



THE ISIR DIGEST

Somaliland Politics and Security Report

November
2022

WWW.ISIRTHINKTANK.COM

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Key Highlights	3
1. Political Dispute Over the Sequencing of Elections	3
2. Sustained clampdown of free press and political opponents by the government	5
3. President Bihi's regional tour.	6
4. Aspirants of new Political Parties continue campaigning	7
5. Garhajis Clan Holds Consultative Convention in Burao	8
6. Increased Incidents in Eastern Regions	10
Way Forward	12

Introduction

In September 2022, the Institute for Strategic Insights and Research (ISIR) published its first bi monthly newsletter that puts into perspective and analyzes the latest political and security news in Somaliland. The first issue drew considerable interest from a wide range of stakeholders including diplomatic missions and policy and research institutions. As a result, ISIR commits to continue publishing the ISIR Digest, to offer objective analysis of current affairs in the security and political arena.

In this issue, we highlight the political disputes and security incidents of the past few weeks. This includes the political deadlock concerning the sequencing of elections, particularly the decision of which election should be held first between the presidential election and political party elections. The fact that the Guurti extended their term by 5 years while at the same time extending the presidential term by 2 years has led to heightened tensions.

The opposition parties have expressed concerns about the term extensions. The parties base their argument on the constitution of Somaliland which recognizes unconstitutional term extensions as, “any term extension beyond those stipulated in the constitutional article Section 83 (subsection 5), or not conforming into the procedural technicalities or outside the timelines provided by the National Electoral Commission.” In a press release, the opposition parties stated that they will consider the extension as an illegal decision.

Meanwhile, there seems to be an increase in cases of insecurity in the eastern parts of the country arising from the sustained election related disputes. This is because the Somaliland government has shifted most of its attention to dealing with the political parties’ new positions of claiming “not to recognize the government” after the 13th November.

So far, the government has been on high alert, and personnel from the police force have been sighted patrolling the streets of major towns, probably to contain any potential eruptions of civil unrest arising from the political disputes. Currently, there have been sustained arrests of political party members. The sustained political stalemate has also negatively impacted the national economy as stated by the Somaliland minister of finance.

Key Highlights

1. Political Dispute Over the Sequencing of Elections

The ongoing political impasse related to the elections in Somaliland has been occasioned by the weak institutions mandated with ensuring checks and balances, the loopholes in certain electoral laws especially those that are manipulated to justify the culture of term extensions. If a lasting political agreement is not reached before the expiry of the presidential term, then the political future of the nation will be bleak.

Below is a sequential timeline of the events leading up to the Guurti extension.

- On Monday 19th September, the House of Representatives convened where opposition MPs unexpectedly presented a motion to amend electoral Law No. 91/2020 and Law No 14/2011 to allow for “a joint election of the presidential and political parties positions”. Out of 54 sitting MPs, 33 voted in favor of the motion. Subsequently, the motion was formally transferred to the Upper House of the Parliament (Guurti) as per the constitutional requirement. However, this move angered the pro government MPs who later moved outside the parliament premises in boycott of the vote.

- On Saturday 24th September, 47 MPs (some protested later that their names were included without their consent) appended their signatures on a letter to the Guurti expressing their disagreement with the proposed amendments.

- On Sunday 25th September, the protesting MPs led by the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives held meetings in a hotel, and concluded that no proceedings would be held in their House until their demands were met. They also put pressure on the Guurti to reject the Motion. This delayed the reconvening of the House of Representatives by one week.

- On Monday 26th September the Guurti speaker refuted the amended law in a letter, arguing that it fell short of the necessary legal requirements by refusing to acknowledge the receipt of the legislative bill. What followed is a dramatic exchange of documents through the informal way of placing an old carton between the columns in the front entrance-steps of the Upper House. This has been dubbed the “Carton politics” in the media, which had a field day with this method of document exchange.



Legal bill Documents in carton left in the entrance-steps of the Guurti

- On Oct 1st, Abdirahman (Clirro), the presidential candidate running on the ticket of the main opposition party WADANI, met with the speaker of the Upper House (Guurti) Saleban Mohamoud Adam in the parliamentary buildings but neither the Guurti speaker nor WADDANI leader provided the details of their conversation. Barely an hour after their meeting, the media broke the news that the term extensions for both the Guurti and the presidential seat had been sanctioned by the Guurti.

- On October 2nd, the two opposition presidential hopefuls from the UCID and WADANI parties held a joint press conference where they unanimously denounced the term extensions made by the Guurti, labeling the extensions illegal and unconstitutional. They also declared that they would not recognize Mr. Bihi's presidency upon the expiry of his constitutional term on 13th Nov 2022.

- On October 4th, the WADDANI party issued a press release in English, summarizing the declarations of the opposition parties' October 2nd press conference.

- On October 5th, Somaliland's international partners issued a press release expressing their position on the Guurti extension and called for a consensus-based agreement. The same call was echoed by the Bureau of Africa Affairs from the state department of USA which restated the urgency of Somaliland leaders to resume dialogue.

2. Sustained clampdown of free press and political opponents by the government

The continued arrests of political opponents and journalists, and the shutting down of private media houses has become the new norm. This is partly due to the fact that the Somaliland Press and Journalist Act is still not approved. The people arrested are often taken into custody without arrest warrants and then released without proper trials and court hearings. In addition, these detentions have been perceived as being politically motivated; most of those prisoners have been transferred to two different Maximum-Security Facilities in Mandhera and Baki districts respectively.

Certain media outlets such as BBC and its affiliate Somali-language media outlets were taken off-air. At the same time, new accusations have been levied against other channels like the CBA TV, leading to the closure of its main Hargeisa office on 7th September.

CBA Tv was later [2]reopened on 11th October after paying a cash fine of up to USD 10,000.00. In the previous months, MM TV paid the same amount when the owner and managing director Mohamed Abdi Sheikh (Illig) along with another reporter were detained for months and later freed. Both channels released statements claiming that the money paid as fines was against the country's legal frameworks.

■ On October 22, a group of four youths, one of them a journalist from Horn Cable TV station and three WADDANI party members whom he had interviewed live on the channel were detained in Gabiley and then released after one week without being charged of any crime.

■ On October 22, the government of Somaliland arrested Mr Abdirahman Ibrahim Artan who is the Director general of WADDANI party headquarters' office in Hargeisa.

■ On October 29, the government arrested the spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after he appeared to have disagreed with an article written by the Minister of Foreign Affairs in a Facebook post .

■ During the early days of October, the government mobilized large contingents of police personnel to forcefully remove private vehicles' plastic cover sheet for " security concerns"

■ On October 25, the government arrested a freelance journalist in Erigavo. The arrest may stem from reports published against the government.

3. President Bihi's regional tour.

■ From the 10th of September, President Muse Bihi went on a two-week long tour of the regions of Somaliland from the western to the eastern parts. The tour started from Awdal and ended in Tukaraq of Sool region.

Tukaraq is the military base for the army of Somaliland forces or the nearest Faultline with the Puntland army. While the government called it a working visit to the regions, it could also be perceived to be a political tour meant to popularize the presidential term extension. As such, the trip drew mixed reactions where in some areas there were large crowds of citizens welcoming the president while in other areas protests broke out amidst demands for a timely election. This is testament that Somaliland is facing polarization politics.

Notably, the Somaliland army has moved further east towards the Puntland Headquarters of Garowe, a distance of less than 60 km from Puntland. This move was made in efforts to capture Bocame from Puntland forces on October 31, 2022. The motives for the timing of the army movement has not yet been explicitly stated either by the government of Somaliland or Puntland from the side of the border with Somalia, but is expected to open additional disagreements and possible clashes with Puntland.

4. Aspirants of new Political Parties continue campaigning

As the disputes continue intensifying, there is one group who have been spared from the election-related political exchanges between the incumbent Kulmiye party and the major opposition parties, UCID/WADDANI parties. So far, 14 new political party aspirant associations have gone through a two-week long vetting process. This is part of the procedural vetting before they formally earn their qualifications as National Political Parties. The constitution only allows 3 political parties to participate in any election.

For the better part of October, the 14 parties traversed the country's regions in efforts to mobilize the support of a minimum of 1000 people in each respective associations' office as required by law. In a controversial move, Sool region's registrations committee amended the laws governing the vetting to just 400 persons per political association. This move was criticized by legal practitioners who claimed that such amendments can only be approved through parliamentary procedures.

The Committee for the Registration of Political Associations and the approval of the National Parties is now expected to announce and confirm the association(s) which fulfill(s) the necessary conditions. Once confirmed, the committee shall grant them a provisional approval which will enable them to participate in the party's elections alongside the existing current political parties. Since there must be winners and losers, it is expected that the losers may dispute the committee's decision. In 2012 when a similar vetting process was done, those who were relegated or could not make the final list did not concede defeat, citing ambiguities related to the process. The party associations leaders of 2012 included; Mohamed Omar Arter, Fawzia Yusuf haji Adan and the late.... who all defected to Mogadishu and held high positions within the ranks of the federal government of Somalia.



The Committee for the Registration of Political Associations and the approval of the National Parties

5. Garhajis Clan Holds Consultative Convention in Burao

On October 16th, a council of Sultans and Chiefs from Gahajis clan made up of mainly the traditional leaders, formally announced that they will convene a consultative conference to be held in Burao from October 25 to October 27. They invited the members of the clan to attend and participate in the conference, notwithstanding their social standing. This was the second of its kind since President Bihi came into power and follows the June 2018 Ga'an Libah Conference.

The core agenda of the October conference revolved around the ongoing electoral standoff as reflected in the seven-point communique that was shared with the Media and translated into the English language. The clan also accused President Muse Bihi's government of organizing systemic killing and torture of its clansmen and referred to the incidents of August 11 where six individuals were killed after the opposition parties staged nationwide protests.

Another notable outcome from the conference was the clan's rejection of the term extensions. They stated that there would be "no term extensions without political agreement between the three current political parties. In addition, no elections would ever be held across the clan's territory". Data indicates that the Garhajis account for approximately 33% of the total votes as well as roughly about 67% of the landmasses from five regions. Unlike in the Ga'an Libah conference, the Burao conference welcomed participation from all the other clans of Somaliland, including delegates from the president's clan who were given opportunities to speak during the closing ceremony. This move is seen as a way for the Garhajis to demonstrate that they have the support of other clans, and also to diffuse any interclan tensions.

So far, the government's response demonstrates its dissatisfaction with the outcome of the conference.

The president echoed his concern when making an address at the main headquarters of the Somaliland national police forces, where he labeled the conference as illegal and urged the traditional leaders to stay away from politics and engage in peace initiatives.



Garhajis Clan Consultative Convention in Burao

5. Increased Incidents in Eastern Regions

Somaliland's eastern regions experienced insecurity and lack of economic development in the past when the administration concentrated on developing the western parts of the country. The eastern regions occupy large areas of land, with poor accessibility due to poor road networks. In addition, the Warsangali & Dhulbahante clans from Darod are reluctant to participate fully in the ranks of the Somaliland government as they also have interest in the administration of Puntland. Others also favor being part of the federal government of Somalia. There are also some concerns that a considerable number of Al-shabab terrorist operatives positioned in the mountainous terrain in the Sanag Region could take advantage of any security gaps

In the recent past, the successive governments of Somaliland have been blamed for collectively failing to strategically bring the majority of the Darod clans into the forefront of Somaliland's democratization & inclusivity processes.

On June 13 this year, attempts by president Bihi to meet with the Warsangali top tribal leader in Erigavo of the Sanaag region failed to bear any fruits because the head of the tribes demanded to share power. The attempts had been sensationalized as a big breakthrough. Before the Warsangali meeting, there was a prior agreement made on October 20 2017 between the Dhulbahante and Somaliland which was never implemented. The Khaatumo accord was negotiated between then leader of Khatumo (the late Ali Khalif Galaydh) and the previous administration of Somaliland headed by Ahmed Mohamed Silanyo. One of the key points of that agreement was to amend the constitution of Somaliland in order to ascertain equitable power sharing and inclusivity focusing on the government's key institutions like; the Executive Councils, Legislation, Judiciary, Defense, etc.

Equally, there are parts of the eastern regions that are occupied by the Isaq clans, mainly the Habar Jeclo and Habar Yonis who also regularly complain that the government is neglecting them and does not do service delivery in those areas.

As a result, those parts of Sanaag and Sool have experienced similar incidents of insecurities that have the potential for escalations. The following are highlights of security incidents reported over the past two months.

■ On September 11, there was a terrorist attack in Eastern Sanaag region where Alshabaab operatives attacked local gold traders. The incident occurred after the local traders refused to pay Al Shabaab/ISIS operatives the extortion money, and the operatives detonated bombs killing one person.

■ On October 5, there was an attack in Laas Caanood, Madereemin neighborhood, at the Bridge near Bootan Fuel Station. The incident involved a hand grenade and Shooting. One of Somaliland's armed personnel, the late Ahmed Qodar, was killed during the shooting

■ On September 6, Berbera mayor called for the stoning of those MPs who support the amendment of the revenue allocation law. This was perceived as inciting violence.



Late Ahmed Qoodaar was later buried in Burao

■ On October 19 in Ceeryaan village in Sanaag region, Habarjeclo youth were seen holding a press conference while holding weapons.

■ On October 23, a skirmish broke out after a group of armed men from Habarjeclo/Biciido shot at a qat store and killed one man and injured three others from Habaryoonis/Sacad Yonis. While it is common to find this kind of incidents in the east, the two clans involved experienced deadly clashes in the recent past and such incidents are worrisome

■ On October 28, another armed conflict happened in Arroweyn village of Buuhoodle District, Togdheer Region, where armed men opened fire and killed one person and injured others due to inter clan conflict between two sub clans of Dhulbahante. Similar shootings were reported at a check-point in the same district Buhodle, where two people were killed.

Way Forward

Since there has been no significant progress in addressing the election related disputes, and as the November 13 deadline approaches, there are valid concerns that the situation may escalate into political chaos. One of the possible scenarios is the government's continued assertion to start preparations to hold the political parties' elections. In order for this to go through, there might be initial preparations that need to be held, like the voter registrations.

If the opposition parties are not involved, there is the prospect of disagreements within the National Electoral Commission as there are two commissioners who were nominated by the opposition parties.

These disagreements should be avoided since disputes inside the electoral bodies may lead to loss of trust and suspicions from the other stakeholders.

Another possible scenario is in case the political parties insist on rejecting the term extension for the office of the president and continue to delegitimize the Guurti's move, there could be yet another frontline for clashes where the government could make high profile arrests of opposition figures as witnessed in the past. The best-case scenario is the possibility of third-party mediators who could bring the differing sides into dialogue so that each party commits to consensus building.

It is reported that the Somaliland partners are considering ways to engage with the government of Somaliland and opposition parties and to facilitate understanding between the parties. This dialogue needs to take a harmonized approach in order to avoid instances of overlapping or duplications. As the citizens wait to see how the prolonged election-related disputes end, emphasis should be on maintaining peace and stability. This would reduce chances of any extremist group taking advantage of the situation to ascertain any form of authority. Some of the aggravating factors may include clashes between the supporters of the opposition parties and the police forces.



About the ISIR Digest:

The ISIR Digest presents a unique way of covering politics and security issues from Somaliland. The newsletter gives the reader a cutting edge and in-depth analysis of the latest developments in Somaliland. We publish and disseminate bi monthly reports totaling 6 issues per year. Our newsletter is accessible in online formats only. Interested readers receive the newsletter by subscribing to our mailing list.

Contact us:

Masala, Off Airport Road
Hargeisa-Somaliland
Email: info@isirthinktank.org
Website: www.isirthinktank.com