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# 2.7.1. Sool

### ○ (a) Background

According to Map 3 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 31 March 2025,1230 and Map 2 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 1 April 2023,1231 Sool region is part of the areas disputed between Somaliland and Puntland. Sool shares an international border with Ethiopia to the south and internal borders with Sanaag region to the north, Togdheer region to the west, and Nugal and Bari regions to the east. It is divided into four districts, Taleex (also Taleh), Xudun (also Hudun), Caynabo (also Aynabo or Ainado) and Laas Caanood (also Laas Anood). The capital of Sool is Laas Caanood. According to the reference map, Togdheer region's Buhodle (or Buuhoodle) district and parts of Burco district are part of the disputed areas.1232

As of September 2024, sources variously estimated the population of Sool region at 548 975 (IPC),1233 and 84 024 (IOM).1234 Most of Sool's population belongs to the Dhulbahante clan,1235 which is part of the Darod family. The Dhulbahante are not affiliated with Somaliland's dominant Isaaq clan.1236 A map produced by the Max Planck Institute and published by Somalia expert Markus Hoehne in a February 2023 article on crisis in Sool region shows Dhulbahante territories in eastern Sool and also in Togdheer's Buhodle district.1237 Members of the Dhulbahante clan refer to Togdheer region as Cayn.1238 The map also shows a smaller Warsangeli (Darod) territory in the northeastern area bordering Puntland's Bari region and Sanaag region.1239

On 6 February 2023,1240 elders and leaders established the Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn-Khatumo (SSC-Khaatumo, SSC-K) administration,1241 representing the Dhulbahante clan along with the Fiqishine and Madiban clans.1242 SSC-K led efforts to remove Somaliland forces in August 2023 and has since declared its allegiance to Somalia rather than Somaliland.1243 In October 2023, the Federal Government of Somalia formally recognised the SSC-K administration.1244 The leader of SSC-K is Abdikhkhadir Ahmed Aw Ali Firdhiye.1245

Events and incidents taking place in Buhodle district are covered in this section and not in in the section 2.8.3 Togdheer (Somaliland).

For additional details on clans in Sool region, please see section 2.6.3.1 of the EASO COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (September 2021) and section 2.7.1 of the EUAA COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023).

### ○ (b) Actors' presence and conflict dynamics

Al-Shabaab control areas, presence and influence, along with other actors, notably SSC-Khatumo

According to Map 3 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 31 March 2025, Al-Shabaab did not control any territory in the Sool region,1246 which is consistent with the situation reported in Map 2 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 1 April 2023.1247 As of 31 March 2025, the area between Gumays, Buhodle, and Tukaraq, including Laas Caanood, was reported as the 'core control zone' of SSC-K (marked as being controlled by 'Autonomous armed forces (unionist)'). These towns were also directly controlled by these 'autonomous armed forces'. The 'estimated area of political influence' of SSC-K further included Taleh and Hudun. Meanwhile, Qorilugud and Oog were reportedly under the control of the Somaliland administration, and the border areas west of Xudun, Gumays, and Buhodle were under mixed control between the 'Autonomous armed forces (unionist)' and the 'Somaliland administration (separatist)'. 1248

In contrast, as of 1 April 2023, Gumays and the Goja'ade base near Laas Caanood were reported to be under the control of the Somaliland administration. The towns of

Buhodle, Xudun, and Taleex, as well as the area stretching from the western border to Laas Caanood, Tuqaraq, and Taleex, were under mixed control.1249

**Conflict dynamics**

Please also see the paragraph on 'SSC-Khatumo versus Somaliland' in section 1.3 Conflict layers and main developments of this report for an overview of the conflict dynamics in Sool. For background information and additional details see the EUAA COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023),1250 and the EASO COI report Somalia: Actors (July 2021).1251

Between February and August 2023, there was intense fighting between Somaliland forces and Dhulbahante clan militias, supported by allied clans.1252 According to a June 2023 article by Markus Hoehne, from March 2023 onward, the conflict around Laas Caanood involved fighters from Dhulbahante, Warsangeli, Majeerteen and other clans (the Harti clan coalition) on one side and clans like Ise and Gadabursi besides Isaaq clans on the Somaliland army side. The majority of the Harti clan coalition, however, belonged to the Dhulbahante clan.1253 In May 2023, for example, fighting took place around the villages of Dhabansaar and Samakab.1254 Multiple clashes and mortar exchanges were reported from 24 to 27 June 2023 in and around Laas Caanood.1255 In August 2023, SSC-K launched a counteroffensive against Somaliland forces, driving them out of Laas Caanood.1256 A new frontline emerged between Oog and Guumays in western Sool, aligning roughly with the boundary between the Isaaq and Dhulbahante clans.1257 Troops remained deployed along the frontlines and both sides sent reinforcements to the area in September 2023.1258 In December 2023, Somaliland forces and Dhulbahante clan militias continued to strengthen their positions near the frontline in Sool region, raising concerns about renewed fighting.1259 Reportedly, in the first half of 2024, the situation in Sool remained calm, despite troop movements of Somaliland forces and Dhulbahante clan militias along the frontline.1260

In January 2025, fighting between Somaliland and SSC-Khaatumo forces resumed in Sool, with clashes erupting in Guumays, in Oog area. The clashes resulted in casualties, though exact numbers were unclear.1261 Ongoing military movements had heightened tensions, sparking fears of the conflict spreading further.1262 Early March 2025, members of Habar Je'lo (sub-clan of the Isaaq) and Dhulbahante clans clashed in the disputed village of Buq Dharkayn. The confrontation involved both government forces and troops from SSC-Khatumo. The violence led to numerous casualties, with dozens reported killed or injured.1263

Other incidents involving violence between clan militias were also reported in Sool region. In November 2023, violence between militias of Habar Je'lo and Dhulbahante clans was reported[1264] near Oog in the areas of Buq Dharkayn and Maygaale.[1265] Further clashes in the region between Habar Je'lo and Dhulbahante clan members were reported in early November 2024, this time in Qorilugud and Gadgad, in Togdheer's Buhodle district.[1266]

## ○ (c) Recent security trends

**Security incidents, estimated civilian fatalities and casualties**

Between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025, ACLED reported 126 security incidents in Sool region (including Buhodle district), including battles, explosions, or other forms of remote violence and violence against civilians, causing 334 fatalities. Figure 21 below shows their evolution per type across the reference period. At district level, Laas Caanood recorded the most security incidents (59), followed by Buhodle district (53 incidents) and Caynabo district (14 incidents) between April 2023 and 21 March 2025.[1267]

Security events in Sool

Figure 21. Evolution of ACLED security events coded 'battles', 'explosions/remote violence' and 'violence against civilians' between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025 in Sool.[1268]

Military forces of Somaliland and Sool, Sanaag and Cayn Militia (SSC) were involved in 56 incidents resulting in 255 fatalities.

For incidents resulting in fatalities, including civilian deaths, please see below an illustrative and non-exhaustive list:

- on 11 July 2023, a health facility in Laas Canood was attacked, resulting in the killing and wounding of dozens of people, including health care workers and patients;1269

- in August 2023, Jama Kadiye Elmi, an 81-year-old poet, was killed in Laas Caanood when artillery hit the car in which he was travelling;1270

- in early November 2024, members of the Habar Je'lo and the Dhulbahante clans clashed near Shangeed and Qorilugud villages in Buhodle district.1271 There were concerns that the violence had 'claimed multiple lives';1272

- on 7 March 2025, clashes involving Somaliland forces and SSC Khaatumo fighters broke out in Buq Dharkayn, resulting in an unspecified number of casualties.1273

**Conflict-related displacement**

According to the UNHCR PRMN, 54 077 individuals were newly displaced from Sool region (including Buhoodle district) due to conflict or insecurity in the period from April 2023 to 16 March 2025. Among them, 48 294 IDPs were displaced within Sool region (including Buhoodle), while 5 783 IDPs were displaced to other regions, including Bari, Nugal, Togdheer, and Woqooyi Galbeed. 36 118 were displaced within the region to Buhoodle district. In the same period, 4 633 individuals arrived from other regions, including Nugal, and Sanaag regions. Xudun was the district most affected by arrivals from other regions (2 392 individuals, all arriving from Ceerigaabo) during the reference period, while Laas Caanood was the district most affected by individuals leaving for other regions (3 072), including Bari, Nugal, Togdheer, and Woqooyi Galbeed.1274 For information on conflict-related displacement prior to April 2023, please see section 2.4.1 of the EUAA COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023).

According to UNHCR’s Somalia Protection and Solutions Monitoring Network (PSMN) fighting in Buhodle district in November 2024 resulted in the displacement of 26 550 individuals. The conflict caused widespread displacement, especially in areas such as ‘Qorilugud, Shangeed, Gocondhaale, Maygaagle, Galgal, Harufadhi, Sooljoogto, Xadhadhan, and Shimbiraale’.1275

Other impacts on civilian life

UNOCHA recorded 6 humanitarian access incidents in Sool region (excluding Buhoodle district) in the period from April to December 2023,1276 and another 15 in 2024,1277 including, for example, movement restrictions impeding humanitarian activities.1278

In 2023, the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition (SHCC) recorded 10 incidents of violence against or obstructing healthcare in Laas Caanood in the period between February and July 2023. Additionally, eight incidents were recorded in which explosive weapons damaged hospitals and injured health workers.1279 Laas Caanood General Hospital was struck by mortars and artillery, resulting in damages and disruptions.1280 Between 8 June and 5 October 2023, UNSOM recorded at least eight civilian casualties in Laas Caanood, including four killed and four injured. Six of the victims were medical staff.1281

In April 2023, AOAV reported that hospitals, schools, and residential areas in Laas Caanood had repeatedly been shelled since the outbreak of heavy fighting in February 2023.1282 Also in April 2023, Amnesty International shared ‘findings that Somaliland security forces indiscriminately shelled the town [of Laas Caanood], damaging hospitals, schools and mosques, killing and injuring civilians, and displacing tens of thousands of people.’1283

In November 2024, the World Food Program (WFP) suspended its humanitarian operations in Somalia's SSC-Khaatumo region due to insecurity and the looting of food aid.1284

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