

# THE ISIR DIGEST

## Politics and Security Bulletin



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## Introduction

Over the past two months, violent clashes have occurred in Las Anod town in the Sool Region. Protesters have been on the streets to demand the expulsion of Somaliland Security Forces stationed in the region after targeted killings of civilians. Traditional leaders and the local community formed an ad hoc committee that organized a general conference to decide the region's future. Following a two-week general consultative conference, the declaration was issued, highlighting that the Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn (SSC)-Khaatumo territories are part of the Federal Republic of Somalia and stand for the unity and integrity of the Somali Federal Republic.

The self-determination conference delegates elected 45 members to the SSC-Khaatumo leadership that would govern the territory under the constitution and laws of Somalia's federal government. The issued communique indicated that Somalia's federal government would administer the SSC-Khaatumo until a new administration is completed for SSC-Khaatumo territories. The communique also called for the Somaliland government to respect the desire of the local people for self-determination and withdraw its troops from the three regions. On the other hand, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) stated its position regarding the Las Anod situation and the declaration. The FGS acknowledged and welcomed the Las Anod communique while also expressing concerns about the deteriorating situation in the region, calling for the end of the war and urging national and international organizations to provide immediate humanitarian support to the displaced people in Las Anod. After the communique was announced on 6 February 2023, violent clashes continued in Las Anod town in Sool Region. The clashes took place between SSC-Khaatumo loyalists and the Somaliland government.

According to reports, despite calling for a unilateral ceasefire, Somaliland forces have been accused of breaking the ceasefire by shelling LasAnod town in Sool Region. This has further escalated the conflict and caused significant damage to the town's infrastructure, including homes, businesses, and hospitals. Today, the situation in Las Anod remains calm following a trip by General Tesfeye Ayalew, head of the Ethiopian defense forces deployment unit to Hargeisa and Garowe, who is believed to have brokered a ceasefire deal between president Muse and the Garads. The analysis section presents several issues that contributed to the escalation of these deadly violent clashes and possible peace options.

## The Scale of the Vulnerability and Humanitarian Crisis

One area where both conflicting sides rarely agree is the fact that they conceded their actions have led to widespread displacement of residents from Las-Anod, reaching a staggering figure of 185,000 or 90% of the whole population, as mentioned by the Somaliland displacement authority. This trend of a surge in displacements adds to the already existing IDPs resulting from the worsening weather conditions and extended droughts. Aid agencies say the displaced population has mostly crossed the Ethiopian border in smaller villages. It is hosted by relatives also hit by climate change impact, i.e., prolonged droughts and reduced herd sizes.

As a result of this dilemma, more than 50 schools have been closed, affecting the education of over 15,000 children, and an estimated 185,282 individuals have been displaced, as per the interagency assessment report published on 13 February 2023. The shelling has reportedly caused many civilian casualties, including women and children.

## Trends, Dynamics, and Analysis of the Events

The international community has called for an immediate end to the violence, dialogue, and negotiation to resolve the underlying political and territorial disputes. Over 150 people have been reported killed from both sides; many more were injured in the eight weeks of the conflict in Las Anod.

Furthermore, the existing gap in responding to the crisis is massive. The humanitarian, drought, and famine response plan for Somalia/Somaliland for 2022-2023, launched in February appealed for delivering much-needed life-saving interventions to more than 8 million Somalis with the urgent need to raise funds around \$2.6. This comes when donors struggle to cope with the aftermath of the Turkey-Syria earthquake, the Ukraine-Russia war, the protracted crisis in Yemen, and climate change-related migrations in many parts of the Horn of Africa. It's also apparent that agencies are overwhelmed in targeting areas as the gap widens. Despite those challenges, there remains an urgent need for a humanitarian appeal for those affected by the conflict.

There is also an increased exodus of Dhulbahante families from leaving large cities of Somaliland. While this is not significantly observed, it also adds to the complicated situation. Those leaving towns in Hargeisa Burao Berbera and Borama are also leaving behind their jobs and lifeline sources and could eventually join the list of growing displacement. This is because the conflict is tribal, so they have taken those steps as precautions. Nevertheless, these families also add to the already existing but unaccounted displacements. There is an imminent risk of spread out of hostility from combatants to individual levels as aggravated using social media platforms. The international community must swiftly contain Las Anod with regional security ramifications.

Over the past two years, Somaliland has experienced heightened political tensions most of which centered on issues around election-related disputes, particularly the question of the sequencing of elections. The beginning months of 2023 have also witnessed the country in turmoil where there has been a fatal armed confrontation between the Somaliland military and local clan militias in Las Anod, the headquarters of the Sool region. The confrontations started immediately after the conclusion of the Dhulbahante clan conference which called for the region's dissatisfaction with the Somaliland administration and willingness to be administered under the Federal Government of Somalia. The people of the Sool region have long held grievances and felt marginalized by the Somaliland government.

While the ongoing fighting has drawn large-scale international condemnation neither side has shown any interest in backing down. In fact, there have been accusations and counter-accusations between the warring sides to label one another as terrorists. This has also contributed to the escalations of the violence and closed any windows of hope for dialogue. While Somaliland indicated several times that they would apply unconditional ceasefire, that met quite a strong resistance as the other fighting group claimed this as a tricky tactical maneuver. This indicates the trust quandary between the Somaliland and SSC-Khaatumo committee, including the Garaads.

A similar setback was witnessed by the traditional elders that went from Hargeisa to Sool. The trust quandary reached its peak when one of the prominent Clans in Somaliland, "the Habar Garxajis,"

issued a statement indicating that they have decided not to participate in any government-led negotiations with the Garaads of Las Anod citing issues of “trust deficit” with the government of Somaliland. The Garhajis also blamed the response of the government to the civilian protests in Las Anod in December 2022 as wrong and contrary to the ways Somaliland used to approach conflicts. The Garhajis leadership is presumably dissatisfied with the current government’s failure to hold presidential elections. The Lasanod conflict, therefore, exposes the deep division and mistrust within Somaliland clans. The Garhajis also wanted to remain neutral which in turn would boost their quest for attaining the top leadership in Somaliland.

The speaker of the Somaliland House of Representatives, the highest-ranking individual from Sool representing the Somaliland government structure, stated in his press conference in Las-Anod on 26 Feb that the government violated human rights, suppressed the freedom of expression, and used live ammunition against civilians in Las-Anod. The speaker felt ignored, and his advice to resolve the conflict was not considered. He accused the president of orchestrating the atrocity against the people and the city’s destruction. His support of the Dhulbahante Garad’s declaration, including self-determination, indicates his frustration with Muse’s administration, who see him promoting his party’s influence, Waddani, in managing the Las Anod conflict.

The inability and the limited contribution of the traditional leaders who traveled from Hargeisa are associated with the lack of unified position within the center of Somaliland politics hence further alienating those in the periphery (the dominant issaq clan is deeply engaged in internal power contestations) Meanwhile the international partners tried to push talks between Garads in Las-Anod. and the elders from Hargeisa stationed in Ainaba, but there was no significant progress.

The speaker, who is the third top official in the country, repeatedly blames the government for “indiscriminate shelling” and accuses the president of undermining peace initiatives. This demonstrates the country’s top leadership has major disagreements on managing the conflict. Thus, Somaliland’s lack of a unified and common position in addressing the conflict has the potential to further escalate the conflicts.

In recent weeks a calm situation has been felt in and around Lasanod following various diplomatic efforts to pressure both sides to commit to a truce. It is worth taking note that the Ethiopian government dispatched a delegation led by General Tesfaye Ayalew, head of the Ethiopian defense forces deployment unit, to Hargeisa and Garowe as part of diplomatic efforts to broker a ceasefire between Somaliland and the community Las-Anod led by the traditional leaders known as the Garaads. On the other hand, armed clashes could resume anytime as there are reports of both sides receiving reinforcements and preparing for large-scale confrontations.

The possibility of the conflict in Las-Anod spilling over to the region of the Horn of Africa is high and could have wider implications. So far, the Somaliland Government accused the participation of armed forces from the Puntland region of Somalia as well as the Somali region of Ethiopia. The Somali region of Ethiopia issued a statement condemning it in response to the criticisms it received from Somaliland and called it “irresponsible accusations” The statement went on to conclude that the Somali region’s army is not part of the conflict in Las-Anod.

## What is a better way forward?

The immediate priority is to intensify the focus on de-escalation of the ongoing war. There is a looming risk that it may get out of control. Meanwhile, the case of Las Anod has become a longstanding issue as past peace initiatives all failed; therefore, it's time to ask critical questions and face the issue differently. We have consulted peacebuilding experts in the region and asked relevant questions on a better way forward that would lead to a lasting peace agreement.

### Below are several refined recommendations for policy considerations.

- Responding to the humanitarian crisis should be the most urgent and prioritized task in the short run. The Displaced population so far lacks much-needed life-saving interventions that would include Food, Shelter, Water Sanitation, and hygiene packages to prevent the risk of waterborne diseases.
- The international community must get involved in facilitating the de-escalation of hostilities. The fighting armies should withdraw from the frontlines by an equal distance. As shown in the last week alone. The neighboring Ethiopia's role is critical as it has political leverage on both sides. The ongoing peace initiative led by the Ethiopian delegations should be encouraged and supported.
- The president of Somaliland has come across wide-scale criticism for coming short of de-escalating and failing to control the hostilities hence losing the trust of people from Sool and eastern Sanaag regions. There were also election-related disputes prior to the tensions in Las-Anod owing to the rejection by the opposition parties for his two-year term extension after his first term in office ended. As such the president is encountering an impending legitimacy crisis therefore should draw and implement an immediate action plan (election timeline roadmap)

in consultation with all political stakeholders. This will be key in resetting the tone and would lead to a mandate renewal. As a result, resolving election-related disputes can be considered a key entry point toward longer-term dialogues.

- The Somaliland House of Representatives Speaker is a widely respected figure in the Dhulbahante and the highest-ranked official from Sool. He can lead genuine conversations between his clan members and the Somaliland government.

- During the conflict, the government of Somaliland accused militant extremist groups like Alshabaab of participating in the conflicts even though the Las-Anod community vehemently rejected it. However, it is well-known that violent radical groups thrive in places of high insecurity because they successfully fill the vacuum created by recruiting destitute youth groups. To prevent Alshabaab and its allies, Somaliland and the Las-Anod community must realize the risk and engage in constructive dialogue.

- Address the underlying causes of this elongated dispute by establishing a broad-based road map for the now-defunct Somalia-Somaliland dialogue. The Sool and eastern Sanaag must be included in any future dialogue between Mogadishu and Hargeisa. In the past, both sides overlooked the issue's uniqueness, leading to the current deadlock.

- The Somaliland government has to acknowledge the atrocities it committed and commission an independent inquiry for the causes of the war and other alleged crimes against humanity, including indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas. In the longer run, Somaliland must offer compensation for the damage and destruction of critical infrastructures.

- To prevent the escalation of future conflicts, there must be a role for regional multinational groups, i.e., the IGAD. The time is now for creating and operationalizing East African standby forces that could be positioned between warring sides.

- Once a genuine reconciliation occurs between the Harti of Somaliland and the Warsangeli, balanced wealth and power-sharing arrangements must be initiated. Somaliland must amend its constitution to accommodate inclusivity for all.

Dates	Timeline of political and security incidents January and February
3/1/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President Bihi Press conference on Las-Anod Following one week of public protests in Las-Anod and provided details about the number of security incidents i.e., targeted killings between 2009-2022. In total, the government recorded 40 cases.</li> </ul>
7/1/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somaliland sends Security Delegation to Las-Anod Minister of Interior Affairs, Major general Nouh Tani, and Commander of Somaliland police forces arrived in Las-Anod, following the tensions and insecurity but came short of issuing a statement</li> </ul>
8/1/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sool Region officials resign from Somaliland Government Posts Ahmed Ibrahim Ali Somaliland’s representative to China, who hails from the Sool region, resigns in protest of the government's use of force in Las-Anod.</li> </ul>
10/1/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WADDANI Opposition Party Criticizes the government for the use of force. Abdirahman Mohamed Abdilahi (Cirro) blames the government for using force against peaceful protests in Las-Anod and called for the establishment of a national inclusive Committee tasked to find lasting solutions for the Las-Anod question.</li> </ul>
13/1/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa In Berbera. They conducted a site survey of the Airport of Berbera. The visit comes before the expected U.S.-led multinational military training exercise justified by Accord scheduled for February 2023. Somaliland eventually did not succeed in participating in the joint exercise.</li> </ul>
21/1/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somaliland statement on the Las-Anod conference Government says the Dhulbahante conference in Las-Anod will take place but with the condition, its outcome respects the borders of Somaliland.</li> </ul>
21/1/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Garaad Jama Garaad Ali arrives in Las-Anod. The Garaad was welcomed by thousands of crowds. He left in 2007 when Las-Anod came under the control of Somaliland.</li> </ul>

27/1/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voter Registration is concluded. One Month long Somaliland National Electoral Commission officially announces the conclusion of the process without the participation of eastern Sanaag and parts of the sool region including Las-Anod.</li> </ul>
27/1/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dhulbahante clan conference opens in Las-Anod. It's named "the SSC regional self-determination conference" (<i>Shirweynaha Aayo-Katalinta Gobaladda SSC</i>).</li> </ul>
30/1/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somaliland Government bars journalists from covering Las-Anod incidents. The Ministry of Information issued a letter warning media houses and independent journalists operating in Somaliland to refrain from broadcasting news reports and airing public opinion that could "inflame the situation in Las-Anod".</li> </ul>
30/1/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Second Press Conference of President Bihi. The president addresses the public about the ongoing Dhulbahante consultative conference in Las-Anod. President Bihi also blamed Al-Shabaab for mobilizing the protestors as they were behind the killing of Las-Anod key figures for a period of 10 years.</li> </ul>
31/1/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Garaads Respond immediately. Garad Jama Garad Ali immediately responds to the earlier speech saying what's happening in Las-Anod is a public revolt against Somaliland that they are not terrorists and went on to point Somaliland as closely linked with Alshabaab.</li> </ul>
1/2/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IGAD Communique on Las-Anod. Regional leaders arrived in Mogadishu for a security summit and mentioned that the Djibouti leader has started a mediation process.</li> </ul>
1/2/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somaliland holds National Army Day commemorations in Las-Anod. Previously it was held in Hargeisa. This move could be translated as a provocative act while the clan conference was underway in the same town of Las-Anod.</li> </ul>
5/2/2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presidential Circular on Las-Anod. A circular from the presidency of Somaliland orders a change in prosecution procedures for cases related to terrorism to be trialed in military courts as opposed to previous arrangements i.e. in civil courts.</li> </ul>

<b>6/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Dhulbahante clan conference Communique After the conclusion of the meeting the Garaads submitted their decisions to the 33 delegates. A seven-point communique was read as they declared that they are not part of Somaliland and instead elected a 45-member committee to administer the Dhulbahante areas.</li> </ul>
<b>6/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Armed Confrontation starts. Heavy military confrontation immediately starts between Somaliland forces and Khatumo SSC militiamen. Both sides accused each other of instigating the attacks.</li> </ul>
<b>7/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Somalia's government released a statement containing 7 points and welcomed the decision of the Garaads to be part of the federal government of Somalia.</li> </ul>
<b>7/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International partners call for an immediate de-escalation of violence and protection of civilians in Las-Anod.</li> </ul>
<b>7/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The UN high commissioner for human rights condemns the shelling of civilian areas and calls for the authorities to commission immediate inquiry about the recent events unfolding in Las-Anod.</li> </ul>
<b>8/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The elected mayor of Las-Anod accused Somaliland forces of shelling non-military installations. He called on president Bihi to withdraw forces and stop the war.</li> </ul>
<b>10/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Government of Somaliland has declared an unconditional and unilateral ceasefire in the conflict in Las-Anod of the Sool region issued on February 10, 2023.</li> </ul>
<b>10/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The SSC traditional leadership welcomed the ceasefire announced by the government. Garad Jama Garad Ali who spoke to the media said that they welcome the announced ceasefire.</li> </ul>
<b>10/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amnesty East Africa is closely monitoring the crisis in Las-Anod. The statement reads as follows "We are appalled by reports of large numbers of people killed. Unlawful killings &amp; other violations must end &amp; there must be immediate unhindered access for humanitarian actors."</li> </ul>
<b>11/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A health Worker in Las-Anod is killed The Somali Red Crescent Society said one of its volunteers Abdisalam Muse was killed in Las-Anod town after he was hit by a stray bullet.</li> </ul>



<b>11/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>President Bihi meets opposition parties and new political associations in two separate meetings within a day and mainly discusses the Las-Anod conflict.</li> </ul>
<b>14/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International partner's second statement on Las-Anod The International Partners released a statement expressing deep concerns about the shelling of civilian infrastructure, which has resulted in casualties and widespread displacement.</li> </ul>
<b>15/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Somaliland National Displacement and Refugee agency statement says '85-90% of residents in Las-Anod are displaced by the ongoing conflict.</li> </ul>
<b>15/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>President Hassan Sheikh speaks about Las-Anod And says that Somaliland should listen to the people's demands.</li> </ul>
<b>67/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Third Press conference of President Muse Bihi Says his government plans to send a delegation of traditional leaders to negotiate with Garaads in Las-Anod.</li> </ul>
<b>19/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Garhajis traditional leadership issues a five-point statement. The Garhajis leaders refused to be part of the traditionally led delegation and blamed the president for being responsible. They also condemned the killing of civilians in Las-Anod and called for a ceasefire.</li> </ul>
<b>23/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Charge affair from the U.S. Embassy in Mogadishu Tim Trenkle visited Hargeisa to meet with Somaliland president Bihi about the Las-Anod conflicts. The embassy later tweets that he had a frank discussion with President Bihi about the situation in Las-Anod.</li> </ul>
<b>24/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bureau of African Affairs statement Says that the United States condemns the continued indiscriminate attacks that have killed scores of civilians in Las-Anod must end and those responsible must be held accountable.</li> </ul>
<b>26/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The speaker of Somaliland's House of Representatives Speaks out. The speaker remained in Las-Anod during the course of the conflict and accused the government of indiscriminate shillings as well as the president for violating the ceasefire on a number of occasions.</li> </ul>
<b>26/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Somaliland holds a press conference. Dr. Essa Kayd speaks about the situation in Las-Anod and says the government of Somaliland is in control of the situation in Las-Anod.</li> </ul>



<b>27/2/2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Puntland joins the conflict in the Sool Region. Puntland army attacks Somaliland army bases in Gambadha after the Somaliland army vacated their base in Tukaraq.</li></ul>
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## About the ISIR Digest:

The ISIR Digest presents a unique way of covering politics and security issues in 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 six issues per year. Our newsletter is accessible online only. Interested readers receive the newsletter by subscribing to our mailing list.

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