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2.4.1. Hiraan

(a) Background

Hiraan region shares an international border with Ethiopia to the north and internal borders with Galgaduud region to the north-east, Middle Shabelle region to the south, Lower Shabelle region to the south-west, and Bakool region to the west. It is divided into three districts, Jalalaqsi, Bulo Burto and Belet Weyne, with Belet Weyne city as the region's capital city.945

Sources estimated the population of Hiraan at 504 816 (IPC),946 and 597 823 (IOM), 947 respectively, in 2024. The main clan in Hiraan region is the Hawadle clan,948 a Hawiye sub-clan dominating the territory north-east of the Shabelle River, while other Hawiye sub-clans, such as Gaaljecel (or Gaalje'el) and Badicadde (or Badi Adde) dominate the territory south-west of the river.949 Smaller clans living in the region's northeast include Udeejeen, Faqi Omar and Faqi Muhmed (both Dir), Rer Aw Hassan and Makanne.950 For additional details on clans in Hiraan region, please see section 2.4.1.1 of the EASO COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (September 2021) and section 2.4.1 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

The Somali news portal Horn Observer noted in June 2024 that Hiraan region had been the ‘epicenter’ of the Ma’awisley clan militias’ fight against Al-Shabaab over the previous two years. Many clan militia members, however, had left their positions, allowing Al-Shabaab to regain control over many rural villages and towns.951

According to Map 3 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 31 March 2025 and Map 2 Somalia – Approximate Territorial Control as of 1 April 2023, Al-Shabaab fully controlled the western part of Bulo Burto district, including the area between the South-West state border and close to the Shabelle River valley and up to the north as far as Buqda town. Other parts of Hiraan region were reported to be under mixed, unclear, and/or local control, except for the north-eastern part of the region. This region, as well as urban centres such as Belet Weyne city, Bulo Burto, and Jalalaqsi were reported to be the under control of ATMIS/federal government coalition forces.952 Another map, developed by the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and the Critical Threats Project (CTP) and based on zone assessments of April 2024, showed Al-Shabaab having control and support zones along the west bank of the Shabelle River between Jalalaqsi and Belet Weyne towns, except for an area around Bulo Burto town.953

The CTP explained that an initially successful counteroffensive launched by Somali forces in 2022 stalled in 2023 and left large Al-Shabaab support zones intact on the west bank of the Shabelle River, which the group used for new offensives aimed at re-establishing positions on the east bank.954 In February 2025, local media reported on heavy fighting between Al-Shabaab and government forces (supported by Ma’awisley clan militias) in the Jicibow area along the Shabelle River,955 in the Jinka Wabiga areas in eastern Hiraan,956 and in areas between Bulo Burto and Jalalaqsi.957

Djibouti ATMIS troops reportedly withdrew from two key military bases in Belet Weyne town in March 2024 over security concerns.958 Djibouti forces are also part of AUSSOM’s - ATMIS’ successor’s - operations in Hiraan region.959 Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) briefly crossed into Hiraan region in summer 2024.960 According to the news site Mareeg, Ethiopia has 10 000 soldiers stationed in four of Somalia’s regions, including in Hiraan region.961

Conflict dynamics

A counter-offensive against Al-Shabaab by Somali government forces together with local clan militias in April 2023 targeting Belet Weyne was reportedly initially ‘promising’, but later slowed down due to lack of forces, inter-clan feuds and logistical

difficulties.962 Moreover, the political conflict between Hiraan governor Ali Jeyte Osman and the Hirshabelle administration led to a withdrawal of militia members, which slowed down the counter-offensive and allowed Al-Shabaab to regain territory. 963 In September 2023, after long negotiations, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud secured the support of the Hawadle community in Mahaas, Hiraan district, in the fight against Al-Shabaab. He appointed Ali Jeyte as the local Ma'awisley militia's commander.964 The International Crisis Group recorded Al-Shabaab attacks in Hiraan district in August, and September 2023, as well as government operations against Al-Shabaab in December 2023, January and February 2024 (airstrikes), July 2024, September 2024, and January 2025.965 Al-Shabaab carried out a number of attacks involving improvised explosive devices (IEDs), such as in July and August 2023,966 and in July 2024,967 causing civilian casualties. Since late 2024, Hiraan region has reportedly become a 'focal point' in the federal government's fight against A-Shabaab, with the support of local militias and international partners.968

The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS) pointed to ongoing tensions between the Hawadle clan dominant in Hiraan and the Hirshabelle State administration over power-sharing arrangements. Tensions intensified in June 2023 when Hiraan's governor Ali Jeyte Osman was removed from his position by Hirshabelle State president Ali Gudlawe. Previously, Osman had announced Hiraan's secession from Hirshabelle State following a dispute over the collection of taxes.969 For further information on the roots of the conflict, please see section 2.4.1 of the EASO COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (September 2021). An agreement was reportedly negotiated in February 2025.970

SMN reported on inter-clan clashes between Hawadle and Abgal clan members along the border between Hiraan and Middle Shabelle in April 2024 and noted that the area had been a 'hotspot' for recent clan clashes, especially the Jalalaqsi and Moqokori districts.971 Similar fights, rooted in disputes over land ownership and resource control, were recorded in Iji area in January 2024, in Halfooley village in July 2023,972 December 2024,973 and February 2025,974 and in Jalalaqsi in November 2024.975 Inter-clan fights between Hawadle and Habar Gidir clans were reported in Mataban district in April 2023.976

☐ **(c) Recent security trends**

Security incidents, estimated civilian fatalities and casualties

Between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025, ACLED reported 394 security incidents in Hiraan region, including battles, explosions, or other forms of remote violence and violence against civilians, causing 899 fatalities. Figure 15 below shows their evolution per type across the reference period.977 At district level, Bulo Burto recorded the most security incidents (185), followed by Belet Weyne (176 incidents) and Jalalaqsi (33 incidents).978

Security events in Hiraan

Figure 15. Evolution of ACLED security events coded ‘battles’, ‘explosions/remote violence’ and ‘violence against civilians’ between 1 April 2023 and 21 March 2025 in Hiraan.979

ACLED recorded 280 incidents involving Al-Shabaab (coded as either ‘Actor 1’, ‘Associated Actor 1’, ‘Actor 2’, or ‘Associated Actor 2’). Of these, 191 incidents involved both Al-Shabaab and the Military and Police Forces of Somalia. 11 incidents involved both Abgal and Hawadle Clan militias.

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

- eight family members were killed in a suspected Al-Shabaab landmine explosion in the village of Jicibow (Bulo Burto district) in July 2023;980
- eight people were killed in a suicide attack on a tea shop in Jalalaqsi district in August 2023, while more than 10 were injured. The attack reportedly targeted the district commissioner, whose bodyguard was among the victims;981
- at least 36 people, including civilians and security forces were reportedly killed and more than 40 injured when a lorry filled with explosive devices exploded at a government checkpoint in Belet Weyne town on 23 September 2023;982
- at least six people, including children and security forces, were killed and more than 10 injured when a car bomb exploded near a market in Bulo Burto town on 28 September 2023;983
- at least four people, including three civilians and a soldier, were killed in a suicide car bombing targeting a military base in Belet Weyne town on 2 July 2024. Al-Shabaab later reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack;984

- a landmine attack on a restaurant in Belet Weyne town in July 2024 claimed two victims, a civilian and a soldier;985

- at least 20 people, including women and children, were killed in armed clashes between two clan militias in Halfooley in village in December 2024.986

Conflict-related displacement

Between 1 April 2023 and 16 March 2025, 10 542 individuals were newly displaced from Hiraan region due to conflict or insecurity, according to the UNCHR PRMN. Of this group, 6 701 individuals were displaced within the administrative region, while 3 841 individuals were displaced to other regions, including Banadir, Bari, Gedo, Lower Juba, Middle Shabelle, and Nugal regions. In the same period, 544 individuals arrived in Hiraan region from other regions, including Bakool, Bari, Galgaduud, Middle Shabelle, and Lower Shabelle.

Belet Weyne was the district most affected by arrivals from other regions (303 individuals) in the period from 1 April 2023 to 16 March 2025, as well as by arrivals from within the region (including within the district), namely 3 717 individuals. Jalalaqsi was the district most affected by individuals leaving for other regions (2 215) and for other locations within the region (3 280), respectively.987 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).

Other impacts on civilian life

According to a report by the UN Secretary-General of October 2024, Al-Shabaab continued to abduct children for recruitment and use in several regions, including in Hiraan.988

In May 2023, the governor of Hiraan region blocked food and fuel transports into areas recaptured by Al-Shabaab,989 along the Shabelle River between Belet Weyne and Bulo Burto.990 The International Crisis Group (ICG) noted that, in the period from 2020 to 2023, Al-Shabaab increased attacks on food and water resources in Hiraan region as a ‘punitive measure’ for clans cooperating with government forces in the fight against Al-Shabaab.991

In 2024, UNOCHA recorded the eviction of displaced persons from displaced sites in Belet Weyne, including 50 households in the period from 1 January to 31 March 2024 and 130 households (780 IDPs) in the period 1 April to 30 June 2024.992 No evictions were recorded for the second half of 2024.

UNOCHA recorded 25 humanitarian access incidents in Hiraan region in 2024,993 such as, for example, the temporary detention of aid workers,994 or an assault by police

officers on aid workers after a dispute at a checkpoint, leaving several aid workers injured in Belet Weyne.995 In 2023, the Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition recorded four cases of violence against or obstruction of healthcare by Al-Shabaab in the period from June to September, including the abduction of five NGO health workers and a civilian man in Hiraan region, who were released following the payment of a ransom.996

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