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2.7.2. Sanaag

○ (a) Background

According to Map 3 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 31 March 2025,1285 and Map 2 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 1 April 2023,1286 Sanaag region is part of the areas disputed between Somaliland and Puntland. Sanaag shares internal borders with Sool region to the south, Togdheer and Woqoyi Galbeed regions to the west, and Bari region to the east. In the north it borders the Gulf of Aden. It is divided into three districts, Lasqoray, Ceerigaabo (also known as Erigabo or Erigavo) and Ceel Afweyn (also known as El Afweyne). Ceerigaabo is the capital of Sanaag.1287

As of September 2024, sources variously estimated the population of Sanaag region at 428 699 (IPC),1288 and 132 140 (IOM).1289

Eastern Sanaag is primarily inhabited by the Warsangeli, a sub-clan of the Harti-Darod, while the Dhulbahante clan resides in some southern areas.1290 The western part, including Ceerigaabo, is predominantly home to the Habar Yunis (also known as Habar Yoonis) sub-clan of the Isaaq.1291 Ceerigaabo is also home to members of Isaaq subclan Habar Je'lo (also known as Habar Jeclo), as well as the Harti subclans of Dhulbahante and Warsangeli.1292

○ (b) Actors' presence and conflict dynamics

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

According to both the Report of the UN Panel of Experts and Map 3 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 31 March 2025, Al-Shabaab maintained a presence in the Cal Madow (Almadow) mountain range,1293 which is consistent with the situation depicted in Map 2 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 1 April 2023.1294

As of 31 March 2025, the western part of Sanaag region (including the towns of Ceerigaabo and El Afweyn) were controlled by the Somaliland administration, while the central part was under 'mixed, unclear, and/or local control', but also marked as '[e]stimated area of influence/presence' of SSC-K. Lasqoray, Badhan and Dhahar towns were controlled by 'Autonomous armed forces (unionist)', as were parts of the eastern and southern areas.1295

In contrast, as of 1 April 2023, the SSC-K's influence was confined to a smaller area in the south. The central and eastern parts of Sanaag, including Dhahar, were largely marked as under mixed control, with no broader SSC-K presence indicated. Lasqoray and Badhan were already under the control of 'autonomous armed forces'.1296

Conflict dynamics

The conflict dynamics in Sanaag involve multiple actors and may be grouped as follows:

Dhulbahante vs Isaaq and Somaliland military forces. Dhulbahante in parts of Sanaag region do not support Somaliland's independence.1297 In August 2024, the long-standing conflict between the Dhulbahante and Isaaq sub-clans flared up again in Ceerigaabo and nearby Goof village,1298 resulting in five deaths.1299 Habar Yunis militias reportedly also ambushed vehicles carrying Dhulbahante civilians in Ceerigaabo.1300 In December 2024, Somaliland security forces clashed with Dhulbahante clan members in Ceerigaabo, following a retaliatory killing in late November 2024. Fighting continued as Somaliland forces, backing the Habar Yunis clan, clashed with SSC-K militias. Tensions later shifted outside Ceerigaabo, with Dhulbahante fighters regrouping 20 to 30 km southwest of the city. In January 2025, Somaliland security forces had maintained control of Ceerigaabo, however Dhulbahante clan militias mobilised outside the city.1301

Warsengeli vs Isaaq. Besides land disputes within the Warsangeli clans, 'there has been conflict between the Isaaq and Warsangeli over mining rights'.1302 In January 2025, Horn Observer reported that the Ceerigaabo conflict involved militias from the

Warsangeli and Habar Je’lo clans, but had also involved SSC-K and Somaliland forces. That same month, tensions intensified after a declaration by the Warsangeli clan, which condemned the clashes in Ceerigaabo that had resulted in dozens of deaths and significant displacement since November 2024.1303 By January 2025, Warsangeli clan militias had also mobilised outside the city.1304

Intra-Isaaq conflicts. Since 2015, an intra-Isaaq conflict in El Afweyn has periodically flared into violence between Habar Yunis and Habar Je’lo pastoralists over access to pasture and water.1305 In August 2024, Somaliland security forces clashed with Habar Yunis sub-clan militias following the above mentioned earlier attacks by Habar Yunis on Dhulbahante civilians in Ceerigabo.1306

Also, between late September and early October 2023 unspecified clan tensions were reported in Ceerigaabo, leading to minor skirmishes,1307 while other clashes between rival clan militias were also reported in Ceerigaabo district in March 2025.1308 According to an October 2023 article by the Somali Digest, unresolved land disputes dating back to the aftermath of the first civil war (from 1981 to 1991) remain a major source of conflict in Ceerigaabo.1309

○ (c) Recent security trends

Security incidents, estimated civilian fatalities and casualties

Between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025, ACLED reported 58 security incidents in Sanaag region, including battles and violence against civilians, causing 121 fatalities. Figure 22 below shows their evolution per type across the reference period. At district level, Ceerigaabo recorded the most security incidents (45 incidents), followed by Ceel Afweyn district (11 incidents) and Lasqoray district (2 incidents) between April 2023 and 21 March 2025.1310

Security events in Sannag

Figure 22. Evolution of ACLED security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025 in Sanaag.[1311]

ACLED recorded 14 incidents involving both Habar Je’lo Clan (and Sub-Clan Militias) and Habar Yunis Clan (and Sub-Clan Militias) militias (coded as either ‘Actor 1’, ‘Associated Actor 1’, ‘Actor 2’, or ‘Associated Actor 2’). ACLED also recorded 11 incidents involving both Dhulbahante Clan (and Sub-Clan Militias) and Habar Yunis Clan (and Sub-clan militias). Both Sool, Sanaag and Cayn Militia (SSC) and Somaliland Forces were involved in 6 incidents.

For incidents involving civilian fatalities, please see below an illustrative and non-exhaustive list:

- violent clan disputes broke out in the Ceel Afweyn district[1312] between 25 August 2023 and 30 August 2023, resulting in 19 fatalities, including a six-year-old child, and 26 injuries;[1313]

- on 26 August 2024, a Dhulbahante clan militia member exchanged fire with Somaliland police while resisting arrest in Ceerigaabo, injuring two officers before being killed. The following day, clashes broke out in Goof village between a Dhulbahante sub-clan and the Habar Yunis sub-clan, to which the police officers belonged. This resulted in at least nine deaths, including a civilian businessman; [1314]

- on 10 March 2025, clan fighting in Dooxada Dureere area of Ceerigaabo district resulted in the killing of at least 12 people and the wounding of several others. The fighting affected ‘both fighters and civilians nearby’.[1315]

Conflict-related displacement

According to the UNHCR PRMN, 22 608 individuals were newly displaced from Sanaag region due to conflict or insecurity in the period from April 2023 to 16 March 2025. Among them, 15 161 IDPs were displaced within Sanaag region, while 7 447 IDPs were displaced to other regions, including Bari, Nugal, Sool, Togdheer, Woqooyi Galbeed. In the same period, 662 individuals arrived from other regions, including Nugal and Togdheer region. Badhan was the district most affected by arrivals from outside the region (460 individuals) during the reference period, while Ceerigaabo was the district most affected by individuals leaving for other regions (6 938). In terms of displacement within Sanaag region, Ceel Afweyn, by a wide margin, was the district most affected by intra-regional IDP departures to other locations within Sanaag region, with 11 700 individuals arriving from other locations within Sanaag (all of whom were displaced within Ceel Afweyn district in August 2023).1316 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).

In December 2024, UN OCHA reported that violent clashes erupted in Ceerigaabo on 14 December 2024 and continued the next day. The fighting displaced around 43 000 people, many of whom sought refuge in safer areas within Ceerigaabo district. Others fled to different parts of Sanaag, including Ceel Afweyn and Lasqoray, while some reportedly fled to Bossaso, Laas Caanood, Xuddun, and Burco districts.1317

Other impacts on civilian life

UNOCHA recorded 6 humanitarian access incidents in Sanaag region in the period from April to December 2023,1318 and another 6 in 2024.1319 In the period from January to March 2024, for example, 'two individuals assaulted a local chief and police officer during a beneficiary registration over disagreements of inclusion/exclusion.'1320

UNOCHA reported that the above-mentioned clashes in December 2024 left those displaced in urgent need of food, shelter, water, sanitation, and basic healthcare services. The fighting had completely disrupted humanitarian operations, business activities, and schooling.1321

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