

THE ISIR DIGEST

Politics and Security Report

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Introduction

The Institute for Strategic Insights and Research (ISIR) publishes a bi-monthly newsletter that puts into perspective and analyzes the latest political and security news in Somaliland. The newsletter is targeted at stakeholders in the peace and security sector, as well as partners in governance. These include diplomatic missions, development partners, and policy and research institutions. This is the third issue of the ISIR Digest.

In this issue, we highlight the politics surrounding the elections, the economic and political implications of the Khat trade in the Eastern Region, the current digital censorship and its implications on the civic space, and the political outlook for 2023. The last part of the Bulletin will present a summarized timeline of key political and security incidents in the form of an infographic.

Key Highlights

• Protests in Lasanod town

Huge protests that continued for approximately about two weeks erupted in Lasanod town in Somaliland, demanding government intervention in the sustained assassinations of key political figures. This came at a time when continued murders of key figures from Lasanod reached its peak.

The incident that triggered the latest spate of violence was the killing of Hadrawi Sangub by unidentified gunmen on Monday, 26 December 2022. The protests began on 27th December 2022 and lasted until 4th January 2023. During the course of the protests, security forces used live ammunition to disperse the crowds killing 14 people and injuring 39 people according to UNHCR report.



The late Abdifatah Abdillahi



(27th December 2022 Scenes from the center of Laascaanood town where the demonstrations have taken place)

• What is the underlying cause for the lack of confidence in the Harti clans of Sool in the Somaliland government?

The mistrust between sections of the clans occupying Lasanod town and the Somaliland government can be traced back to 2007 when the Somaliland army moved into the town. This followed armed clashes with Puntland forces. Following the Somaliland army's complete takeover of Lasanod town, sections of the Harti Clans of Sool and Eastern Sanaag have long held that Somaliland which is dominantly run by the Isaac clan has centralized power and resource sharing within themselves and have long complained about being marginalized.

In early December 2022, Khatumo leaders who met in Jigjiga announced their intention to forcefully remove Somaliland's control over Sool and Sanag. Also between 2011 and 2017, the Harti clan formed the Sool Sanaag and Cayn front (SSC) which was led by Saleebaan Haglotoosye. This was in an attempt to wage war against the Somaliland administration. The clan further formed the Khatumo State which was headed by the late Prof Ali Khalif Galaydh. As both fronts were armed, they were engaged in armed clashes with Somaliland forces. This resulted in the loss of lives and the destruction of property mainly in the Sool and Buuhoodle areas.

The clashes ended when both groups signed peace agreements amid internal intra-clan disputes with the then-president of Somaliland Mr. Ahmed Silanyo. Saleban Hagla Toosiye joined the Somaliland cabinet and is now heads (Ururka Shacabka) the People's political association which plans to partake in the upcoming political party's vote.

The Khatumo leader's agreement was signed following a proposal by Mr. Galaydh to amend the constitution to accommodate the grievances of the Harti clan and address the question of power-sharing. When president Silanyo who signed the agreement on behalf of Somaliland left office, the next president Muse Bihi halted the implementation of the agreement. The implementation was halted at a time when Professor Galaydh was still in Hargeisa struggling to convince his Khaatumo comrades to honor the peace agreement. He, therefore, felt powerless and let down by the decision. In response, Mr. Galaydh toured the regions of Somaliland in a bid to appeal to the public where he met youth groups and participated in public discussions as he coined the term "Somaliland la Wada leeyahay" which means 'Inclusive Somaliland'.

In 2018, when president Bihi came to power, Somaliland forces advanced into Tukaraq in deadly clashes with Puntland forces.

Meanwhile, there were heightened tensions in Eastern Sanaag when Warsangeli Sanaag army contingents who were stationed in the Badhan Region defected from Somaliland to Puntland.

●Voter Registration kicks off in Somaliland



The voter registration process formally commenced on 28th December 2022 and will take one month to complete. It's worth taking note that there will be no voter registrations in the eastern sanaag areas occupied by the Warsangeli clan of Harti as well as in parts of Sool that includes Lasanod amid heightened security tensions. Interestingly, both the opposition parties and the government agree on the implementation of voter registration irrespective of which election will be held first. So far, the Somaliland National Electoral Commission is yet to shed light on which election will precede the other between the presidential election and the political parties' election, in light of the disagreements among the key stakeholders.

The disagreement on election sequencing reached its peak following the Guurti's (Upper House) extension of the presidential term by two years in October 2022, a move that was fiercely contested by the opposition parties.

However, the National Electoral Commission's initial nine-month timeline for the presidential election has not been revisited yet.

On the other hand, the government of Somaliland insists on organizing the political party's vote to elect the three political parties that will take part in the upcoming, unscheduled presidential elections.

The event to launch the voter registration process, which was not given much prominence in the media, was attended by the three political parties and the new political associations. This could be translated as a rare opportunity to negotiate a settlement for the electoral impasse.

The timing of the registration comes at a crucial time for the electorate who are facing the risk of imminent drought, particularly the pastoral rural population who make up the majority of the voters. The voter registration will continue for one month in 170 polling stations throughout Somaliland, targeting to register specific voters, particularly those who could not make it during the past voter registration campaigns i.e. those who may have reached the age of 16 or who plan to relocate from their original places of residence.

• WADDANI Party organizes countrywide rallies in major towns

The leaders of the two major opposition parties, UCID, and WADANI parties held a joint press conference in October where they unanimously denounced the presidential 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. This came a few weeks after the Garhajis Grand Conference in which the Garhaji clan rejected the idea of holding any election in their constituency unless the government and the opposition parties came to an agreement.

Since the elections were not held by the time the deadline lapsed, the main opposition party, WADDANI, has been leading major rallies in protest of the presidential term extensions. The party has so far mobilized large rallies in three major cities in Somaliland - Burao, Hargeisa, and Erigavo and threatened to withdraw their recognition of the current government as the legal government.

On 10th November, WADDANI held its final rally in Hargeisa, and on the 13th of November, in a five-point joint statement released by the opposition parties, they denounced the legitimacy of the executive. A week later, the president called for his ruling party - Kulmiye's -

executive committee meeting and announced the revocation of all legal rights of the opposition parties. These developments could complicate attempts to resolve the political deadlock and compound the continued stalemate in the country.

The situation has so far consumed significant resources that would otherwise be directed towards other priority areas such as humanitarian response to the recent drought, and the consequences of the devastating market fire.

• Government's Intolerance of Criticism

Another major development in Somaliland is the government's intolerance of criticism by the general public, essentially leading to a shrinking civic space. There have been noted restrictions on the freedom of expression for journalists, political activists, and the general public. The government has demonstrated an unwillingness to take criticism, persecuting people deemed to be pointing out any of its shortcomings. This dates back to 2018, but lately, the intolerance to criticism has risen to unprecedented levels, such that one may get arrested for a simple Facebook post. For instance, in November 2022, the Government of Somaliland deported a female social media influencer as she entered Somaliland from Ethiopia using the Tog-Wajaale border crossing. She was accused of making remarks against the government of Somaliland in the past.

In response to opposition parties' withdrawal of recognition of the government, more than 60 young people, including minors, were arrested from Burao and taken to Mandera Prison; a maximum security prison in a remote region away from Burao. The arrest was a result of their celebrating the opposition parties' move. Additionally, police arrested a man who is a member of the newly registered political association known as "Kaah". The reason for the arrest relates to social media posts he made, which were deemed to be critical of the government.

Furthermore, the government continues to detain media and opposition party officials. In November, the WADDANI party representative in Sheikh District was arrested, together with a reporter from the CBA in the same region. The arrest happened at the reception of the party leaders in Sheik district, which the reporter was broadcasting. WADDANI party leadership termed the arrest as an abuse of power and an attempt to deny the citizens their basic freedom.

The government's response to public protests could be perceived as unduly forceful, seeing as it has numerous times involved the firing of live bullets to disperse the protesting crowds. While the use of live bullets during the pro-election protests in June and August still remains unsolved, on December 27, the government responded in a similar fashion, shooting at protesters in Lasanod.

Footage of the army men using lethal weapons inside the town went viral. Consequently, there are reported fatalities and injuries from the incident.

All these incidents point to a government that is not supportive of the freedom of expression, the freedom of association, the right to affiliate with a political party of choice, and various other freedoms and rights, ultimately, shrinking the country's civic space.

• Political instability and the potential for radical groups to take advantage

As the year 2022 comes to an end, Somaliland marks the first anniversary of an election-related dispute between the two opposition parties of UCID/WADDANI on one side and the governing KULMYE party on the other side. These disputes have gone through various stages, with the most dramatic events being witnessed in the past two months during which time the opposition parties heavily contested the presidential term extension, following the expiry of the five-year term on November 13.

In a joint press conference, the leaders of both opposition parties called for the end of the formal term of the president. President Muse Bihi remains in power and will continue to hold office until the presidential elections are held as stipulated in the national constitution.

However, the opposition parties have argued that the current presidency has lost legitimacy hence they will not recognize it. On November 13, immediately after the opposition parties called for the end of the president's term, violent clashes erupted in the cities of Erigavo and Burao with the main political stakeholders taking part in deepening electoral crises and polarization of masses who support either side of the political divide, it is expected that the situation will continue to get worse since both the government and the opposition have not shown any interest in holding constructive dialogue.

Elsewhere in Burao, Abdimalik Muse Oldon was released after two years behind bars. Mr. Oldon is a well-known journalist and influences large groups of audiences through his social media channels. The reporter was originally accused of criticizing the President of Somaliland as well as the Abaarso schools. At first, Abdimalik was acquitted of any crime by the Marodijex Regional Court before the appeals court sentenced him to serve two years in prison. Soon after his release, Abdimalik talked to the media on several occasions, appearing to have been radicalized while in prison based on the grievances he experienced as a result of sustained imprisonment. In a message directed to the media, Oldon asked the press not to be neutral when religion is being targeted and accused his opponents of being against Islam.



Journalist turned religion activist Mr. Abdimalik Oldon after he served two years jail terms

• Khat Trade gets into Somaliland's political economy trends

In August 2022, the ban on the importation of Khat from Kenya into Somalia and by extension, Somaliland, was officially lifted after an agreement was signed between the newly elected Somali president Mr. Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud, and Kenya's outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta. The ban was instituted in March 2020 at the onset of diplomatic tensions between Somalia and Kenya occasioned by the Maritime case at the International Court of Justice, among other contentious issues.

Following the lifting of the ban, the resumption of Khat trade and issuance of import licenses has become a newly contested fault-line and a clash between past traders and new market entrants.

While the demand for Kenyan khat is not as high and lucrative in Somaliland as it is in the Federal Government of Somalia, there are still certain parts of Somaliland where it is consumed, for instance in Laacaanood and other parts of the Sool region. Mohamed Jabuutaawi, a long-term importer of Khat from Kenya, has accused the government of Somaliland of revoking his import licenses without due cause, and in retaliation has threatened to continue trading in the stimulant without licensing and by force. During the press conference, images of armed men could be seen behind Jabutawi.

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Khat Trader Mr. Jabutawi speaking to the media alongside him could be seen, armed men

● Highlights from the recently approved National Budgets

The House of Representatives approved the national budget for 2023, estimated to be \$420 Million which is only 4% more than the previous year's budget. The national budget act was later on signed into law by the president. The minister of finance, Dr. Sa'ad, highlighted the fact that the government would collect less revenue than initially thought as political tensions have affected trade and the business environment. The parliament, for the second year running, has made significant reallocations, channeling \$4 million into new projects.

The revenues for the budget will be raised mainly by the Central Government as well as the Local Council governments. In addition, a significant amount will be raised from "International Donations". The 2023 budget focuses on the following main sectors.

- Security
- Elections
- Agricultural production
- Water
- Fisheries
- Environmental protection
- Foreign (Recognition lobbies)
- Technical skills institution and
- National Employment Program

2023 Political Developments and Possible Security Implications Outlook

After local dispute resolution attempts are exhausted, Somaliland's political deadlock between the government and opposition over the elections may continue to worsen unless external factors change. In any case, the dispute will keep repeating due to dysfunctional institutional structures and practices. Additionally, President Muse is observed to have demonstrated inflexibility by preempting traditional consensus approaches that served as means to bridge political issues. The prospect of having a dedicated dialogue is seemingly very narrow. Therefore, if the opposition and the government fail to compromise on the two years extension and the sequence of the elections then chances are high for another year of political turmoil when a humanitarian crisis could be high amid looming drought conditions.

Secondly, the instability and insecurity particularly from the eastern regions will remain a challenge that will create distrust between the Harti and Somaliland administrations. For the last two years, unidentified gunmen have been murdering key figures, mainly from pro-Somaliland politicians. While it's clear that these killings have instigated instability, what remains unclear is the perpetrators or the motives beyond fueling violence in the region.

The government has so far not provided a comprehensive response which has angered the Harti clans in Sool. It has also become a factor that could keep distancing themselves away from Somaliland and particular. The situation in the eastern regions of Somaliland in general will remain a hotspot that will need to be approached with a high degree of sensitivity as well.

• A Timeline of Political and Security Incidents in Somaliland

The following is a timeline of the security and political events, incidences, and developments since the last issue of the ISIR Digest:

6 November 2022,

The committee for registration of political associations and approval of national parties announced the final list of associations that will participate in the vote for the three future political parties.

7 November 2022,

Following the announcement, some of the political associations that did not make it to the final list of nine held press conferences alleging mismanagement and fraud during the vetting process. Talawadaag political association filed a case earlier and won a court verdict granting its validity as a political association after the committee disqualified it earlier.

Between 4th and 10th November 2022,

The chairperson and presidential hopeful of the WADDANI opposition party toured the Eastern Regions, holding major rallies across cities in Somaliland. These cities included; Bura'o, Erigavo, Sheikh, Odweyne Las'anod, and Hargeisa. The rallies were in protest against the presidential term extensions, and a call for timely presidential elections.

8 November 2022,

Somaliland's international partners held a virtual meeting with president Bihi and afterward issued a statement raising concerns about the lack of dialogue between the Somaliland political actors.

8 November 2022,

The WADDANI party representative in Sheikh District was arrested, together with a reporter from the CBA in the same region. The arrest happened during an event held to welcome the party leaders in the Sheik district, which the reporter was broadcasting.

13 November 2022,

upon the lapsing of the presidential term limit, the leaders of the opposition parties declared that the constitutionally mandated term of the president has expired and hence do not recognize the legitimacy of the current executive (president and his cabinet). In early October 2022, Guurti extended the term of the president by two more years.

On November 13, 2022,

the government arrested dozens of citizens in the Bura'o after the opposition supporters held a rally to support the opposition parties' decision.

November 20, 2022,

the Government of Somaliland deported a female social media influencer for the second time as she entered Somaliland from Ethiopia using the Tog-Wajaale border crossing. She was accused of making remarks against the government of Somaliland in the past.

November 21, 2022,

Somaliland Police conducted an operation and arrested seven individuals in Las Caanood. The detainees were suspected to be connected to the assassinations of officials and prominent residents in town.

November 21, 2022,

Somaliland and Puntland forces clashed near Dan-Dan village, killing two and injuring four among the combatants.

November 21, 2022,

the Kulmiye party issues a statement claiming that the opposition parties have lost their legal personality rights.

November 24, 2022,

Police arrested a man who is a member of the newly formed political association known as "Kaah". The reason for the arrest relates to social media posts he made critical of the president.

26 November 2022,

A well-known Khat trader based in Laascaanood by the name Jabuutaawi was seen on television alongside armed men threatening to use violence as he accused the Somaliland Government of favoritism in regard to Khat Import licensing.

November 26, 2022,

Police arrested a member of the Waddani party after the Minister of Technology submitted a complaint about the detainee criticizing the government on social media.

November 26, 2022,

on the same day, the Somaliland Vice President lamented that 70% of Somaliland youth are unemployed.

November 29, 2022,

the House of Representatives approved the 2023 National Budget.

November 30, 2022,

Members from the Somaliland disabled community staged a demonstration and held posters demanding benefits amid the approval of national 2023 budgets. The protest ended peacefully.

6 December 2022,

Somaliland President Bihi received a delegation from Norway and Turkey and discussed the resumption of the Somaliland-Somalia dialogue. The delegates also met Somaliland opposition parties afterward.

7 December 2022,

The President of Somaliland flew to Djibouti to attend a much-publicized wedding ceremony that involved three presidents from Djibouti, Somaliland, and Somalia.

11 December 2022,

Somaliland National Electoral Commission announced that voter registration will start on 28 Dec 2022. Opposition parties welcomed this announcement.

22 December 2022,

Journalist Abdimalik Muse Col-doon was released from Hargeisa central jail after serving two years following sentencing by the Hargeisa Court of Appeal.

On 26 December 2022,

The Commission for the Registration and Certification of Political Parties/Associations released a letter saying that the ten years license of the three political parties (Kulmiye, Waddani, and UCID) officially expired on that day.

26 December 2022,

unidentified gunmen shot and killed a man who was a former Somaliland parliament candidate in Laascaanood.

December 27 and 31 2022,

Residents of Laascaanood staged large-scale demonstrations. The protesters were angered by the continuous and targeted killings of key figures by unidentified gunmen. In response, Somaliland security forces responded by firing bullets at civilians leaving 10 dead and dozens injured.

28 December 2022,

The Federal Government of Somalia in a press release warned oil exploration companies specifically Genel Energy PLC to cease "its claim of ownership rights and stop operations from drilling oil in Somaliland"

29 December 2022,

Somaliland, in a response press release, rejected the federal government of Somalia's objection to Genel Energy's activities .

On 29 December 2022,

Several officials resigned from the government in protest of the security force's deadly response to the protest. Media posts show people marching on the streets carrying Somalia flags.

31 December 2022,

For the fourth day, the public protest that was caused by the unidentified gunmen killings continues.



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