

ISIR INSTITUTE ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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ISIR
INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC
INSIGHTS AND RESEARCH

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ISIR INSTITUTE

Off Airport Road, Masallaha Hargeisa

SOMALILAND

Phone: +252 63 6226667

www.isirinstitute.com | info@isirinsitute.org |

[X](#) @ISIRInstitute [f](#) @ISIRinsitute [in](#) @ISIRinsitute [@](#) @isirinsitute

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ISIR INSTITUTE

The Institute for Strategic Insights and Research (ISIR) is an independent, nonpartisan organization that uses research to inform its policy advocacy work. It undertakes impartial policy research, training and analysis to organizations and decision-makers in the Horn of African region who are working toward innovative thinking to stimulate formulation of sound public policies leading to positive outcomes in the fields of peace & security, good governance, safeguarding human rights and democracy.



Message from the Managing Director

The ISIR Institute continued to deliver its institutional mission in 2024 by producing new knowledge, engaging in informed civic forums, undertaking public policy analyses, and proposing solutions.

While the Horn of Africa regional dynamics have proved to be increasingly challenging, the institute has continuously proffered potential solutions. Among the most notable developments in 2024 were the intensification of the dispute between Somaliland and Somalia, the diplomatic row between Somalia and Ethiopia, the formation of a tripartite security pact involving Eritrea, Somalia, and Egypt against Ethiopia, and the continued attacks by the Yemeni Houthi against targeted commercial vessels, which created insecurity in the Red Sea, where 15 percent of the global trade and 12 percent of the global energy navigate.

At the country level, most of the countries in the Horn of Africa demonstrated fragility. In Somaliland, there had been concerns over the possibility of holding peaceful elections after two years of local political crises as well as armed confrontations with SSC-Khatumo in Sool and Sanag. In Ethiopia, the implementation of the cession of hostility agreement between the Ethiopian government and the TPLF, as well as insecurity posed by rebel forces, remained challenging. In Sudan, the continued fighting between the Sudanese army and the rebel forces and the humanitarian catastrophe have been alarming. In South Sudan, the endless political transition has led to uncertainty and



Hassan Adan (Suudi)
Managing Director ISIR

heightened risk of a return to conflict. In Somalia, the political fragmentation between the federal government and the regional states has led to political stagnation and concerns of renewed conflict.

In response to those issues, the institute has provided possible strategies to address those regional issues. The analyses were covered in eight publications in the form of study reports, policy briefs, and other publications and were further deliberated in civic forums. The director of the Institute for Strategic Insights and Research extends his utmost gratitude to the committed researchers and fellows as well as the valuable contributors and audiences for the positive feedback and collaboration. Special thanks go to the like-minded think tanks and partners with whom we forged synergies to advance our shared objectives.

ISIR Institute: 2024 Publications

We invite you to explore the ISIR 2023 Annual Report for more insights into our initiatives and access previous annual reports for a comprehensive overview : [ISIR Annual report 2023](#)

Research Papers:

- Somaliland's Foreign Policy Reset: Turning Challenges into Opportunities
- Somaliland Election Stakeholder's Use of Digital and Social Media
- Houthi Deterrence and the Horn of Africa: Rethinking Washington's Red Sea Policy
- Af Soomaaligu Khatar Ma Ku Jiraa? Falaqaynta Walaaca Faafay iyo Wejyada Dhabta ah

Policy Briefs:

- Persian Gulf Hegemony in the Horn of Africa: Patronage, Arms Trade, and Evolving Power Dynamics
- South Sudan's Endless Political Transitions
- Somaliland Election Stakeholders' Use of Digital & Social Media.
- Somaliland's Foreign Policy Reset: Turning Challenges Into Opportunities

ISIR Digest:

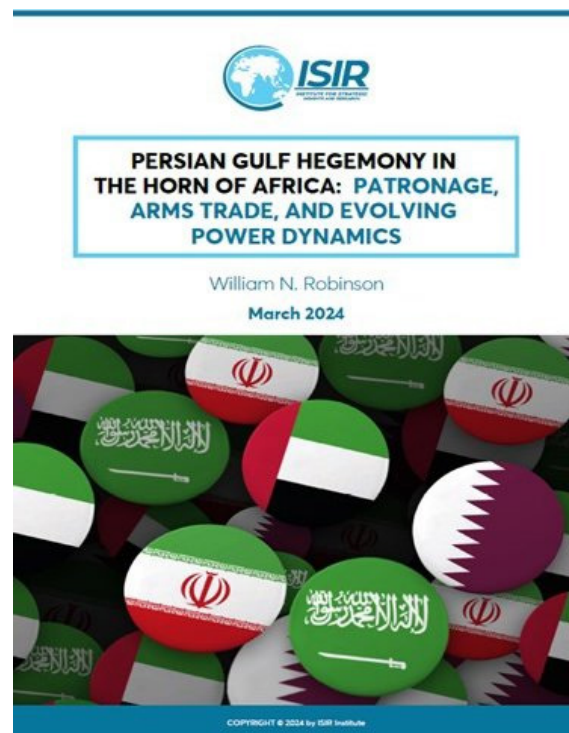
- Geopolitical Crisis and the Upcoming Somaliland Presidential Elections

Thematic focus

Regional Peace and Security

The Horn of Africa region faces some of the most critical peace and security challenges, due, in part, to socio-political crises. The region is fraught with governance challenges, economic underdevelopment, environmental catastrophes, and resource/territory-based conflicts. The Institute of Strategic Insights and Research contributes to the strengthening of peace and security in the region through conducting relevant, issue-based research on regional peace and security, keeping abreast of and connecting to relevant conflict transformation and peace building studies, and participating in key regional relevant research and practice exchanges.

In 2024, ISIR commissioned various research studies into the peace and security situation in the region, the drivers of instability, and policy recommendations for tackling these challenges. One of these papers was titled, **"PERSIAN GULF HEGEMONY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA: PATRONAGE, ARMS TRADE, AND EVOLVING POWER DYNAMICS"**. It delved into the evolving dynamics within the Eastern Gulf and the Horn of Africa, highlighting a transformation in the soft-power strategies of key players such as the UAE, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, as they increasingly align with Mearsheimer's offensive realist paradigm. The transformation of power dynamics carries consequential ramifications for peace and security in the Horn of Africa. [Read here](#)



Additionally, the ISIR Institute examined the escalating crisis in the Red Sea, triggered by the Houthi movement's attacks on commercial shipping routes through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait in the paper, **"Houthi Deterrence and the Horn of Africa: Rethinking Washington's Red Sea Policy"**, highlighting the strategic importance of this maritime corridor, which facilitates the transit of about 15% of the global trade, and the significant repercussions of the Houthi attacks on global trade, particularly for the Horn of Africa. The paper discussed the two dominant responses to the crisis: the U.S. and its allies' call for punitive intervention to restore maritime stability, and the opposing view that calls for a cessation of hostilities in Gaza as

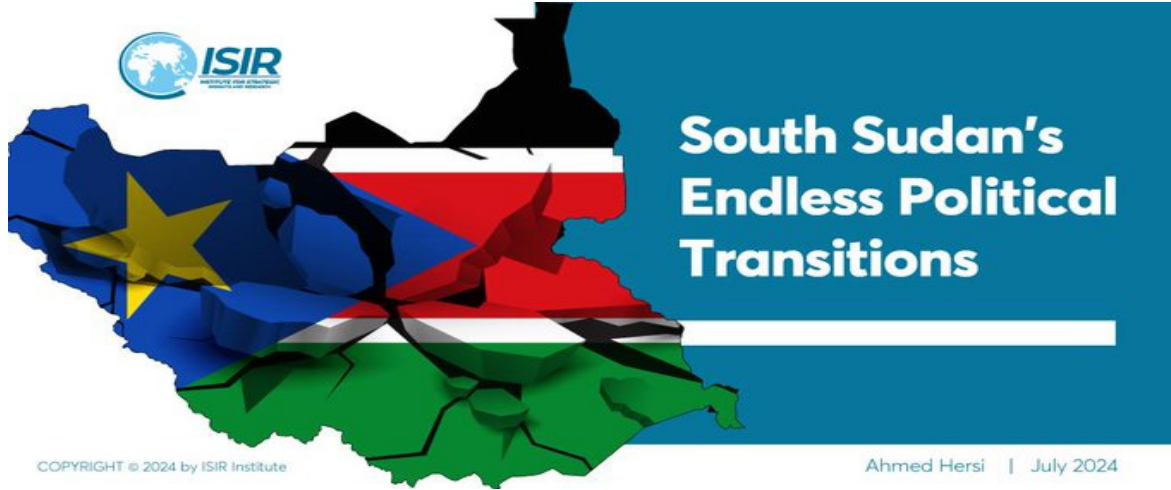
a prerequisite for peace in the Red Sea. Analyzing the limitations of the prevailing U.S. policy, this paper critiqued the effectiveness of punitive actions and the failure to address the root causes of the conflict, including the situation in Gaza. It recommended a shift towards non-escalatory political strategies and greater engagement with humanitarian efforts, emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach that considers the broader

geopolitical dynamics, including the Iran-Houthi relationship, and the humanitarian implications for Yemen and the Horn of Africa. This paper advocated for collaborative regional efforts and diplomatic dialogues, highlighting the role of Red Sea littoral states and regional blocs in de-escalating tensions and promoting stability. The paper can be accessed [here](#)



In July 2024, the ISIR Institute published the **South Sudan's Endless Political Transitions publication**, at a time when South Sudan was facing uncertainty and a high risk of the return to conflict, which would subsequently undermine the momentum initiated by the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) signed in September 2018. It has been five years and 10 months since the Implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the

Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) began. Despite three extensions, critical tasks that are necessary for holding general elections at the end of the transitional period are still pending. Immediate steps need to be undertaken to identify the tasks that need to be completed before the elections and establish clear timelines to prevent a relapse into conflict and ensure a smooth transition. The paper can be accessed [here](#).



Cross-Cutting Themes

Occasionally, ISIR publishes research papers, opinion pieces, and analyses on crosscutting themes. One such paper in 2024 was the paper on the **'Af Soomaaligu Khatar Ma Ku Jiraa? Falaqaynta Walaaca Faafay iyo Wejiyada Dhabta ah.** This paper explored the ways in which the Somali language is undergoing simultaneous growth and improvement. For hundreds of years, this language has been linked to the challenges of civilization, with

its writing system and script being the most challenging aspects. However, in the last fifty years, the language has evolved and has developed a writing system that has allowed for the spread of written texts and reading materials in Somali. Nevertheless, this progress is accompanied by a lack of development in the writing style and grammar, which still lacks established standards or references.



Af Soomaaligu Khatar Ma Ku Jiraa?

Falaqaynta Walaaca Faafay iyo Wejiyada Dhabta ah

Dr. Maxamed Xirsi | June, 2024

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Democratic Governance

Governments in the Horn of Africa face many complex challenges as they have to meet the demands and expectations of an increasingly growing population. While each country struggles with its specific challenges, there is often value in understanding other countries' interventions and drawing insights from best practices through intra-regional learning. ISIR has long sought to strengthen public institutions to promote "responsible governance", where leaders establish accountability mechanisms to ensure political transparency and economic stability. Throughout the year, ISIR played a key role in regional development through "transformative democratization" which is the foundation of flourishing, prosperous nations. Overcoming governance challenges unlocks the region's potential to achieve sustainable development and national prosperity.

ISIR Institute Published the **SOMALILAND ELECTION STAKEHOLDERS' USE OF DIGITAL & SOCIAL MEDIA**, which delved into the past decade, whereby digital and social media plat-

forms such as Facebook, X (formally known as Twitter), YouTube, and recently TikTok, have become essential tools for Somaliland's elections, playing an increasingly significant role in the dissemination of political communication, civic engagement, and general campaigning. This policy brief aimed to determine how various election stakeholders utilize digital and social media during Somaliland's electioneering period and to explore the potential impacts of these platforms on peace and social cohesion. The policy brief can be accessed [here](#).

The study explored how political parties, media outlets, civil society organizations (CSOs), and the public use media tools to enhance the reach of their campaign messages, disseminate information, and mobilize voters. Given these platforms' rapid growth in reach and influence, social media usage shapes electoral dynamics in Somaliland and presents unique challenges and opportunities during the electioneering period and further in the country's democratization process.





Politics and Security Bulletin

The ISIR Digest

Geopolitical Crisis and the Upcoming Somaliland Presidential Elections: Key Actors, Interests, and Potential Scenarios

July, 2024

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The ISIR Digest

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 and partners in governance. These include diplomatic missions, development partners, and policy and research institutions.

In 2024, the ISIR Institute published the eighth issue of the newsletter, focusing mostly on the Geopolitical Crisis and the Somaliland Presidential Elections and on how Somaliland's leadership has been increasingly assertive in seeking international attention, leveraging its strategic location along the Red Sea and proximity to key international trade routes such as the Bab al-Mandab Strait, a critical shipping passage linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. In 2016, DP World, the UAE's leading global port operator, secured a 30-year concession for the port of Berbera. All the issues of the ISIR Digest are available on the [ISIR website](#).

A Working Paper

The Institute Published a Policy Brief **SOMALILAND'S FOREIGN POLICY RESET: TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES**. Somaliland faces significant internal challenges, including escalating conflicts in the eastern regions and disputes over power-sharing in Awdal, which have hindered state-building efforts, weakened trust in institutions, and threatened national cohesion. These vulnerabilities create opportunities for the external actors, such as Puntland and the Federal Government of Somalia, to exploit. Addressing these issues requires a renewed commitment to inclusivity, nationwide reconciliation, and equitable power-sharing arrangements for regions like Awdal, Sool, and Sanag. Such measures will empower citizens, rebuild trust in public institutions, and address long standing grievances, particularly in the eastern regions, ultimately strengthening Somaliland's domestic foundation and enhancing its external positioning.

Externally, Somaliland enjoys limited international support, which under-

scores the need for a recalibrated diplomatic strategy. The current shifting regional and global alliances present both risks and opportunities, requiring Somaliland to carefully navigate these dynamics. One of the strategies that Somaliland could adopt is economic diplomacy, which emphasizes partnerships and investments, and offers a promising pathway to advancing

Somaliland's strategic objectives. By fostering foreign investment, promoting trade, and securing support for critical sectors such as energy, infrastructure, and telecommunications, Somaliland can strengthen its case for recognition and establish itself as a valuable economic partner.

The policy brief can be accessed [here](#).



Civic Forum

The Civic Forum is an open platform, acting as a catalyst for change. It is a community-based initiative designed to open up avenues for unfettered discussions and exchange of information about the region. The Institute for Strategic Insights and Research (ISIR) believes that open platforms unlock the community's potential to engage in critical and constructive conversation. The public has a key role to play in national development and success. The

ISIR Civic Forum brings together key actors to help find solutions to issues of public interest and aims to improve growth, social mobility, and innovation. The forum is meant to provide a platform for citizens such as political analysts and other thought leaders in the democratization processes in Somaliland to conduct debates and dialogues in a bid to encourage public participation in Somaliland's transition to democracy.

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In 2024, the ISIR Institute organized a series of Civic Forums, where participants engaged in Continued meaningful discussions on critical issues such as the dialogue between Somaliland and Somalia, the ongoing democratization process in Somaliland, and policy recommendations aimed at enhancing regional diplomacy. These forums provided a platform for diverse voices to converge, fostering a collaborative environment for addressing the complexities of governance and socio-economic development in the region. In addition to the Civic Forums, ISIR convened four consultative workshops,

bringing together key stakeholders from the political, socio-economic, and governance sectors in Somaliland. These workshops aimed to synthesize insights and develop actionable strategies to navigate the multifaceted challenges facing the region.

A notable highlight of the year was when Dr. Gulied Ahmed presented a comprehensive summary of his recently defended doctoral dissertation titled **"Do Our Children Have Rights? Children's Rights in the Unrecognized State of Somaliland"**.



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Dr. Guled Dafac Presents Ph.D. Dissertation



His work sparked important conversations about the rights of children in contexts of limited recognition and governance.



**AF SOOMAALIGU KHATAR MA KU JIRAA?
FALANQEYNTA WALAACA FAAFAY IYO WEJIYADA DHABTA AH**

Furthermore, ISIR hosted a civic forum titled "Af Soomaaligu Khatar Ma Ku Jiraa? Falaqaynta Walaaca Faafay iyo Wejiyada Dhabta ah."



This event provided a crucial space for examining the status and future of the Somali language, addressing concerns about its preservation and the implications for cultural identity and social cohesion in Somali people.

EVENTS



In 2024, ISIR organized and hosted a variety of significant events, for instance the event held to prepare the ISIR Institute's Annual Plan for 2024 in accordance with the 2022–2025 strategy.

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Another heartfelt event was the farewell ceremony for Mr. Mohamed Abdirahman Hassan, the former Managing Director of the ISIR Institute. This notable gathering brought together members of ISIR's advisory group,

research fellows, management, as well as friends and partners of the Institute. The ceremony served as an opportunity to announce and welcome Mr. Hassan Suudi as the new managing director of the institute during this event.



ISIR Institute Leadership Change Announcement



**HASSAN
SUUDI**
—
Managing Director
ISIR Institute

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The Institute also hosted the **Governance Hero** award and summit in collaboration with its partners, [AccountLab](#) and [SLNDGGC](#). This significant event celebrated individuals who have made exceptional contributions to promoting good governance. The ISIR once again congratulates the five heroes recognized for their outstanding efforts! Your dedication to fostering transparency and accountability is truly inspiring.



Research Skills and Culture Training

ISIR oversees a robust internal archive that compiles information related to its key thematic areas. This responsibility encompasses the processing, publishing, and dissemination of research findings and other outputs, underscoring ISIR's commitment to freedom of information and open access publishing. A core aspect of ISIR's mission is to train researchers, enhancing their ability to analyze public issues and develop home-grown solutions to regional challenges.

In 2024, the ISIR Institute proudly concluded its third cohort of the Research Skills and Culture Training Workshop, which took place on May 4 and 5 at the Ambassador Hotel in Hargeisa. This workshop aimed to elevate the skills of mid-career researchers in advanced research methodologies and cultural competencies, both essential for effective research practices.

Participants engaged in interactive sessions that included training on quantitative and qualitative methods,

data analysis, and ethical considerations. The workshop highlighted the significance of cultural awareness and communication, equipping researchers with the tools necessary to adeptly navigate diverse contexts. Attendees also had the chance to network with their peers, fostering collaboration and the exchange of ideas for future projects.

The series of trainings are a part of ISIR's strategic objectives to empower and enable aspiring young researchers to excel in their profession. ISIR aims to build a network of researchers who are home-grown and based within the region of the Horn of Africa. The course facilitators reinforced the participants' knowledge of research and analysis topics important for early career researchers; the researchers are also set to receive mentorship for one year as they research a topic of choice. The training sessions were conducted through lectures, tutorials, and working groups.





Building Networks



1. The former Director of ISIR Institute, Mohamed Abdirahman, visited and held discussions with [MzalendoWatch](#), a leading organization in Kenya renowned for its dedication to fostering inclusive and accountable Parliaments in Kenya and Africa.
2. ISIR Institute held a consultation meeting to navigate budgetary processes and related challenges with the Parliamentary Sub-Committee on Economics, Finance, and Trade.

3. The ISIR Institute and Hikma Foundation renewed their memorandum of understanding, signifying the beginning of the second phase of their partnership.



4. The Institute Welcomed Dr. Mohamed Hirsi as a Research Fellow at the ISIR Institute. He has published extensively on disease prevention and health promotion. Additionally, he writes

on political and social issues and is an expert in Somali culture and language, enhancing his research and writing with his cultural and linguistic insights.





Dr. Mohamed Hirsi



Ahmed Y. Hersi

5. ISIR Institute welcomed Mr. Ahmed Hersi as a Senior Researcher with extensive experience in regional peace and security. He is a Regional Maritime Specialist, focusing on areas such as the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Western Indian Ocean. Additionally, he is a member of

the UK's International Association of Maritime Security Professionals (IAMSP).

6. In the ISIR Institute office, we received senior officials from the Swedish Embassy and the Swedish Agency for Peace, Security & Development.



International conferences

1. Mohamed Abdirahman, the former director of ISIR Institute, participated in the "2nd East African Regional Parliament Monitoring Organisations Conference" at the Sheraton Hotel in Kampala, Uganda. The

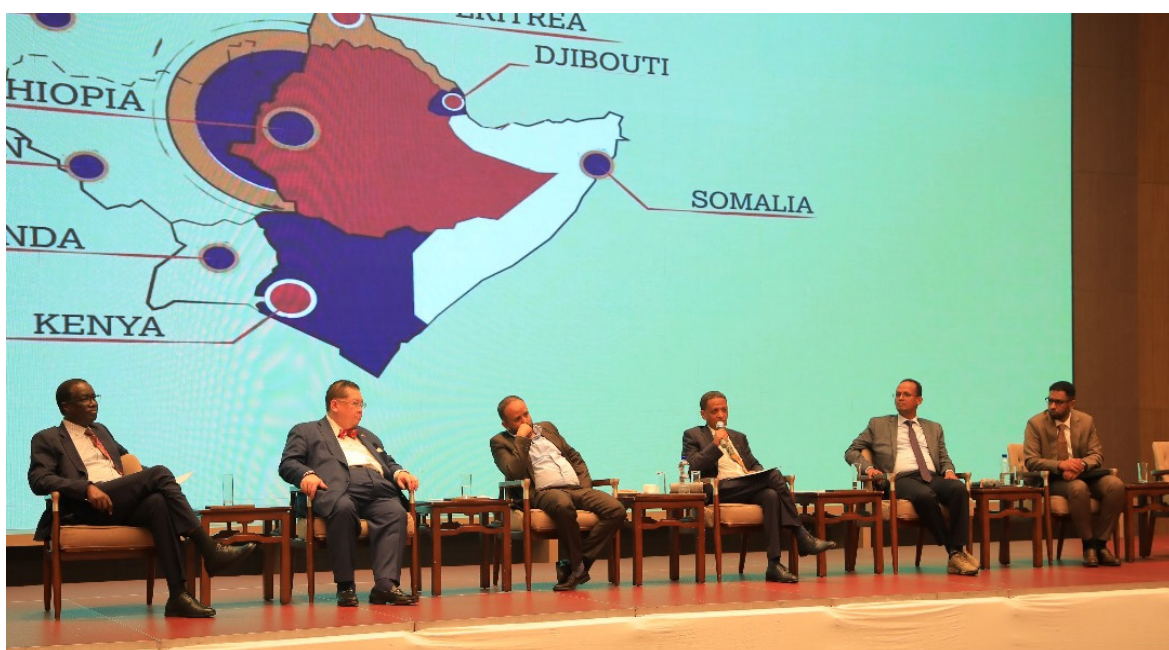
organizers were @centre4policy, @MzalendoWatch, and @NEDemocracy.

2. The former director also participated in a conference on The second annual Horn of Africa Dialogue

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series. The conference was hosted by the Institute of Foreign Affairs, in Addis Ababa on April 19, 2024. The conference aimed to strengthen regional Peace and Stability. The theme of the conference was "Navigating the complexities: fostering regional security in the Horn of Africa". At the conference, he

presented a research paper titled "*Houthi deterrence and the Horn of Africa Rethinking Washington's Red Sea Policy*" which examines the escalating crisis in the Red Sea, and the limitations of Washington's punitive strategy, and which he co-authored with Mr. William Robinson.



Media Appearances and Special Interview



THE EASTERN GULF IN THE HORN: A METAMORPHOSIS OF POWER DYNAMICS

William N. Robinson
March 2024

ANALYSIS OF THE PERSIAN GULF HEGEMONY IN THE HORN OF AFRICA ARTICLE

WILLIAM N ROBINSON

A nuanced analysis of the Persian Gulf hegemony in the Horn of Africa by William Robinson, an ISIR Fellow. The analysis explores the intricate power dynamics and the region's growing influence.

A panel of experts on the Af Soomaali language civic forum



Lix su'aalood oo la xidhiidha nidaamka indhaha oo ay tahay in komishinku ka jawaabo ka hor inta aan la dhaqangelin. | Hassan Suudi.



The ISIR Institute managing director putting forward some clarification questions in relation to the proposed technology for the election undertaking.

Initiatives

Based on the Memorandum of Understanding with the parliament, the institute has launched in May 2024 a platform for learning and sharing information about the law-making procedures and bill process (Gole Watch). The platform is a significant initiative aimed at enhancing democratic engagement in Somaliland's parliament as it involves

various activities and initiatives aimed at fostering transparency of the country's law-making process.

Gole Watch aims to monitor parliamentary operations and increase transparency between the parliament and the public. It delivers accurate and visually appealing information about parliamentary sessions, decisions, and

legislative processes, making it easier for citizens to remain informed and engaged. Gole Watch seeks to promote accountability and civic participation in the political process by bridging the

gap between parliamentarians and the general population. This initiative is an important step toward improving government and creating informed citizens in Somaliland.



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ISIR INSTITUTE:

Off Airport Road, Behind the Adam's Inn
Hargeisa, Somaliland
T: +252 63 6226667