or sub-national administrations are currently in circulation throughout Somali markets. This has created a growing sense of distrust of Somali Shillings.

To ensure monetary stability, the FGS – in collaboration with FMS administrations, subject-matter experts and international financial institutions – to develop a long-term monetary policy to manage and stabilize the Shilling currency. In 2007, the FGS predecessor government, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), made steps towards minting new Shilling currency and introducing it to the Somali economy in a responsible and responsive manner. Currently, the Shilling currency in circulation comes only in the 1,000 Shilling denomination, and the FGS announced new changes more than two years ago. In June 2018, FGS Ministry of Finance presented new Somali Shilling currency at a press event in Mogadishu, where Finance Minister Dr. Abdirahman Dualeh Beileh pledged that the FGS was “determined to print new currencies of the Somali Shillings that include 5,000 and 10,000 denominations”.⁴³ Some two and half years later, the FGS has not introduced the new Shilling currency and the problem of inflation continues to persist and harm local economies in Somalia.

4.1.3 **Forecast:** Puntland state is expectedly to enact new policy reforms to manage and control inflation in local markets over the coming two months.

4.2 Puntland Struggles Against Locusts, Flooding and COVID-19

4.2.1 **Key Developments:** Since last month, some coastal areas of Puntland state, Somalia, faced heavy rains and flooding. In addition to flooding, the state continued to implement “lax” measures against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, and efforts against locusts that threatened agriculture and the environment. On Oct. 6, for example, Puntland independent media reported that some local communities complained about Puntland Ministry of Environment and Agriculture and its failure to effectively to combat the locust crisis.⁴⁴ On Oct. 8, the media reported that COVID-19 spread in Garowe was due to “lax preventative measures”, and limited public awareness was contributing to increases cases of COVID-19.⁴⁵ On Oct. 25, Puntland Ministry of Health officially opened the state's

fourth COVID-19 testing center in Badhan, Sanaag region; Health Ministry officials said that other labs are located in Bossaso, Garowe and Galkayo cities.⁴⁶

As concerns over public health in Puntland grew, the German government announced on Oct. 22 that it donated 7.2 million Euro to UNICEF to invest in health services sector in Puntland.⁴⁷ On Oct. 28, the UN reported that 35 persons were killed in floods in Somalia since January 2020, after heavy rains were reported in different coastal regions of Somalia.⁴⁸ On Oct. 31, heavy rains were reported in rural and coastal areas of Nugal and Karkaar regions of Puntland. Local communities in remote areas faced flooding, high winds, property destruction, and risk to life during the rainstorms. The region entered the second rainy season in September, however, rains have been scarce throughout Somalia this season.⁴⁹

4.2.2 **Analysis:** In September, NAI reported a locust outbreak and flash flooding in some parts of Puntland. These disasters were also compounded by the fact that a second wave of COVID-19 was occurring. In September, *Puntland Situation Report* noted the ‘lax measures’ that the Puntland government was taking and the terrible example set by Puntland authorities, who largely ignored all of the preventative measures, such as social distancing and wearing face masks to contain the spread. In the *Puntland Post* website report, a health worker speaking on the condition of anonymity stated that the Ministry of Health stopped its regular meetings on COVID-19, signaling that sense of urgency has pretty much dissipated. Even during a second spike, the government has opted to focus its efforts on other priorities rather than managing a public health outbreak. The construction of a COVID-19 center in Badhan is counterintuitive, if the government does not take the health crisis seriously.

Management of crises is a complicated task and involves many moving parts, but one of the major issues with emergency management is credibility, especially on the part of government and the stakeholders involved. Puntland government has history of weak capacity in its management of crises, but as the natural disasters and crises mount, the Puntland administration continues to be tested and continues to struggle. There are many reasons for this, including lack of emergency planning, public resources and limited emergency capacity. While all these reasons are impediments, however, some are self-inflicted. The integrity of management systems is crucial to outcome of activities and Puntland has struggled to ensure the integrity of emergency management, be it for natural disasters or public health crises.

Earlier this year, the floods in Qardo drew a lot of attention and aid, most of it raised locally, and despite Puntland commissioning an independent body that included government, civil society and religious leaders, there were accusations of corruption and mismanagement.⁵⁰ Although these reports were uncorroborated, the commission still did not inspire confidence as it ceased to continue its updates via press conference on the status of public donations and progress of delivering aid to flood victims. Prior to that, there were accusations made by residents in Bargal of aid mismanagement, which later led to a shooting that injured one person.⁵¹

This month, residents were complaining of the locust response and its ineffectiveness. Countering locusts is a difficult task and requires a concerted effort whose effectiveness has historically been difficult to gauge. Largely, the response is being led by international organizations with the Puntland government coordinating efforts. But given Puntland’s track record with transparency of management systems in crises, the state will need to do more build the integrity of its systems with effective monitoring and evaluation and manage public relations. Nevertheless, all of this will be in vain if the government is not consistent with its approach and commitment to management of emergencies. As consistency to approach alone will not suffice, the government will also need to be consistent in its leadership, by being an exemplar model in managing crises.

4.2.3 **Forecast:** As climate change continues to impact the globe, Puntland state will likely continue to face more natural disasters. Furthermore, although there were heavy rains in some areas, other areas remain dry and the threat of drought looms in many parts of the state. Puntland has faced its fair share of crises over the past two years, and the state will need to build its emergency response management capacity in the near-term to ensure effective and timely response. It is likely that the Puntland state government will not change its approach to COVID-19 crisis and the state will likely continue its non-adherence to prevention measures.

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.

W: naisomalia.com

E: contact@naisomalia.com

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