



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# Somalia: March 2018 update

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### Inside:

1. Somalia under President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (2012-17)
2. Somalia under President Farmajo (February 2017-)



# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Somalia under President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (2012-17)</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 His performance in office	5
1.2 Creating regional states	5
1.3 Somalia-Somaliland-Puntland relations	6
1.4 Controversy over the (s)electoral system for the 2016 elections	6
<b>2. Somalia under President Farmajo (February 2017-)</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Domestic and foreign manoeuvres	8
2.2 Security	11
2.3 Future of AMISOM	13
2.4 Humanitarian situation	14
2.5 Somaliland: elections but no rapprochement	16
2.6 Ongoing Somaliland-Puntland tensions	16
2.7 2017 London Conference on Somalia	17

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 Newly elected president of Somalia, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo (centre) makes an acceptance speech after he was sworn into office at the Mogadishu Airport hangar on February 8, 2017 by [AMISOM Public Information](#) Licensed by [CC0 1.0 Universal \(CC0 1.0\)](#) / image cropped.

## Summary

Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (known as Farmajo) was elected president of Somalia by the federal parliament on 8 February 2017. Although the incumbent, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, had originally been the favourite to win ahead of the vote in the eyes of many commentators, he was decisively defeated.

Farmajo was the prime minister of Somalia between 2010 and 2011. During his campaign he promised to renew the fight against corruption and indicated that he would be open to talks with al-Shabaab. He came into office with a reputation for competence. However, just over a year on, this reputation is already being severely tested.

President Farmajo faces a big challenge in consolidating the country's emerging federal system. His predecessor failed to see through a constitutional review process that might have given it a more solid legal and administrative underpinning. Farmajo has made slow progress to date on this count. For now, the status of the regional states remain 'interim' and the division of powers between them and the centre opaque. There have been tensions between Mogadishu and some of the regional states. Some wonder whether Western backers of the federal experiment in Somalia might begin to lose faith in it over the period ahead.

Farmajo, who hails from the Darod clan, is also facing challenges from the powerful Abgal sub-clan of the Hawiye clan, which has felt under-represented in his government. Some have gone so far as to call for his prime minister, Hassan Ali Khayre, to be replaced by one of their own. During the first quarter of 2018, opposition politicians have been canvassing for an impeachment motion in the federal parliament (which has barely sat at all since February 2017) against President Farmajo – so far without success. Khayre, meanwhile, is pressing a no-confidence motion in the Lower House Speaker. Western and African governments have expressed concern about the growing political instability.

Behind the scenes, foreign interests further complicate the political picture. Various Gulf States are busy trying to increase their influence, including by sponsoring local politicians. In terms of the wider confrontation between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, and Qatar, on the other, the Farmajo government has sought to remain neutral. In retaliation, they have stopped making regular budgetary support payments to Somalia. But some regional states have taken the side of the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Some have interpreted the UAE's agreement with Somaliland to open a naval base in the coastal town of Berbera as part of a strategy to raise the costs for Mogadishu of refusing to fall into line. This has come in the context of the UAE and Ethiopia buying significant stakes in Somaliland's wider plans for the development of the port at Berbera. On 12 March tensions deepened when the Somali federal parliament voted to expel the state-owned UAE company DP World in protest at its involvement in developing the port at Berbera.

*Africa Confidential* assessed in January 2018 that there had been no improvement in the security situation since Farmajo took office. Since 2016, after several years of fighting in which it lost control over substantial areas of territory, al-Shabaab has increasingly prioritised conducting asymmetrical attacks on Mogadishu and other urban centres. However, it retains control over substantial tracts of territory in the south of the country and supply routes between towns.

Al-Shabaab's conducted its deadliest attack ever (although it has never officially claimed responsibility) in October 2017 in Mogadishu, when bombs in two lorries killed an estimated 512 people, most of them civilians. The attack generated a wave of public anger against al-Shabaab in the capital, but there was also disillusionment with the performance of the national government.

US airstrikes against al-Shabaab targets have been increasingly often deployed in tandem with SNA and African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) operations. In November 2017, for the first time there were three US airstrikes against so-called Islamic State targets in Somalia.

After a relative lull at the end of 2017, since January 2018 there have been further major al-Shabaab attacks in Mogadishu. For example, on 22 March a car bomb killed at least 14 people near a hotel.

During President Farmajo's first year in power, the issue of AMISOM's future began to be posed more sharply. The third conference to be held in London about Somalia since 2012 took place in May 2017. It agreed a plan whereby the SNA would gradually take over from AMISOM. In August 2017, the UN Security Council renewed AMISOM's mandate until May 2018 while endorsing its scaling back. AMISOM announced subsequently that 1000 troops out of its total complement of 22,000 would leave Somalia by the end of 2017.

With donor support, efforts are underway to improve the coordination between the Somali National Army and forces loyal to the regional states. The aim is to increase the size of the SNA from its current level of around 11,000 to 18,000-strong.

President Farmajo took office in February 2017 amidst a severe drought. Over a year on, although the threat of famine has so far been averted, the drought remains intense. The agricultural sector has virtually collapsed. The forecast for rain is poor. Donors provided more than \$1.2 billion towards famine prevention during 2017. In January 2018, the UK Government announced an additional £21 million in funding.

President Farmajo has so far had no success in improving relations with the self-declared independent state of Somaliland. After several postponements, Somaliland held presidential elections in November 2017. The victor was Muse Bihi Abdi of the ruling Kulmiye Party. The defeated candidate, Abdirahman Irro of the Waddani Party, claimed there had been fraud but the Supreme Court upheld the result. There was some violence before and after the elections but clan elders, as in the past, played a part in calming the situation.

# 1. Somalia under President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (2012-17)

Somalia's post-civil war 'transition' officially came to an end in August 2012 when the mandate of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) expired. The following month, [Hassan Sheikh Mohamud](#) was elected president by a new parliament. However, within a couple of years, the president was declaring that Somalia was once again in a "[political crisis](#)".

## 1.1 His performance in office

President Mohamud was president between 2012 and February 2017. His tenure was marked by continuing allegations of large-scale official corruption. The country remained in a condition of almost permanent humanitarian crisis. While progress was made in combating the Islamist terrorist group al-Shabaab, it continued to be a significant security threat. Al-Shabaab increased its attacks in neighbouring Kenya, which sent troops into southern Somalia in 2011.<sup>1</sup> There was a spike in large-scale attacks in Kenya by the group during 2014 and 2015.

The African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) force experienced successes but also some big set-backs. For example, in January 2017 al-Shabaab attacked a Kenyan military camp and reportedly killed at least 21 soldiers (Kenya claimed that nine of its soldiers and dozens of terrorists died). The fact that Kenya had national elections later in the year made their troops a particularly attractive target for Al-Shabaab.

At the end of President Mohamud's term of office, AMISOM was short of morale and funds. Ethiopia had withdrawn from participation and Burundi had indicated that it might do so too. Despite donor efforts to strengthen it, the Somali National Army (SNA) often remained ineffective.

## 1.2 Creating regional states

Under President Mohamud, the Federal Government also made some progress towards establishing district and regional administrations in areas under its control, with four new regional states (known officially as Federal Member States) created: Galmudug, Jubaland, South-West State and Hir-Shabelle. Critics argued that the foundations of some of these states were often distinctly shaky, with some of them reflecting the interests of Somalia's neighbours more than those of its people (for example, Ethiopia and Kenya's strong influence over Jubaland in the far south of the country).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "How KDF's Entry into Somalia changed Security Situation in Northern Kenya", *Garissa News*, 6 July 2016

<sup>2</sup> "More states, less unity", *Africa Confidential*, 11 July 2014

The much longer-established polities of Puntland and Somaliland are officially included as regional states by Somalia; in practice Mogadishu has little or no purchase over them.

The process of regional state formation inevitably created losers as well as winners. In some cases, this led to violence on the ground. One such flashpoint was between Puntland, formed in 1998 and therefore by far the longest-established regional state in Somalia, and Galmudug regional state in central Somalia over north Mudug, to which both made a claim.<sup>3</sup> In December 2015 a peace deal was signed, but clashes continued.<sup>4</sup> There were also tensions over the regional state formation process in the middle Shabelle and Hiraa regions of central Somalia.<sup>5</sup>

During 2015 and 2016 there were clashes between the SNA and supposedly pro-federal government private militias linked to these regional state structures.<sup>6</sup> These tensions sometimes played into the hands of al-Shabaab (see below).

### 1.3 Somalia-Somaliland-Puntland relations

There were several rounds of high-level talks in Djibouti and Turkey between the Federal Government and its Somaliland counterpart during President Mohamud's tenure, but there was no meaningful progress towards bringing Somaliland back into the federal fold.

Somaliland and Puntland were unable to resolve a long-standing territorial dispute over the Sool, Sanaag and Ceyn areas which had led to military clashes in the past. However, Somaliland and Puntland had a shared hostility towards another, more recently announced, 'state' called Khatumo. This state drew on territory that straddled both polities. Somaliland forces clashed with Khatumo forces on several occasions.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.4 Controversy over the (s)electoral system for the 2016 elections

Hopes that the 2016 elections would be held on a 'one-person-one-vote' basis proved unrealistic. However, President Mohamud promised that they would more "legitimacy" than they did in 2012.<sup>8</sup> To this end, there were negotiations aimed at increasing the number of people involved in the electoral process as compared with the 2012 elections, when parliamentarians in the lower house were selected by a Council of 135 Elders based on a power-sharing formula between Somalia's main clans. The parliament then elected the president.

After a period of negotiation and consultation, it was eventually agreed that, for the lower house (275 seats), the Council of 135 Traditional

<sup>3</sup> J. Mosley, "Somalia's federal future: layered agendas, risks and opportunities", Chatham House Research Paper, August 2015, pp13-14

<sup>4</sup> Somalia, *Crisis Watch Database*, 1 July 2016

<sup>5</sup> "President Hassan arrives in Beled Weyne to resolve southeastern Somalia impasse", *BBC Monitoring Africa*, 25 March 2016

<sup>6</sup> "A federal farrago", *Africa Confidential*, 10 July 2015

<sup>7</sup> "Somaliland Accused of Fueling Deadly Clan Fighting", *Shabelle Media Network*, 30 June 2016

<sup>8</sup> "Division all round", *Africa Confidential*, 8 January 2015

Elders would not select parliamentarians this time around. Instead they would nominate 50 members for each of 275 'Electoral Colleges' – that is, one College for each parliamentary seat. This College would then elect the MP. Nominations to the Colleges would reflect the principle of 'power-sharing' between the main clans. This arrangement in effect created an 'electorate' of 13,750 people.<sup>9</sup>

For the upper house (54 seats), regional presidents would nominate two candidates for each seat, from which regional assemblies would elect one.<sup>10</sup> Here again, the principle of power-sharing would apply. As they did in 2012, parliamentarians would subsequently elect the president.

The UN Special Representative for Somalia, Michael Keating, called these arrangements a "[political process with electoral features](#)".

There were concerns that the electoral process would escalate the already fraught relations between some regional states and Mogadishu. Somaliland did not send representatives to talks concerning the new electoral model. Puntland eventually agreed to participate in the Electoral College system after initially rejecting the proposal, on condition that the 2020/21 elections would take place on a one-man-one-vote basis.<sup>11</sup> President Mohamud agreed to this demand.

The federal parliamentary (s)elections duly took place in October and November 2016. The new parliament was inaugurated on 27 December 2016. Its first task would be to (s)elect a new president.

*Africa Confidential* described the process of creating a new parliament as "extremely tortuous and drenched in bribery and violence".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "The National Leaders Forum Communique", 12 April 2016

<sup>10</sup> "Somalia's Federal Future: Layered Agendas, Risks and Opportunities", *Chatham House*, 2 September 2015

<sup>11</sup> "Seeking stability in Somalia's election season", *The Africa Report*, 9 June 2016

<sup>12</sup> "Surviving elections and jihad", 6 January 2017

## 2. Somalia under President Farmajo (February 2017-)

The complex (s)electoral process finally ended with the election on 8 February 2017 of Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (known as Farmajo) as Somalia's new president. Although the incumbent, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, had been the favourite to win ahead of the vote in the eyes of many commentators, he was decisively defeated by 184 votes to 80.

Power was transferred to the new president on 16 February. His inauguration took place on 22 February.

A dual US-Somali citizen, Farmajo the prime minister of Somalia between 2010 and 2011, during which time he acquired a reputation for relative competence. During his campaign he promised to renew the fight against corruption and indicated that he would be open to talks with [al-Shabaab](#).<sup>13</sup> He also benefitted from the fact that he was viewed by many as a genuine Somali nationalist, as illustrated by the suspicions he expressed about the role and motivations of Ethiopia in Somalia.

The international community, which had bank-rolled the (s)electoral process, warmly welcomed the new president. Western governments had initially favoured the incumbent but adjusted their expectations when they saw that he was losing ground politically.

### 2.1 Domestic and foreign manoeuvres

As always in Somalia, clan interests and alliances played a major role in deciding the presidential (s)election outcome, as did the involvement of foreign powers. President Farmajo comes from one of the two biggest clans in Somalia, the Darod. Most expected that, to ensure balanced clan representation, his prime minister would come from the other largest clan, the Hawiye. This is what transpired when Hassan Ali Khayre took office on 1 March 2017, although some Hawiye expressed dissatisfaction that he did not come from one of the larger sub-clans within the group.<sup>14</sup> Overall, the new government was larger than Farmajo had promised, reflecting this need to be sufficiently 'inclusive' of all the larger clans.<sup>15</sup>

*Africa Confidential* argued that Farmajo's government did not in practice mark a significant break with the past.<sup>16</sup> Within a few months, allegations of official corruption were already swirling around the new administration – for example, over the management of Mogadishu port and fisheries policy. According to Transparency International, Somalia is the most corrupt country in the world.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Farmajo begins 'era of unity' as Somali president", *East African*, 8 February 2017

<sup>14</sup> He is a member of the Habel Gidir sub-clan.

<sup>15</sup> "UN chief urges Somalia's new president to form inclusive government", *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 February 2017

<sup>16</sup> "New populist hires old faces", *Africa Confidential*, 14 April 2017

<sup>17</sup> "... a harsher one in Mogadishu", *Africa Confidential*, 26 May 2017



Meanwhile, supporters of defeated president Mohamud quickly began to organise themselves into an opposition bloc.

Within a few months there was also evidence of continuing tensions between Mogadishu and some of the regional states. Farmajo's relationship with new Galmudug president Ahmed Dualeh Gelleh soon became strained and his government took steps to prevent the Hir-Shabelle administration from opening its own port and airport – a step which would have denied neighbouring Mogadishu substantial revenue streams.<sup>18</sup>

President Farmajo faces a big challenge in consolidating the country's emerging federal system. His predecessor failed to see through a constitutional review process that might have given it a more solid legal and administrative underpinning. Farmajo has made slow progress to date on this count, although there are hopes that a long-delayed 'national constitutional convention' might take place during 2018.<sup>19</sup> For now, the status of the regional states remains 'interim' and the division of powers between them and the centre opaque.<sup>20</sup> In October 2017, the regional states created a 'Council of Interstate Cooperation' in order to agree common negotiating stances when dealing with the national government. For a short while, cooperation with the national government was even suspended.<sup>21</sup> Some wonder whether Western backers of the federal experiment in Somalia might begin to lose faith in it over the period ahead.

By the beginning of 2018, *Africa Confidential* was claiming that Farmajo had lost a lot of credibility during his first year in office and had become "dictatorial". There were arrests of political opponents and peaceful critics in Mogadishu at the end of 2017. Some of the regional state administrations have been undertaking similar repressive measures.<sup>22</sup>

Farmajo is reportedly still facing challenges from the powerful Abgal sub-clan of the Hawiye clan, which has felt under-represented in his government. Some have gone so far as to call for Prime Minister Khayre to be replaced by one of their own. During the first quarter of 2018, opposition politicians have been canvassing for an impeachment motion in the federal parliament (which has barely sat at all since February 2017) against President Farmajo – so far without success. Khayre, meanwhile, is pressing a no-confidence motion in the Lower House Speaker, Mohamed Osman Jawari, to stand down.<sup>23</sup> Foreign governments, including the UK, have called on Somali leaders to "respect the rule of law and the Provisional Federal Constitution in

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<sup>18</sup> "... a harsher one in Mogadishu", *Africa Confidential*, 26 May 2017

<sup>19</sup> [Report of the UN Secretary-General on Somalia](#), S/2017/1109, 26 December 2017, para 5

<sup>20</sup> "Security tops list of problems for Somalia's new president", *Financial Times*, 11 February 2017; "Cracks in the federal system", *Africa Confidential*, 12 January 2018

<sup>21</sup> [Report of the UN Secretary-General on Somalia](#), S/2017/1109, 26 December 2017, para 19

<sup>22</sup> [Report of the UN Secretary-General on Somalia](#), S/2017/1109, 26 December 2017, para 55-56

<sup>23</sup> "Senate calls on president to intervene in the ongoing political crisis", *Premium Official News*, 22 March 2018

resolving political differences. This needs to include preservation of democratic space.”<sup>24</sup>

In addition, President Farmajo has also been at loggerheads with the Mayor of Mogadishu, Thabit Abdi Mohamed, who has been accused of involvement in illicit land deals in the capital that are causing large-scale forced displacement. In January 2018 Farmajo replaced him.<sup>25</sup>

*Africa Confidential* also assessed in January 2018 that there had been no improvement in the security situation since he took office (see below).<sup>26</sup> However, with donor support, efforts are underway to strengthen Somali security institutions, most notably through improving the coordination between the SNA and forces loyal to the regional states. For example, in November 2017 2,400 Puntland forces were integrated into the SNA. The aim is to increase the size of the SNA from its current level of around 11,000 to 18,000-strong.<sup>27</sup> A ‘national stabilization strategy’ aimed at boosting reconstruction and the extension of state authority from the ‘bottom-up’ has also been finalised.<sup>28</sup>

Behind the scenes, foreign interests further complicate the political picture. Various Gulf States are busy trying to build influence, including by sponsoring politicians. Over the last year or so, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar have been particularly to the fore. The UAE is suspicious of the Farmajo government, having been closely associated with ex-president Mohamud. Qatar remains a strong backer of Farmajo. Turkey, an ally of Qatar, also has a growing stake in Somalia.

In terms of the wider confrontation between the UAE and Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, and Qatar, on the other, the Farmajo government has sought to remain neutral.

In retaliation, Saudi Arabia and UAE have stopped their making regular budgetary support payments to Somalia; amongst other things, this has weakened the government’s ability to pay the security forces.<sup>29</sup>

Some have interpreted the UAE’s agreement with Somaliland to open a naval base in the coastal town of Berbera as part of a strategy to raise the costs for Mogadishu of refusing to fall into line. This has come in the context of the UAE and Ethiopia buying significant stakes in Somaliland’s wider plans for the development of the port at Berbera.<sup>30</sup> The UAE is also reported to be supporting current impeachment efforts against President Farmajo by opposition politicians.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Int’l community urges Somalis to respect constitutional differences in resolving differences”, *Pan African News Agency*, 17 March 2018

<sup>25</sup> “[Somalia: Thousands Homeless as Settlements Razed](#)”, Human Rights Watch, 28 January 2018

<sup>26</sup> “Cracks in the federal system”, *Africa Confidential*, 12 January 2018

<sup>27</sup> [Report of the UN Secretary-General on Somalia](#), S/2017/1109, 26 December 2017, paras 41-43

<sup>28</sup> [Report of the UN Secretary-General on Somalia](#), S/2017/1109, 26 December 2017, para 48

<sup>29</sup> “[Managing the Disruptive Aftermath of Somalia’s Worst Terror Attack](#)”, International Crisis Group, October 2017

<sup>30</sup> “Rival Arab powers take their fight to Africa”, *Africa Confidential*, 9 February 2018

<sup>31</sup> “Any port in a storm”, *Africa Confidential*, 9 March 2018

On 12 March tensions deepened when the Somali federal parliament voted to expel the state-owned UAE company DP World in protest against its involvement in developing the port at Berbera.<sup>32</sup>

By contrast, some of the regional state administrations – for example, South West State, Galmudug and Puntland – have taken the side of the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which has further heightened tensions with the Farmajo government.

Western countries, meanwhile, remain supporters of Farmajo, but their enthusiasm does appear to be waning. In December 2017, the US suspended its military aid to the SNA, complaining that it was being misappropriated. Questions have been raised about how well the Trump administration is coordinating its actions on Somalia with its allies.<sup>33</sup>

## 2.2 Security

The credibility of the Farmajo government will depend on its ability to deliver security.

Since 2016, after several years of fighting with the SNA and AMISOM in which it lost control over substantial areas of territory, al-Shabaab has increasingly prioritised conducting asymmetrical attacks on Mogadishu and other urban centres. However, it retains control over substantial tracts of territory in the south of the country and supply routes between towns.

Al-Shabaab was unable to prevent the 2016/17 (s)electoral process from taking place but continued to launch regular attacks on the Somali security forces and civilians during this period. At least 50 people died at its hands in December 2016.

*Africa Confidential* claims that many of the Elders involved in the (s)elections who came from areas where al-Shabaab was strong repudiated their involvement on returning home and apologised for participating in it. Their apologies were reportedly accepted provided they paid \$300 to al-Shabaab, significantly boosting its coffers. Nonetheless, over 20 people who had been involved in the Electoral College were reported to have been killed by al-Shabaab in June 2017 alone.<sup>34</sup>

In late-March 2017 it was reported that US armed forces had been told that they could target al-Qaida linked militants in Somalia more aggressively through airstrikes without seeking prior White House approval. According to *Africa Confidential*, at that time the US had 50 special operations advisors in Somalia, whose role was to recommend offensive strikes against militants and support ground operations by the SNA.<sup>35</sup> An American soldier was killed in an operation 40 km west of Mogadishu in May 2017.

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<sup>32</sup> "Mogadishu fires broadside at UAE", *Africa Confidential*, 22 March 2018

<sup>33</sup> "Cracks in the federal system", *Africa Confidential*, 12 January 2018

<sup>34</sup> "The endless election", *Africa Confidential*, 3 February 2017

<sup>35</sup> "New populist hires old faces", *Africa Confidential*, 14 April 2017

At the same time, there were reports that the US had also given its blessing to Farmajo's ambition to open channels of communication with al-Shabaab. However, many characterised this as a move to split the group, rather than usher in peace talks. The Farmajo administration experienced a big success in August 2017 when Mukhtar Robow Ali, a senior al-Shabaab leader – albeit one who had been increasingly estranged from it in recent years – surrendered to the authorities. He did so shortly after the US had withdrawn his name from its list of foreign terrorists. The federal government was quick to herald this as an indication that the group was about to collapse. But this has not happened.<sup>36</sup>

Attacks and clashes involving the SNA, AMISOM and al-Shabaab continued unabated throughout the second half of 2017. Al-Shabaab experienced its full share of set-backs but also proved that it was still a force to be reckoned with. For example, in July 2017 it killed at least 23 AMISOM soldiers in an ambush in Lower Shabelle.

Al-Shabaab's conducted its deadliest attack ever (although it has never officially claimed responsibility) in October 2017 in Mogadishu, when bombs in two lorries killed an estimated 512 people, most of them civilians. The attack generated a wave of public anger against al-Shabaab in the capital, but there was also disillusionment with the performance of the national government. The heads of police and national intelligence subsequently resigned. The International Crisis Group reported that, in the months leading up to this attack, al-Shabaab had recaptured several nearby districts to the capital.<sup>37</sup>

US airstrikes continued to be deployed increasingly often in tandem with SNA and AMISOM operations. In November 2017, for the first time there were three US airstrikes against so-called Islamic State targets in Somalia.

After a relative lull at the end of 2017, since January 2018 there have been further major al-Shabaab attacks in Mogadishu. For example, on 22 March a car bomb killed at least people near a hotel.<sup>38</sup> On 25 March, two more car bombs killed six people. This appears to suggest that, despite President Farmajo's promises when taking office (see below), not much progress has so far been made in weakening al-Shabaab. All the evidence suggests that al-Shabaab continues to have success in infiltrating the capital and other urban areas.<sup>39</sup>

Below is a BBC [map](#) setting out who controlled what territory in Somalia as at February 2018:

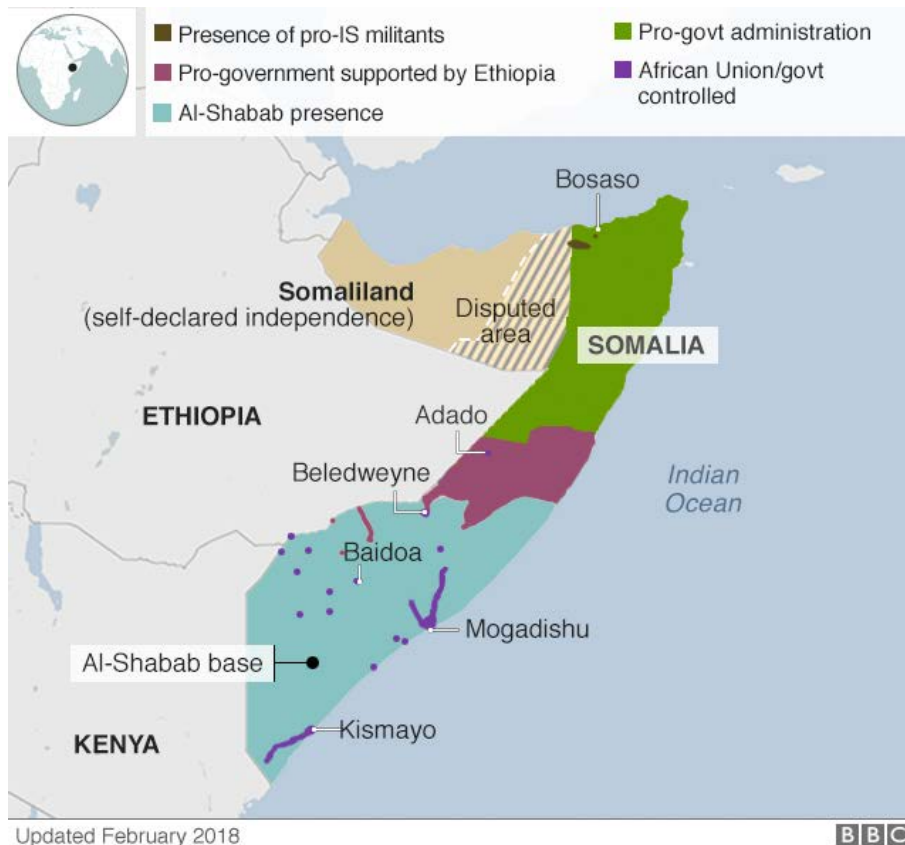
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<sup>36</sup> "The split that never was", *Africa Confidential*, 8 September 2017

<sup>37</sup> "[Managing the Disruptive Aftermath of Somalia's Worst Terror Attack](#)", International Crisis Group, October 2017

<sup>38</sup> "At least 14 dead, several hurt in car bomb in Somali capital", *Associated Press*, 22 March 2018. Subsequent reports brought the death toll up to 17.

<sup>39</sup> "Cracks in the federal system", *Africa Confidential*, 12 January 2018



## 2.3 Future of AMISOM

During President Farmajo's first year in power, the issue of AMISOM's future began to be posed more sharply. The May 2017 London Conference on Somalia (see below) agreed a plan whereby the SNA would gradually take over from it in areas where AMISOM had been taking the lead on security.

In August 2017, the UN Security Council renewed AMISOM's mandate until May 2018 while endorsing its scaling back. AMISOM announced subsequently that 1000 troops out of its total complement of 22,000 would leave Somalia by the end of 2017.

In December 2017 a security conference took place in Mogadishu which agreed to develop a "conditions-based" transition plan, with clear target dates, of security responsibility from AMISOM to the SNA.<sup>40</sup>

The UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, reiterated AMISOM's "critical" security role in Somalia in December 2017.<sup>41</sup> However, AMISOM morale is reportedly low. The Trump Administration has taken a sceptical view of it and has ceased to provide funding. France has also shown signs that it is losing faith in its effectiveness.<sup>42</sup> However, in neither case is there much optimism about the SNA's ability to fill the gap if AMISOM is wound down – which raises the question of who (if

<sup>40</sup> [Report of the UN Secretary-General on Somalia](#), S/2017/1109, 26 December 2017, para 54

<sup>41</sup> [Report of the UN Secretary-General on Somalia](#), S/2017/1109, 26 December 2017, para 78

<sup>42</sup> "Cracks in the federal system", *Africa Confidential*, 12 January 2018

anybody) is going to lead the fight against al-Shabaab in the years ahead.

## 2.4 Humanitarian situation

President Farmajo took office in February 2017 amidst a severe drought. In January 2017 the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Somalia said that five million Somalis – about half the population – did not have enough to eat.<sup>43</sup> Over a year on, although the threat of famine has so far been averted, the drought remains intense. The agricultural sector has virtually collapsed – livestock deaths have been massive – and food prices have risen markedly.<sup>44</sup> Looking ahead, the forecast for rain is poor.<sup>45</sup>

Somalia continues to face a massive internal displacement crisis. According to Amnesty International:

As of January 2018, there were 2.1 million IDPs in Somalia, many of whom have crowded into urban areas, placing a huge strain on resources. The lack of clean water in Somalia has also triggered a cholera outbreak which killed at least 1,155 people between January and July 2017.<sup>46</sup>

Donors provided more than \$1.2 billion towards famine prevention during 2017.<sup>47</sup>

The British International Development Secretary, Penny Mordaunt, visited Somalia in January 2018. While there, she announced an additional £21 million in funding for famine prevention. A further £40 million is scheduled to be provided in 2018 to sustain the relief and recovery effort, bringing the total to £61 million.<sup>48</sup>

On 6 March 2018, there was a High-Level Humanitarian Event in London at which donors agreed the steps they would take to prevent famine during 2018. Below is an extract from the Statement agreed by participants:

Participants applauded the collective Somali and international efforts to massively scale up humanitarian assistance in 2017 in response to the severe drought. As a result, we were successful in averting famine and saving many thousands of lives.

However, the job is not yet done. We remain deeply concerned by the serious and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Somalia. Somalia continues to suffer from one of the worst droughts on

<sup>43</sup> "Somalia: president appeals for assistance as drought worsens", *Africa News*, 20 January 2017

<sup>44</sup> "Huge livestock death may worsen food security in Somalia, says UN", *Daily Independent* (Nigeria), 22 March 2018

<sup>45</sup> "Somalia: poor rains forecast put food security at risk", *United News of India*, 22 March 2018

<sup>46</sup> "[Somalia: Satellite imagery reveals devastation amid forced evictions of thousands who fled conflict and drought](#)", Amnesty International, 19 January 2018

<sup>47</sup> [Report of the UN Secretary-General on Somalia](#), S/2017/1109, 26 December 2017, para 70

<sup>48</sup> [International Development Secretary in Somalia: "The UK averted famine last year, but the job is not yet done"](#), Department for International Development/Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 22 January 2018

record, leading to successive failed harvests, mass loss of livestock, appalling and rising rates of malnutrition.

An estimated 5.4 million people, including 2.8 million children are in need of humanitarian assistance and almost 500,000 people are projected to face the food insecurity emergency phase (IPC 4). Famine remains a risk in many areas with 1.8 million children projected to be malnourished in 2018. We also remain concerned that over 1 million people have been newly displaced internally, in addition to the 1.1 million already in a state of protracted displacement. The recent forced evictions have further exacerbated the situation of the IDPs in some of the main cities. If the rains later this spring are also below average, as currently forecast, the situation is likely to deteriorate further.

It was underlined that the situation is further exacerbated by ongoing insecurity and conflict. Humanitarian access remains a major issue with constraints in particular in Al Shabaab held areas and targeted attacks restricting humanitarian operations. Protection of civilians, including high levels of sexual and gender based violence, forced recruitment of children by armed groups and violations of International Humanitarian Law continue to occur. The Somali government is taking steps to confront this and are in the process of establishing the Human Rights Commission. The Somali government is committed to protecting its civilians, in particular the most vulnerable including returnees and those displaced through legal frameworks and policies. The adoption of the National Disaster Management Policy by the Council of Ministers was a significant step forward. Nonetheless, there is an urgent need to make progress on security, and for all security actors to play their part in facilitating the humanitarian response.<sup>49</sup>

Following the announcement in May 2016 by the Kenyan Government that the Dadaab refugee camp, where about 230,000 Somali refugees currently reside, would be closed, thousands of refugees have reportedly been pressurised into leaving the camp. This has happened despite the Kenyan Supreme Court ruling the camp closure illegal in January 2017.<sup>50</sup>

Amnesty International published a report in December 2017 describing the poor conditions in which returnees to Somalia are living in urban areas or camps.<sup>51</sup> The Kenyan Government and the UN claim that those refugees who have returned to Somalia, which in 2017 numbered over 30,000, are doing so voluntarily. The Kenyan authorities are not registering new arrivals from Somalia. Amnesty International also criticised the international community's failure to provide adequate support to Dadaab, noting that as at November 2017 the UN's appeal for its refugee response in Kenya was only 29% funded.

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<sup>49</sup> "Donors agree measures to prevent famine in Somalia in 2018", [www.reliefweb.com](http://www.reliefweb.com), 6 March 2018

<sup>50</sup> "Closure of Dadaab refugee camp ruled illegal by Kenyan court", *Irish Times*, 10 February 2017

<sup>51</sup> "[Somalia: Refugees pressured to leave Dadaab return to insecurity, drought and hunger](#)", Amnesty International, 21 December 2017

## 2.5 Somaliland: elections but no rapprochement

President Farmajo has so far had no success in improving relations with the self-declared independent state of Somaliland.

As we saw above, Somaliland played no part in Somalia's 2016-17 (s)electoral process. Diplomatic efforts to persuade it to become involved were unsuccessful.

Although the UK Ambassador to Somalia, David Concar, and other senior diplomats have recently been calling for the two sides to cooperate on food security as a matter of urgency, relations remain poor.<sup>52</sup> There are certainly no indications that talks of the kind that took place between them earlier in the decade, but which ran out of steam in 2015, will resume.

In June 2017, the Somaliland government signed a unity deal with a region, Khatumo State, which had declared itself autonomous in 2012.

After several postponements, Somaliland held presidential elections in November 2017. The victor was Muse Bihi Abdi of the ruling Kulmiye Party. The defeated candidate, Abdirahman Irro of the Waddani Party, claimed there had been fraud but the Supreme Court upheld the result. There was some violence before and after the elections but clan elders, as in the past, played a part in calming the situation. Muse Bihi Abdi took office in December 2017.

In March 2017, Somaliland gave the UAE permission to open a naval base in the coastal town of Berbera. The UAE (through the state-owned company DP World), along with Ethiopia, is also involved in the ambitious plans for the development of Berbera's port.<sup>53</sup> The Farmajo government has expressed its strong opposition, requesting mediation by the Arab League, and the lower house of the federal parliament has voted symbolically to cancel the deal and ban DP World from the country. The Somaliland authorities insist that it will go ahead.<sup>54</sup>

## 2.6 Ongoing Somaliland-Puntland tensions

The longstanding dispute between Somaliland and Puntland over which has sovereignty in their contested border regions has continued to simmer during the past year. Puntland rejected the legitimacy of the June 2017 agreement between Somaliland and Khatumo State (see above).

Having come to blows on several occasions in the past, in January 2018 there was another confrontation between the two polities, when Somaliland troops violently forced out Puntland troops from the town of

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<sup>52</sup> "UK ambassador urges dialogue between Somali leaders", *BBC Monitoring Africa*, 18 March 2018

<sup>53</sup> "Rival Arab powers take their fight to Africa", *Africa Confidential*, 9 February 2018. At the same time, the UAE and Ethiopia have taken significant stakes in Somaliland's wider plans for the development of the port at Berbera.

<sup>54</sup> "Somaliland DP World and Ethiopia port to go ahead", *CPI Financial*, 21 March 2018



Tukaraq in Sool. Since then there has been a stand-off in the area between forces from the two sides.

## 2.7 2017 London Conference on Somalia

A third London Conference on Somalia was held in May 2017 (the first took place in 2012).<sup>55</sup> With President Farmajo and a wide range of foreign governments in attendance, a 'New Partnership Pact', comprising the next phase of reconstruction efforts and the campaign against al-Shabaab, was endorsed.

Welcoming participants, British Prime Minister Theresa May said:

As we meet today, Somalia has a critical window of opportunity. The election of President Farmajo and his mandate for reform provides a unique chance for Somalia to take control of its security and to build an inclusive political settlement with new economic development that can help to create more jobs and livelihoods for its people.

So our task today is not to tell Somalia what to do – nor to impose our own solutions on this country from afar; but rather to get behind the new President's efforts and to support the Somali people as they work to build this new future for their country.<sup>56</sup>

Plans were endorsed to organise national forces and forces at the regional state-level into a coherent 'national security architecture', with a new National Security Council at its apex. As part of this, the SNA will eventually be increased in size to 18,000. Some have expressed scepticism about the prospects for this initiative, given the continuing tensions in the relationship between the centre and the regions (see also above).<sup>57</sup>

President Farmajo also announced at the Conference that al-Shabaab would be defeated within two years. To this end, he called for the UN arms embargo against Somalia to be lifted. However, this call was not heeded – many observers remain fearful that equipment provided to the SNA might be sold or diverted to al-Shabaab by corrupt officers.

The departure of AMISOM by the end of 2018 was also endorsed at the Conference, as was the holding of free and fair one-person one-vote elections in 2021.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> For full details, see the UK Government's webpage on the Conference: [London Somalia Conference 2017 \(Archived\)](#)

<sup>56</sup> [Speech by Theresa May at the London Somalia Conference](#), 11 May 2017

<sup>57</sup> "Closure of Dadaab refugee camp ruled illegal by Kenyan court", *Irish Times*, 10 February 2017

<sup>58</sup> "A hopeful view in London...", *Africa Confidential*, 26 May 2017

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