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1.3. Conflict layers and main developments

For analytical purposes, the main conflict dynamics in Somalia can be presented in different layers, which can be described as follows:

The Al-Shabaab/anti-Al-Shabaab conflict. According to the Rule of Law in Armed Conflicts (RULAC) project,235 the Somali government is a party to a non-international armed conflict with Al-Shabaab.236 Al-Shabaab is designated as a terrorist group by the UK237 and the US.238 The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS), the Federal Member States (FMS), clan militias, as well as other international actors, such as Ethiopia, Kenya, the US, and ATMIS/AUSSOM, are all engaged, although in various degrees and forms, in the conflict against the militant al-Qaeda affiliated organisation.239 During the reference period this was the main conflict driver in the country, with most of the security incidents either perpetrated by Al-Shabaab, or involving various security actors and forces against Al-Shabaab. Overall, more than 75 % of these security events, and more than 80 % of the estimated fatalities that were recorded by ACLED during the reference period of the report, are to be attributed to the (anti-)Al-Shabaab conflict.240 For main developments during the reference period about Al-Shabaab's control areas and influence see section above 1.2.2 Al-Shabaab control areas, presence, and influence. For details about all other actors, and their armed forces, see main developments during the reference period in the chapter 1.2.3 Updated list of main actors as well as the previous EUAA COI report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023),241 EASO COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (September 2021),242 and the EASO COI report Somalia: Actors (July 2021).243 For (anti) Al-Shabaab conflict dynamics and their reverberations at regional level, please see the remainder of this report, 2 Regional security situation and trends.

The inter- and intra-clan rivalries. Another major source of conflict that pervades Somali society is constituted by clan rivalries and competitions over political power and scarce resources.244 Various experts agree that the level of clan conflicts, rivalries, and animosity has substantially increased across the country during the past two years.245 According to ACLED data, inter- and intra-clan conflicts in the country caused more than 472 security incidents during the reporting period, resulting in 1 214 estimated fatalities and an unspecified number of casualties.246 The number of estimated fatalities has more than doubled compared to the two preceding years (April 2021 – March 2023), when there were 280 reported incidents resulting in 487 estimated fatalities.247 After the Al-Shabaab conflict, this is the second main conflict driver and source of insecurity in the country.248

For a mapping of the main clan conflicts across Federal Member States in Somalia see the EUAA COI Report Somalia: Country Focus (May 2025).249 For background information on the clan system in Somalia see the EUAA COI Report Somalia: Country Focus (May 2025),250 the EASO COI report Somalia: Actors (July 2021),251 and the EASO COI report Somalia: Targeted profiles (August 2021),252 as well as relevant information in the EUAA COI report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023),253 and the EASO COI Report Somalia: Security Situation (September 2021).254 For clan conflict dynamics and their reverberations at regional level during the reference period (April 2023 – March 2025), please see the remainder of this report 2 Regional security situation and trends.

The ISIS/anti-ISIS Conflict. Somali security forces - notably Puntland Maritime Police Forces and Puntland Darwish – as well as US military forces, are engaged in armed confrontation with the Islamic State in Somalia. During the reference period, most confrontations and security incidents have taken place in the Bari region, in the Qandala (Al Miskaad), Bossaso, and Iskushuban districts. On various occasions ISIS has also clashed with Al-Shabaab, notably in the Bossaso and Qandala districts. Based on ACLED data, in the reference period ISIS-Somalia was involved in 126 reported security incidents,255 with a spike in the period January-March 2025 - almost 85 % of all events - which resulted in 769 estimated fatalities.256 For an overview about ISIS-Somalia see section 1.2.3 Updated list of main actors. For (anti) ISIS-Somalia conflict dynamics and their reverberation at regional level please see the remainder this report 2 Regional security situation and trends.

SSC-Khatumo versus Somaliland. Among other territorial disputes across Somalia, Puntland and Somaliland contend over control of the Sool and Sanaag regions, which border the two state administrations, as well as the area of Cayn, which basically correspond to the Buhodle district of the Togdheer region.257 Within this broader context, a major conflict erupted in February 2023 between the Somaliland National Army and the SSC-Khatumo forces – Sool, Sanaag and Cayn – mainly constituted by Dhulbahante clan militias,258 which belong to the same Harti/Darood clan family for which Puntland constitutes the core and institutional 'home'.259 During the first few months, the conflict caused around 5 000 casualties from both sides, including armed forces and civilian fatalities,260 and more 200 000 displaced people.261 With the establishment of an autonomous regional SSC-Khatumo administration,262 later recognised by the FGS,263 the conflict has continued intermittently throughout the entire reference period in various locations in the disputed areas.264 For regional details about this conflict see the remainder of this report, notably section 2.7 Sool, Sanaag and SSC-Khatumo. For background information and additional details see the EUAA COI report Somalia: Security Situation (February 2023),265 and the EASO COI report Somalia: Actors (July 2021).266

Crime. According to the Africa Organised Crime Index, Somalia ranked 13th out of 54 African countries in terms of criminality - a combination of criminal market and criminal actor indicators - at the end of 2023,267 up from 18th in 2021.268 In particular, Somalia has the highest score in Africa and the world (9.50) for extortion and protection racketeering at the hands of non-state armed groups and militias.269 With arms trafficking (9.0) and trafficking in human beings (8.0) also prominent among criminal markets,270 as well as dysfunctional institutions characterised by the highest levels of corruption in the world (1.0),271 confidence in law enforcement institutions is lowest in Somalia (1.5).272 In terms of resilience, defined 'as the ability to

withstand and disrupt organised criminal activity',273 the country's performance remained unvaried during the reference period, exhibiting the lowest score across Africa after Libya,274 similarly to 2021.275 Within this context, Al-Shabaab is not the sole actor responsible for criminal and illicit activities, attacks, targeted killings and executions in Somalia. Such crimes can also be politically and economically motivated or related to other type of conflicts and activities.276 According to the organised crime index, next to mafia-style groups – such as Al-Shabaab –'criminal networks' and 'state embedded actors' are particularly relevant in Somalia.277 Against this backdrop, youth gangs engaged in violent criminality, notably in Mogadishu, where they are locally known as ciyaal weero,278 are a persistent and long-standing issue.279 For further information on Criminality see section 1.5 Criminality.

Other layers. Other confrontations which are more of a political nature and do not necessarily escalate into armed confrontations include: (1) Tensions between the FGS and the Federal Member States over the establishment of an effective federal system.280 These included, more recently, disputes over electoral issues,281 and related controversial constitutional amendments.282 Within this context, in March 2024, Puntland revoked its recognition of the federal government,283 while Jubbaland officially severed its ties with it in November 2024,284 in a move that escalated into open military confrontation.285 (2) The intra-regional tensions and governance dynamics at FMS level.286 (3) The FGS versus Somaliland tensions, over its political status and international recognition,287 and in the course of 2024, in relation to the signing of the MoU between Somaliland and Ethiopia.288 (4) External disputes and tensions, which often play out at regional level in Somalia, and which revolve around various external actors, such as Ethiopia and Kenya - historically engaged in Somalia - UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, home to Somali elites patrons, but also Türkiye and Egypt, with which Somalia has signed security pacts in the course of 2024.289 For a more detailed overview about these other layers and their implications at regional level see part 2 Regional security situation and trends, as well as previous EUAA COI reports.

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