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UPDATE**

Somalia, August 28, 2023

DAILY SITUATION UPDATE

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As operations against Al-Shabaab in rural areas intensify, the extremist group typically carries out more frequent attacks in the capital city of Mogadishu to make up for their losses.

The political and security landscape in Somalia continues to evolve as the government takes decisive steps to combat the militant group Al-Shabaab and address internal divisions. Amidst these challenges, there are also notable developments in infrastructure, press freedom, and regional climate patterns.

In Somalia, President Hassan Sh. Mohamud reaffirms the government's firm commitment to combating and eradicating Al-Shabaab. As part of this effort, amnesty is offered to militants and their leaders who renounce violence, demonstrating a willingness to integrate former fighters into society. Additionally, political parties in Puntland are making progress by establishing an elected local council in Badhan, with elections slated for September 5th, 2023. However, the Somali Parliament faces challenges in finalising the country's constitution, particularly concerning the inclusion of representatives from Somaliland, and addressing unresolved regional tensions. To resolve the impasse in Somaliland, a committee is formed, advocating for the resumption of political activities and the holding of parliamentary and presidential elections. These initiatives reflect the government's commitment to democratic processes and nationwide reconciliation.

The Greater Horn of Africa is predicted to experience heavy rains from October to December 2023 due to the El Nino phenomenon. This weather pattern is expected to bring both positive and negative impacts to the region, including increased agricultural productivity but also potential risks of flooding and environmental damage. Preparedness and response measures should be put in place to mitigate these impacts and ensure the well-being of affected communities.

A Joint Command has been established by the federal government in Somalia to coordinate efforts among the Somali National Army, US Africa Command, and the African Union Transition Mission. Successful operations led by the government have resulted in the recapture of towns previously controlled by Al-Shabaab. However, counterattacks by the militants in locations like Cowsweyne highlight the ongoing challenges faced by Somali troops in maintaining control over liberated areas. Internal conflicts within the Somali National Army, stemming from a land ownership dispute in Marka, have adversely affected the overall security situation, leading to armed clashes and disruptions to business activities.

Efforts toward peaceful coexistence between Somaliland and the SSC-Khaatumo administration have been initiated with the SSC Khaatumo administration issuing a statement for the cessation of "war of aggression". However, the loss of a military base led to Somaliland deploying reinforcements and Isaaq fighters, exacerbating tensions. Proper treatment of prisoners of war and calls for justice against indiscriminate shelling emphasise the need for adherence to international humanitarian norms.

Somalia is navigating a complex political and security landscape as it strives for stability and progress. The government's unwavering commitment to combat Al-Shabaab, establish local councils, finalise the constitution, and resolve regional tensions reflects the determination to build a democratic and united country. However, challenges persist, including internal divisions, volatility in security operations, and regional dynamics with Somaliland. The focus on infrastructure development, press freedom, and environmental preparedness are positive steps toward a more prosperous future. Addressing these issues requires unity, improved security measures, and effective governance to confront terrorism, foster community cohesion, and ensure the well-being of the Somali people.

SUMMARY

Politics: In Somalia, President Hassan Sh. Mohamud has expressed the government's unwavering commitment to combat and eradicate the militant group Al-Shabaab throughout the entire country. As part of this effort, amnesty has been offered to fighters and their superiors who renounce violence. Meanwhile, political parties in Puntland have finalized plans for the establishment of an elected local council in Badhan, with elections set to take place on September 5th, 2023. However, the Somali Parliament has been facing divisions and challenges in finalizing the country's constitution, particularly with regards to the inclusion of representatives from Somaliland and addressing unresolved regional tensions. To resolve the political impasse in Somaliland, a committee has been formed, calling for the resumption of political activities and the holding of parliamentary and presidential elections. On a regional scale, the Greater Horn of Africa is predicted to experience heavy rains from October to December 2023 due to the El Nino phenomenon, which is expected to bring both positive and negative impacts. Moreover, President Ahmed Madobe of Jubaland has called for a unified front against Al-Shabaab, criticizing ongoing operations and emphasizing the need for a comprehensive solution in areas that have been reclaimed. In the realm of press freedom, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has urged the immediate release of journalist Mohamed Ibrahim Bulbul, who was detained after reporting on alleged corruption involving senior police officers. Tensions and concerns between the people of Sool and Somaliland forces have prompted a visit by the Vice President of Puntland to the Sool region, aiming to address these issues. Additionally, former Minister of Interior Ilyaas Cali Xasan has called for improved security and unity within the national army to effectively confront terrorists and address community disagreements. In infrastructure developments, Las Anod airport has resumed operations and will undergo expansion and renovation, showcasing efforts to enhance aviation infrastructure in the region. Lastly, protests have taken place in Galkacyo, demonstrating public support for the ongoing military offensive against Al-Shabaab.

Key Takeaways:

1. President Hassan Sh. Mohamud of Somalia expressed the government's commitment to combat Al-Shabaab until they are eradicated from the entire country. Amnesty was offered to fighters and their superiors who renounce violence.

2. Political parties in Puntland, Somalia, finalized plans for the establishment of an elected local council in Badhan, with elections scheduled for September 5th, 2023.
3. The Somali Parliament faced divisions and challenges in finalizing the country's constitution, particularly regarding the participation of representatives from Somaliland and unresolved regional tensions.
4. A committee in Somaliland was formed to resolve the political impasse and called for the resumption of political activities and holding both parliamentary and presidential elections.
5. The Greater Horn of Africa is forecasted to experience heavy rains from October to December 2023 due to the El Nino phenomenon, with both positive and negative impacts expected.
6. President Ahmed Madobe of Jubaland called for a united front against Al-Shabaab, criticizing the ongoing operations and highlighting the need for a solution in recovered areas.
7. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) urged the immediate release of journalist Mohamed Ibrahim Bulbul, who was detained after reporting on alleged corruption involving senior police officers.
8. The Vice President of Puntland visited the Sool region to address concerns and tensions between the people of Sool and Somaliland forces.
9. Former Minister of Interior Ilyas Cali Xasan called for improved security and unity within the national army to confront terrorists and address community disagreements.
10. Las Anod airport resumed operations and is expected to undergo expansion and renovation, showcasing efforts to enhance aviation infrastructure in the region.
11. Protests took place in Galkacyo against Al-Shabaab, demonstrating public support for the ongoing military offensive.

Security: The federal government has established a Joint Command to coordinate efforts among the Somali National Army, US Africa Command, and the African Union Transition Mission. Successful operations led by the Somali government resulted in the recapture of several towns previously controlled by Al-Shabaab, though casualties were reported on both sides. However, a counterattack by the militants in Cowsweyne highlighted the challenges faced by the Somali troops. The SSC-Khaatumo administration announced a cessation of Somaliland's "war of aggression" in certain regions, expressing a desire for peaceful coexistence. Internal conflicts within the Somali National Army, stemming from a land ownership dispute in Marka, resulted in armed clashes and halted business activities. Security concerns caused the cancellation of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's planned visits to Eldher and Galcad. Incidents involving Al-Shabaab, including the escape of

Lieutenant Colonel Hassan Ali Nur and vulnerabilities within Somalia's security apparatus, bring attention to the complexities of the situation. Somaliland responded to a military base loss by deploying reinforcements and Isaaq fighters. The SSC-Khatumo administration emphasized the proper treatment of prisoners of war and called for justice against indiscriminate shelling. The oscillating frontlines in Budbud and Osweyne underscore the volatility and raise questions about the effectiveness of current strategies. In Somaliland, traditional elders mobilized individuals in response to hostile activities, while disturbing videos depicting assaults on Daarood women led to insecurity and riots. Furthermore, a significant fire in Jowhar town brought challenges to its control and resulted in substantial damage.

Key Takeaways:

1. The federal government of Somalia announced the establishment of a Joint Command to regulate operations against Al-Shabaab militants. The command will bring together members of the Somali National Army, US Africa Command, and the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia.
2. The Somali government launched a successful operation in several towns in the Galgaduud region, previously under the control of Al-Shabaab. Fierce clashes took place, resulting in casualties on both sides.
3. Al-Shabaab militants launched a counterattack against Somali army troops in Cowsweyne, leading to casualties among soldiers. The attack highlighted the challenges faced by Somali troops in their efforts against Al-Shabaab.
4. The SSC-Khaatumo administration announced the cessation of Somaliland's "war of aggression" in the Sool, Sanaag, and Ayn regions. They outlined measures to stabilize the area and expressed willingness for peaceful coexistence.
5. Armed clashes occurred in Marka between rival factions within the Somali National Army due to a dispute over land ownership. Both sides suffered losses, and the conflict temporarily halted business activities.
6. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's planned visits to Eldher and Galcad were cancelled due to security concerns caused by a close encounter with Al-Shabaab militants.
7. Lieutenant Colonel Hassan Ali Nur (Shuute), Chairman of the Somalia Armed Forces Court, narrowly escaped capture by Al-Shabaab. The incident revealed vulnerabilities within Somalia's security apparatus.
8. Somaliland military reinforcements and auxiliary Isaaq fighters arrived in Oog town following the loss of a military base on the outskirts of LasAnod.

9. The SSC-Khatumo administration reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring the proper treatment of prisoners of war from Somaliland, along with calling for justice against those responsible for indiscriminate shelling.
10. The oscillating frontlines in Budbud and Osweyne highlight the volatility and complexity of ongoing operations. Rapid shifts in control between the Somali National Army and Al-Shabaab raise questions about the effectiveness of current strategies.
11. Traditional elders in Somaliland reported mobilizing Isaaq males over 15 in response to the loss of a military facility and hostile activities against the ruling party.
12. Disturbing videos circulated on the internet depicting physical assaults on Daarood women married to Isaaq men in various cities of Somaliland, leading to insecurity and riots.
13. A fire broke out in the market in Jowhar town, causing significant damage and challenges to control the blaze.

EVENTS LISTED

Politics

On August 28, 2023, **President Hassan Sh. Mohamud of the Federal Government of Somalia expressed the government's unwavering commitment to continue its efforts in combating Al-Shabaab, a militant group, until they are eradicated from the entire country.** Speaking in Dhusamareb town alongside regional leaders and government officials following the National Consultative Council, President Mohamud emphasized that the reign of Al-Shabaab was coming to an end. The ongoing offensive aimed to eliminate the remaining pockets of Al-Shabaab's control within the few areas they still held. President Hassan extended an offer of amnesty to the group's fighters and their superiors, encouraging them to renounce violence and re-join their communities. He emphasized the potential for a better life, peace, education, healthcare, and other essential services upon their return. During his three-week stay in Dhusamareb, the President maintained a strategic presence to bolster the offensive operation against Al-Shabaab.

On August 28, 2023, **a meeting was held in Hotel Martisoor, Garowe, bringing together representatives from various political parties in Puntland, along with the Ministry of Interior and Federal Affairs.** The meeting aimed to discuss and finalize the establishment of the first-ever elected local council in the town of Badhan. Minister of Interior of Puntland, Abdi Farah Said (Juxa), stated that political parties agreed on holding the local council elections on September 5th, 2023, with voting taking place in 29 districts until May 25th. The meeting concluded with the decision to officially inaugurate the Badhan district administration in Sanaag region on August 30th, 2023, although the initial plan was to begin with Gaalkacyo. The Kaah party, led by President Deni, emerged as the clear winner in

Badhan, securing the positions of chairman and deputy chairman, and they are expected to replicate this success in at least 8 other districts.

On August 28, 2023, **the Somali Parliament held a session to discuss the finalization of the country's constitution.** However, the meeting was overshadowed by deep divisions among Members of Parliament (MPs), particularly regarding the northern regions known as Somaliland. Some MPs argued that the constitution could not be debated or finalized without the participation of representatives from Somaliland. However, there was no consensus among parliamentarians on how to define these northern regions, with some MPs opposing the explicit mention of "Somaliland" in the constitution due to the lack of a universally accepted definition. Recent hostilities in the Sool region further strained relations among MPs, particularly those representing Somaliland and Puntland. MPs from Puntland expressed concerns about the absence of President Saeed Deni from the National Consultative Council meetings on the constitution, which they believed excluded Puntland from being consulted on the matter. President Deni confirmed that Puntland would abstain from discussions on the constitution until Somaliland's participation was secured. These disagreements highlight unresolved regional and political tensions, making the finalization of the constitution seem increasingly challenging, emphasizing the complexities of governance in a nation plagued by regional disparities and ongoing conflict.

On August 28, 2023, **a committee composed of prominent members from the Habarjeclo subclan of the Isaaq community announced the formation of a political decision-making body in Hargeysa, the capital of Somaliland.** This committee was established with the aim of resolving the ongoing political impasse following the expiration of President Muuse Biixi's term on November 13, 2022. President Biixi had managed to prolong his presidency through political manoeuvring, bypassing the scheduled elections, which were originally slated for December 2023. However, the committee has called for the resumption of political activities and the holding of both parliamentary and presidential elections, emphasising the need for inclusive participation from the three major political parties: Waddani, UCID, and Kulmiye. The committee's initiative has garnered support from opposition figures, such as Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, the leader of Waddani, who acknowledged the importance of dialogue and unity in Somaliland. Similarly, Faysal Cali Waraabe, the chairman of UCID, expressed his willingness to cooperate and engage in discussions. Waddani and UCID have specifically insisted that the presidential election should take place within the current year while also advocating for the simultaneous election of parliamentary representatives. These developments come after years of political tensions in Somaliland, including the protracted conflict in Laascaanood, which had escalated for eight years, causing significant strain on governance. The recent committee's actions are seen as an effort to restore stability and address the concerns of the population.

On August 28, 2023, **the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) released a forecast indicating that the Greater Horn of Africa is likely to experience heavy rains from October to December of the same year.** The forecast was made during the 65th Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF65), organized by ICPAC in collaboration with the region's National Meteorological and Hydrological Services. The wetter-than-usual conditions are attributed

to the El Nino phenomenon, which typically brings increased rainfall to East Africa. Additionally, the forecast suggests that the Indian Ocean Dipole, another climate phenomenon, may further enhance the impact of El Nino. The region's most likely to receive above-average rainfall include southern Ethiopia, eastern Kenya, and southern Somalia. Conversely, drier-than-usual conditions are expected in isolated areas of southwestern Uganda and southwestern South Sudan. The forecast highlights that Eritrea, central and northern Ethiopia, Djibouti, western Kenya, significant areas of South Sudan and Sudan, and northern Uganda may experience below-average rainfall until the end of the season. The October-December period is crucial for rainfall in equatorial parts of the Greater Horn of Africa, typically contributing 20-70% of the annual total rainfall. However, the season may occur early in some regions, such as eastern Kenya, southern Somalia, and eastern Tanzania, where elevated rainfall is anticipated. On the other hand, average or delayed rainfall is predicted for parts of northern Somalia, western Kenya, Uganda, southern South Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, and north-western Tanzania. It is worth noting that El Nino is likely to lead to increased temperatures worldwide, including Africa. The ICPAC forecast also suggests that the average surface temperature in most parts of the Greater Horn of Africa, particularly Djibouti, Eritrea, northern Ethiopia, northern Somalia, and parts of coastal Tanzania, is expected to be higher than usual. While the heavy rainfall is good news for farmers and the agriculture sector after three years of drought, it also poses risks such as flooding and the proliferation of desert locusts. ICPAC Director Guleid Artan urges governments and disaster management agencies to be prepared for potential landslides, flash floods, and extreme weather events, emphasizing the importance of taking necessary measures to protect lives and livelihoods.

On August 28, 2023, **the President of Jubaland, Ahmed Madobe, called for a united front against the Al-Qaeda-linked militant group Al-Shabaab in Somalia.** During an event in Dhusamareb city marking the end of two-day talks, Madobe criticised the ongoing operations against the group, referring to them as "unfruitful." He emphasised the need for a solution in the recovered areas, where Al-Shabaab continues to retaliate. Madobe expressed readiness for Jubaland to fully participate in the war and highlighted the importance of standing together to liberate Somalia from Al-Shabaab. Jubaland has previously stated its preparedness to deploy forces in an effort to recapture remaining areas, particularly the Middle Juba region, which has been under militant control for over 12 years. At present, Somalia is in the final stages of the war against Al-Shabaab. Last Friday, alongside security forces from Galmudug region, Somalia's army entered the historic district of Elbur, forcing the hasty retreat of Al-Shabaab militants from the area, located approximately 400 kilometres north of the capital, Mogadishu.

On August 28, 2023, **Reporters Without Borders (RSF) issued a statement urging for the immediate release of Mohamed Ibrahim Bulbul, an editor at Kaab TV and the information and human rights secretary at the Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS).** Bulbul had been detained by the Mogadishu police for over ten days following his reporting on an alleged case of corruption involving senior police officers. The journalist was taken away forcefully by four armed plainclothes policemen while attending a class at the university on August 17. Prior to his arrest, Bulbul had publicly disclosed suspicions of fund misappropriation by senior police officers who had attended a training seminar organised

and funded by the European Union. During his transfer to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Mogadishu, he sustained injuries to his chest and shoulder. Bulbul was initially held for two days in a cell without proper facilities and subjected to interrogation in the absence of legal representation. On August 19, he appeared before a judge at a Banaadir regional court and was later transferred to a CID centre in the suburb of Sheelare. Since August 22, neither his lawyer nor his family has been permitted to visit him. RSF expressed concern regarding Bulbul's arbitrary detention, calling for his immediate release and the protection of journalists' sources. RSF also highlighted recent arrests of other journalists, including Zakariye Mohamed Salad and Mohamed Dulmi-diid from Channel Five Somali TV, as well as Abdifatah Yusuf Beereed from Goobjoog TV, signalling a growing trend of targeting journalists in Somalia. The Somali authorities have yet to disclose the official reasons for Bulbul's arrest or the charges against him. The head of the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) criticised the authorities, emphasising the need to focus on investigating the alleged misuse of funds instead of targeting the journalist who exposed the matter. RSF also condemned the requests made by CID officers to access Bulbul's phone and laptop, as well as inquire about his sources, highlighting the lack of legal basis and the potential threat to source confidentiality.

On August 28, 2023, **Ahmed Cilmi Cismaan Karaash, the Vice President of Puntland, made a visit to the Gambadhe village in the Sool region.** Accompanied by officials from the Puntland government, he arrived in the city of Laascaanood, the regional capital. From there, he proceeded to Gambadhe, where he was warmly received by the local community. The visit of the Vice President aimed to assess the prevailing situation and address the concerns of the residents amidst recent tensions between the people of Sool and the Somaliland forces.

On August 28, 2023, **former Somali Minister of Interior Ilyaas Cali Xasan, expressed condolences following an attack carried out by Al-Shabaab in the Cowswayne village of Galgaduud region.** He urged the current government officials to address the security situation, emphasising that approximately 70% of the casualties from the recent attack were from the southern regions. Xasan further stated that it is crucial for the national army to unite and confront the terrorists, ensuring the safety and well-being of the population. However, he also acknowledged previous disagreements within the Digil and Mirifle communities, specifically highlighting the need for the Speaker of Parliament, the serving President, ministers, and parliamentarians to engage in dialogue and find a resolution to prevent further hostilities. The remarks aimed to address the concerns and challenges faced by the Digil and Mirifle communities and encourage peaceful coexistence.

On August 28, 2023, **Las Anod airport resumed operations and saw its third consecutive day of receiving civilian airplanes.** The airport's revival marks a significant milestone in its functioning, which had previously experienced a period of inactivity. Additionally, it is noteworthy that the airport is expected to undergo expansion and renovation in the near future. This developmental plan demonstrates the commitment of the SSac (name denoting a specific organization or entity) towards improving and modernizing aviation infrastructure. Notably, SSac has successfully executed similar expansion and renovation projects at two other airports within the past six months alone. These advancements

highlight the efforts made to enhance air transportation accessibility and services in the region.

On August 28, 2023, **a number of individuals gathered in the streets of Galkacyo, demonstrating their solidarity by protesting against Al-Shabaab.** The protest comprised a diverse group of participants, including men, women, and children, all of whom expressed their backing for the ongoing military offensive against the al Qaeda-inspired organization.

Security

On August 28, 2023, **the federal government of Somalia announced its plans to establish a Joint Command in order to regulate operations against Al-Shabaab militants.** The National Consultative Council (NCC) expressed hope that with the activation of military activities, the extremist group would be defeated in the coming months. This decision follows the first phase of operations against Al-Shabaab, which took place after President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's re-election in June 2022 and resulted in the deaths of over 3,000 fighters, with 3,500 others critically injured. The Joint Command Structure will bring together members of the Somali National Army (SNA), the US Africa Command, and the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), who have been collaborating in the fight against Al-Shabaab. Additionally, Kenya, Djibouti, and Ethiopia have agreed to deploy non-ATMIS troops to assist in the operations; however, their participation in the second phase is still to be officially confirmed. The upcoming phase will concentrate on Jubaland and Southwest states, where Al-Shabaab has maintained a stronghold for a significant period. The Al-Shabaab group, in response, has carried out retaliatory attacks in various parts of Somalia. The NCC meeting concluded with an agreement to align the ongoing operations with the national counter-terrorism strategy and to expedite preparations for the offensive, which will target areas in the south and west, including parts of HirShabelle and Jubaland states. Commanders from the Kenya Defence Forces have expressed their readiness to participate in operations in Jubaland, emphasizing the close cooperation between Kenya and Jubaland in the fight against Al-Shabaab.

On August 28, 2023, **it was reported that government forces launched an operation targeting several towns in Galgaduud region of Somalia.** According to VOA Somali language service, the Somali Federal government troops conducted a successful operation in Ceel Dheer, Masagawaay, Budbud, and Galcad, all located in Galgaduud region. These areas were recently under the control of Al-Shabaab militant group. The government troops had previously withdrawn from the town of Wabxo, but later returned and reclaimed it from Al-Shabaab. Fierce clashes were reported during the offensive, resulting in casualties on both sides. Furthermore, Colonel Ismael Abdimalik, the 26th Brigade Commander stationed in Ceelbuur, mentioned that the government forces made tactical advancements in certain areas through a limited-scale military operation. The situation remains tense as sporadic fighting continues in the region.

On August 28, 2023, **al-Shabaab militants launched a counterattack against Somali army troops in the town of Cowsweyne, which had been recently captured from the**

militant group as part of a major offensive. The attack resulted in dozens of soldiers being wounded and an unspecified number killed, according to soldiers involved and hospital officials. Although the Somali government stated that the attack was foiled, soldiers and sources at a military hospital confirmed significant losses suffered by both the army and the militants. The attack highlighted the military's vulnerability to counterattacks in areas long controlled by al-Shabaab. The military campaign in central Somalia, which began last year and recently intensified, has seen several successes including the capture of the militants' stronghold of El Buur. However, the recent setback in Cowsweyne indicates the ongoing challenges faced by the Somali troops in their efforts against al-Shabaab. The exact casualty figures remain unclear, with different sources reporting varying numbers. Former Somali president, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, called for a serious investigation into the battle, urging parliamentary action to hold the responsible commanders accountable. Al-Shabaab, an al-Qaeda-linked group, has been fighting to overthrow Somalia's Western-backed government and impose its interpretation of Islamic law, causing significant casualties since 2006.

On August 28, 2023, **heavy clashes took place between Al-Shabaab militants and the Somali National Army (SNA) in Osweine village (also known as Cawsweyne).** The details of the aftermath remain uncertain, with both sides claiming victory. The state media confirmed that the SNA successfully repulsed an Al-Shabaab attack in Osweine, with support from the local community who had provided intelligence. However, former President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed raised doubts about the operation and called for independent investigations to determine the handling of the attack, expressing concerns about possible casualties among the soldiers. The situation in Cawsweyne still remains unclear, with no independent reports affirming Al-Shabaab's claim of victory. Due to the scale of the attack, analysts believe it was likely planned before the capture of Cawsweyne on Tuesday, raising questions about Somalia's preparedness in the fight against Al-Shabaab. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has been in Dhusamareb, overseeing and mobilising troops along with the support of the US Africa Command and the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS). While it is unclear if the national army suffered a loss, Al-Shabaab has been carrying out retaliatory attacks targeting civilians and security forces throughout the country and even across borders. The government is planning a second phase of operations against the militant group.

On August 28, 2023, **the SSC-Khaatumo administration announced the cessation of what they referred to as Somaliland's "war of aggression" in the Sool, Sanaag, and Ayn regions.** The administration, in an official press release, stated that it had successfully protected the dignity of the local population and upheld Somalia's sovereignty. The SSC-Khaatumo administration outlined various measures to stabilize the area, including the withdrawal of their own troops from Las Anod, facilitating the return of displaced individuals, and providing social assistance. They also emphasized their commitment to upholding the rights of prisoners in their custody, ensuring their treatment aligns with Islamic law, Somali customs, and international standards. Furthermore, the SSC-Khaatumo forces reported seizing tanks, artillery, and other heavy armaments from Somaliland, which will soon be transferred to their defence troops. While expressing a willingness to defend their territories, the administration extended an olive branch for peaceful coexistence, promising not to invade lands belonging to neighbouring clans and expressing openness to cooperation on matters of trade and security. The announcement has sparked international discussions

given the broader geopolitical context in the Horn of Africa, and the international community's response to this situation will likely have long-lasting implications for the region's political landscape.

On August 28, 2023, **armed clashes took place in the southern port city of Marka, Somalia, between two rival factions within the Somali National Army (SNA), according to a resident.** The conflict was reportedly sparked by a dispute over land ownership. While the exact number of casualties remains unverified, both sides suffered losses, with wounded individuals being treated at a local hospital. The intensity of the confrontation led to a temporary halt in business activities, and many residents remained indoors as heavy and light weapons were used in the clash. Marka, which serves as the regional capital of Lower Shabelle, has been plagued by longstanding clan rivalries. Presently, it is under the control of the Southwest state, with the SNA responsible for security. Following the expulsion of Al-Shabab, the city and its surrounding areas had experienced a return to normalcy, with open schools, thriving businesses, and people resettling. As the SNA continues its fight against Al-Shabaab in the region, situated near the capital city of Mogadishu, local authorities from the regional and district administration have yet to comment on the internal conflict within the SNA.

On August 28, 2023, **the highly anticipated trips of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to the cities of Eldher and Galcad were definitively cancelled following a close encounter with Al-Shabaab militants.** Mahad Salad, the Director of the National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), and Colonel Hassan Ali Shute, the Head of the Armed Forces Court, were dispatched as an advance team to address concerns raised by the Somali National Army. However, their mission was disrupted when the army abandoned their posts in Galcad, leading to the cancellation of the President's secured visit. This significant escalation in the region's volatility forced the authorities to prioritize security and halt the forthcoming visits. The situation is further complicated by internal strife within the military, evidenced by the fractious relationship between the Minister of Defence and the Commander of Defence Forces.

On August 28, 2023, **Lieutenant Colonel Hassan Ali Nur (Shuute), Chairman of the Somalia Armed Forces Court, narrowly escaped capture by the extremist group Al-Shabaab.** He, along with National Intelligence chief Mahad Salad, was flying in a helicopter to the recently liberated Galcad district when it was revealed that Al-Shabaab had recaptured the strategic town. Security reports have raised suspicion that Salad possessed prior knowledge of the capture but failed to disclose it. The pilot quickly rerouted the flight upon receiving the alert, preventing a potential victory for Al-Shabaab. This incident highlights the ongoing threat posed by the group and the vulnerabilities within Somalia's security apparatus. Security officials have refrained from commenting on the matter, deepening the intrigue surrounding the near-capture encounter. The complex relationship between Salad and his cousin Mahad Karate, a deputy emir of Al-Shabaab, has also raised concerns.

On August 28, 2023, **an elevated state of alert was noted in LasAnod as Somaliland military reinforcements, accompanied by auxiliary Isaaq fighters, arrived in Oog town. This follows the loss of a Somaliland military base on the outskirts.**

On August 28, 2023, **the SSC-Khatumo reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring the proper treatment of prisoners of war (POWs) from Somaliland.** Their statement emphasized that the POWs would be cared for in accordance with Islamic Law, Somali customs, and international standards. Additionally, the SSC-Khatumo made it clear that those individuals responsible for indiscriminate shelling would not go unpunished, as they would face justice for their actions.

On August 28, 2023, **the oscillating frontlines in Somalia highlighted the volatility and complexity of ongoing Phase One of liberation operations.** Two strategically important locations in the Galgaduud region, Budbud and Osweyne, witnessed a series of rapid shifts in control between the Somali National Army (SNA) and the extremist group al-Shabaab. The town of Budbud was initially recaptured by the SNA on April 16, 2023, but al-Shabaab swiftly counter-attacked and reclaimed the town shortly afterward. A similar pattern occurred recently, with the SNA regaining control of Budbud on August 22, only to withdraw and relinquish it on August 27. These developments raise questions about the effectiveness of current strategies and the resilience of the warring factions. Ground reports suggest that the SNA faces challenges, including disorganization, fear among soldiers, and a lack of air support, which contributes to the fragility of their territorial control. Al-Shabaab's ability to rapidly reclaim lost territory highlights its adaptive and decentralised organisational structure. A significant event occurred in Osweyne, where al-Shabaab reclaimed the town only four days after the SNA's capture, acquiring over 40 military vehicles, including armoured carriers. This raises concerns about the insurgents' increasing capabilities and the need for the SNA and its allies to reassess their current conflict strategy. The experiences in Budbud and Osweyne emphasise the importance of a comprehensive approach that combines military force, political reconciliation, and economic development for long-term stability. The shifting dynamics in these locations serve as cautionary tales and call for sustainable operations and strategies that extend beyond territorial gains in Somalia's pursuit of peace and state-building.

On August 28, 2023, **traditional elders in Somaliland reported encouraging the mobilisation of all Isaaq males over 15.** This comes in response to the loss of a military facility on the outskirts of Las Anod and the presence of clan militia engaging in hostile activities against the ruling party. The mobilisation efforts aim to strengthen the security situation and safeguard the interests of the Isaaq community in the region.

On August 28, 2023, **a troubling situation unfolded in various cities of Somaliland. Reports have emerged of disturbing videos circulating on the internet depicting instances of physical assaults on Daarood women who are married to men from the Isaaq clan in Hargeisa, Burco, and Berbera.** The emergence of these videos has led to a heightened sense of insecurity among the Daarood community in these cities. This unrest stems from the announcement made by the Somaliland Leadership and Clan elders, indicating an ethnic war against the Daarood people. In response, some Isaaq civilians have resorted to violent acts, engaging in riots, and attacking Daarood-owned businesses such as the Golis Company in Ceerigaabo.



On August 28, 2023, a **fire broke out in the market located in Jowhar town, which is approximately 91 km north of Mogadishu**. The blaze is reported to have been triggered by an electrical fault. The incident resulted in significant damage to the market and its surrounding areas. The fire rapidly engulfed the market, causing widespread destruction and posing immense challenges to the local authorities' efforts to control it. Efforts are underway to assess the extent of the damage and provide assistance to affected individuals and businesses.



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