GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY MONITOR

October 2026

HIGHLIGHTS

October saw Villa Somalia lose further ground as stalled election negotiations and disputed regional polls produced widening armed opposition. Forces loyal to former South West State President Abdiaziz Laftagareen took control of four of Bay Region's five district centres, while opposition fighters seized government offices in Beled Weyne following the re-election of Hirshabelle President Ali Gudlaawe. Al-Shabaab exploited these divisions, securing agreements with sections of the Hawaadle clan and inflicting heavy losses on a Somali National Army (SNA) convoy sent towards Burhakaba. The announcement of a national electoral timetable for 2027 deepened the dispute over who would participate and how absent regions would be represented. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's invitation to November talks with the opposition are likely to fail if he shows no signs of willingness to compromise. These developments came as international partners continue to reduce their commitments in Somalia, with Ugandan bilateral forces beginning to withdraw, United States forces leaving Baledogle, and the closure of the United Nations' political mission removing an established, official channel for political mediation. Somaliland President Irro returns from 'productive' US trip.

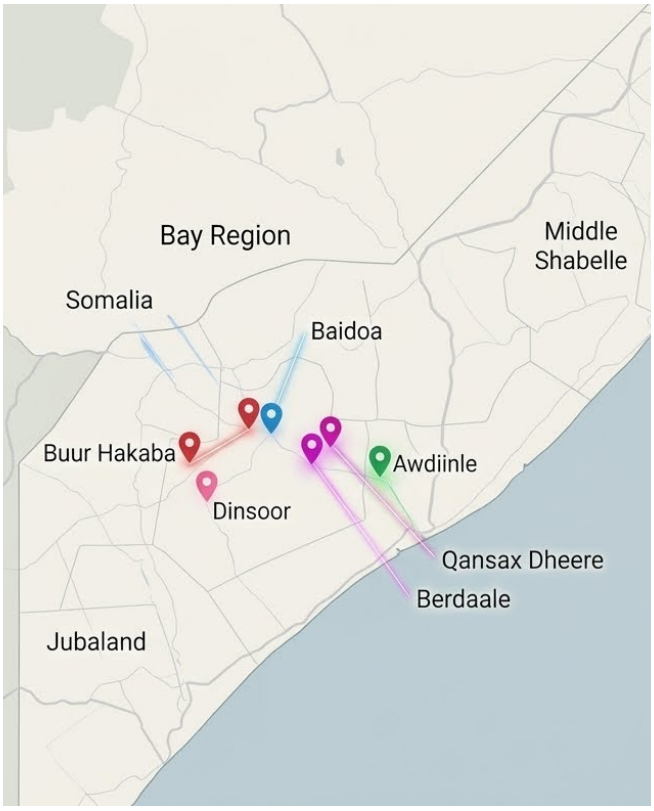
National Election Plans Deepen the Political Divide

National election negotiations remained stalled during October as Villa Somalia pressed ahead with arrangements rejected by the Somalia Future Council (SFC) and other opposition parties. The national electoral commission announced parliamentary elections for 15 April 2027 and a presidential election for 15 May. A subsequent announcement that seats allocated to non-participating regions could be filled through voting elsewhere made the proposal still more contentious. It would allow elections held in Mogadishu to fill seats belonging to Puntland or Jubaland without the participation of their administrations, giving Villa Somalia a means to bypass opponents whose agreement is needed for a credible national settlement.

Opposition leaders rejected the timetable and warned that unilateral elections could prompt the formation of a parallel government. Meetings in Mogadishu and Nairobi were expected in the coming weeks to agree their response. The prospect of a parallel government increases the risk that competing claims to national authority will accompany the armed disputes already under way in the regions. Reports that Villa Somalia was considering a disarmament operation against Mogadishu-based opposition leaders also temporarily raised tensions in the capital.

At the end of the month, Hassan Sheikh invited national opposition leaders and civil society representatives to talks in Mogadishu from 14–18 November. Participation remained uncertain. Opposition groups were seeking a clear agenda and evidence that the presidency was prepared to reconsider its plans. Critics viewed the invitation as an attempt to ease diplomatic pressure or buy time while unilateral electoral preparations continued. Unless the timetable, representation of non-participating regions, and electoral rules are open to negotiation, the proposed meeting is unlikely to resolve the dispute.

Villa Somalia Loses Most of Bay Region



The struggle for control of South West State (SWS) widened into a rapid loss of territory across Bay Region for federal authorities. Laftagareen-aligned forces took Qansaxdheere on 8 October and Burhakaba on 15 October, where fighting reportedly left more than 14 dead and 33 wounded. Berdaale, Awdinle and Dinsoor followed on 16 October without fighting. The opposition consequently controlled four of Bay Region's five district centres and positions within approximately 35 kilometres of Baidoa. The state's capital city is increasingly surrounded, while the loss of Burhakaba further compromised its road connection to Mogadishu.

The speed of these gains reflected shifting clan politics, elite defections, as well as direct military pressure. Local calculations were influenced by the opposition's momentum, al-Shabaab threats, clan grievances against the governing style of contested SWS President Adan Madoobe, and reported financial offers from opposition groups. Laftagareen's supporters began appointing district officials, turning military gains into claims to administrative authority. Further defections raised concern over Wajid in Bakool and Waanlaweyn in Lower Shabelle. Opposition forces also entered Qoryoley on 26 October, although it remained unclear at the end of the month whether the town had changed allegiance.

A delegation of six Rahanweyn federal parliamentarians, led by former House of the People Speaker Mohamed Mursal Sheikh Abdirahman and Adan Saransoor, travelled to Baidoa to pursue mediation. However, Laftagareen demanded that Adan Madobe step down before talks began. Leaders aligned with Laftagareen also warned the delegation about its safety. The initiative offered little immediate prospect of a settlement.

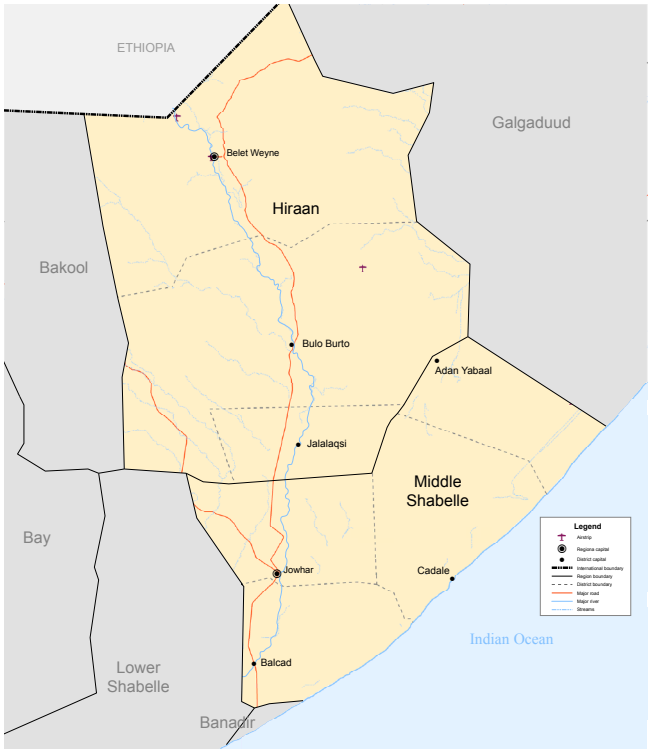
Villa Somalia added Laftagareen and nine other opposition leaders to the national financial sanctions list under the country's anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing mechanism. Federal government and SWS officials questioned whether Laftagareen had become dependent on al-Shabaab. Although there is some evidence of co-ordination, the extent of cooperation remains unclear. The insurgents benefit from the collapse of government positions and have their own reasons to attack federal reinforcements, but this does not establish that all opposition forces operate under their command. Treating the entire rebellion as an al-Shabaab proxy risks obscuring the importance of local political dynamics.

Another Political-Military Disaster for the SNA

On 24 October, the Ministry of Defence announced Operation BANOODA to recover territory in Bay and Bakool from opposition forces and al-Shabaab. However, three days later an SNA convoy moving from Baledogle towards Burhakaba was ambushed near Jameeco village. Al-Shabaab employed vehicle-borne explosive devices and one-way attack drones, killing dozens of soldiers, including members of the Türkiye-trained Gorgor forces. The group claimed more than 300 government soldiers killed and multiple military vehicles captured. This casualty figure could not be confirmed and other estimates put SNA losses closer to 50 dead and 100 wounded. Nonetheless, the incident dealt an immediate blow to the effort to reopen the route towards Baidoa and recover the towns lost earlier in the month.

Laftagareen also condemned Türkiye's continued military support for Villa Somalia, particularly the reported use of drones and F-16 aircraft against opposition fighters and vehicles in Bay and Bakool. As in September, external air support had not enabled federal forces to establish durable control on the ground. Further reinforcements may sustain the administration in Baidoa, but the loss of surrounding towns leaves it increasingly dependent on outside protection while giving al-Shabaab more opportunities to attack forces moving to its relief.

Hirshabelle Elections Accelerate the Loss of Hiraan



Hirshabelle Map

Hirshabelle's elections proceeded despite Hawaadle protests in Beledweyn over the state's distribution of power and the legitimacy of the process. On 5 October, Hassan Sheikh's Justice and Solidarity Party (JSP) was declared the winner of 78 of the state parliament's 99 seats. Ali Gudlaawe was re-elected president on 24 October, with Abdifatah Afrah, a controversial Hawaadle politician, as vice president. The inclusion of a Hawaadle running mate did not resolve the wider dispute over the clan's influence within the administration.

Following reports that the new state leadership might visit Hiraan, fighters loyal to opposition leaders took control of Beled Weyne, including its administrative buildings. The seizure of the regional capital demonstrated the limits of the electoral victory. Gudlaawe secured another term, but his administration will struggle to gain traction outside of the state capital of Jowhar.

Al-Shabaab was meanwhile consolidating its own position. On 4 October, elders representing ten Hawaadle sub-clans signed an agreement with the group in Maxaas District, accepting the militant group's control. The agreement did not encompass the entire clan. Hawaadle leaders and armed groups remained divided between accommodation with al-Shabaab, participation in the JSP administration, and opposition to Villa Somalia and support for a separate Hiraan State. These divisions make it easier for the insurgents to negotiate with individual communities while isolating those still willing to resist.

On 9 October, Al-Shabaab took Hees village, approximately 35 kilometres from Beled Weyne. The advance increased its access to revenue from regional trade and could threaten government control in Matabaan District. At the same time, the movement of opposition fighters, heavy weapons and military vehicles into Beledweyn risked weakening the remaining Ma'awiisley positions in eastern Hiraan. Forces that had fought al-Shabaab for several years with limited federal support are increasingly occupied by a confrontation with the authorities in Mogadishu and Jowhar.

Jubaland Gains Ground in Gedo Region

Villa Somalia also lost influence in Gedo following an agreement between Abdirashid Janaan and Jubaland President Ahmed Madoobe. Janan's exclusion from the new Jubaland cabinet briefly raised the possibility that he would return to an alliance with Villa Somalia. Negotiations ultimately produced a deal to integrate his formerly federally supported forces into Jubaland's Daraawiish. National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) forces in Gedo Region subsequently switched allegiance as well. Reports of federal movements from Luuq and Dolow had generated concern about renewed confrontation, but the agreement strengthened Jubaland's position and reduced Villa Somalia's ability to exert pressure through local allies.

A Re-Run of Elections in Galmudug State

In Galmudug, a rerun of the state election increased the JSP's parliamentary majority from 63 to 67 of 89 seats. Towfiiq, whose legal challenge had prompted the rerun, did not participate after the electoral commission said it had failed to submit its candidate list on time. Liban Ahmed Hassan "Liban Shuluq" was elected president on 22 October, with Abdiweli Garyare as vice president. The result secured another allied administration for Hassan Sheikh, although the exclusion of the party that challenged the original poll left some political disputes unresolved.

Galmudug saw no significant new security developments during the month. Training of SNA and NISA personnel continued in the region, alongside efforts by Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre and NISA Director Mahad Salad to broker local clan agreements, including between Saad and Marehan communities around Guriel and Balanballe. These initiatives could improve local stability and provide a basis for renewed cooperation against al-Shabaab if the agreements hold.

International Commitments Shrink as Security Deteriorates

Uganda began a staged withdrawal of bilateral forces despite Hassan Sheikh's visit to Kampala. These troops had been deployed outside the African Union Support and Stabilization Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM) earlier in the year to help reverse al-Shabaab gains in Lower Shabelle. Uganda's approximately 4,500 personnel assigned to AUSSOM are tentatively scheduled to remain through December 2027, but the departure of the additional force reduces the military capacity available around Mogadishu. Al-Shabaab continued attacks against riverine positions in Lower Shabelle and around Balcad in Middle Shabelle during the month.

U.S. forces also withdrew from Baledogle as Washington concentrated its effort against ISIS-Somalia in Puntland and al-Shabaab and Jubaland. The shift leaves Villa Somalia facing growing demands on its forces with fewer international personnel at a key military base. Discussions between the FGS and AUSSOM over the eventual handover of 49 AUSSOM forward operating bases in 2027 remained at an early stage. The losses in Bay and Hiraan raise further doubts about the SNA's ability to assume these responsibilities while also being used to enforce disputed political outcomes.

The reduction in military support was accompanied by the closure of the United Nations Transitional Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS), marked by a ceremony on 27 October. The mission and its predecessors, UNPOS and UNSOM, had supported political negotiations, governance and peacebuilding for more than three decades. The office's closure can be presented as a step towards restored Somali sovereignty, but it also removes an established mediator with a formal international mandate at a moment when national negotiations are stalled and regional disputes are becoming armed conflicts.

Hassan Sheikh continued efforts to manage regional relationships, visiting Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed in Ethiopia before joining Egypt, Eritrea and Sudan at the Alamein summit. He reiterated an offer of preferred Ethiopian commercial access to two or three Somali ports. These engagements took place amid Ethiopia's continuing internal conflict and heightened tensions with Eritrea. Further reports of an Egyptian deployment to Middle Shabelle produced no concrete reinforcement during the month.

Neighbouring governments were also showing limits to their willingness to support Villa Somalia's domestic strategy. Kenyan officials helped resolve Janaan's dispute in Jubaland's favour and hosted South West opposition figures. Ahmed Madoobe's relationships with Nairobi and Laftagareen's camp facilitated these contacts. Ethiopia did not prevent the opposition's advance through South West State. These developments suggest that both neighbours are preserving relationships with influential Somali actors rather than allowing their ties with Hassan Sheikh to determine all their local commitments.

A New Hijacking Tests Puntland's Piracy Gains

Puntland's military operations against pirates last month appeared to contain piracy for much of October, but had not dismantled the financial and operational networks behind the attacks. On 29 October, pirates hijacked the Iranian fishing vessel Azini with nearly two dozen crew aboard. The vessel could be used as a mother ship for attacks farther offshore. The seizure underlined the limits of September's recoveries. Disrupting individual hijackings reduced the number of captive vessels, but the capacity and willingness to mount new operations remains.

SOMALILAND

October highlighted Somaliland's dual-track strategy: advancing external strategic outreach (targeting the US, Israel, Taiwan, and Ethiopia) and internally asserting sovereignty (airspace control, political restrictions, and military readiness), while managing economic headwinds.

Irro returns from US



President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi

President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi "Irro" returned mid-month from an extended US and UAE trip, hailing the landmark trip as productive.

President Irro's September–early October Washington visit - which included meetings with Congress, the State Department, Defence, Energy, Treasury officials and Sen. Ted Cruz, alongside a Hudson Institute and Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) address - was hailed as productive. Somaliland offered counter-terrorism cooperation, Berbera port access (DP World-operated), mining and critical mineral rights, and potential military access in exchange for recognition.

Domestic critics expressed disappointment at Irro's public diplomacy performance at the Hudson Institute engagement and perceived ill-preparations, flippancy during the interview with Joshua Meservey.

Meanwhile, public comments by US President Donald Trump calling Somaliland "a totally different country" from Somalia prompted celebratory rallies in Hargeisa. However, other organs of the US government watered down Trump's comments, reiterating that formal US policy remains unchanged. US Ambassador to Ethiopia Ervin Massinga restated this status quo during an interview with an Ethiopian newspaper.

Taiwan

Taiwan marked its 115th National Day in Hargeisa around 5 October. Officials highlighted deep bilateral cooperation in maritime security - anchored by a new Taiwan-funded Red Sea Fusion Centre - alongside healthcare, technology, agriculture, education, and disaster management.

Egypt

President Irro reaffirmed confidence in Ethiopia and criticised the 4 October Egypt–Somalia–Eritrea–Sudan quadrilateral summit in New Alamein, which supported Somalia's territorial integrity and rejected Somaliland's recognition. He stated that no sustainable regional framework on maritime security in the Red Sea that excluded Somaliland could succeed.

Ethiopia

Comments by the Ethiopian Ambassador to Israel Tesfaye Yetayeh Anteneh on an Israeli TV channel triggered uproar in Hargeisa. The Ambassador, in response to a question on why Ethiopia had not yet recognised Somaliland, warned that recognising Somaliland could force Ethiopian troop withdrawals from Somalia and strengthen Al-Shabaab.

Somaliland's ambassador to Israel strongly criticised the remarks, arguing that recognition would enhance stability, counter-terrorism, and security along Ethiopia's Berbera Corridor.

Somaliland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs avoided public censure of the envoy's remarks but reportedly communicated its dismay privately, and received Ethiopian reassurance that the envoy's "misspoken" words did not reflect official policy and would be investigated.

Aviation

Aviation sovereignty again become a flashpoint in October, with Somaliland formally rejecting Somalia's e-Visa system and cancelling its validity on arrival at Hargeisa and Berbera airports. To assert jurisdiction, Somaliland issued a 25 October directive banning all flight ticketing via Mogadishu's International Air Transport Association (IATA) Billing and Settlement Plan (BSP) for departures, including prior and return tickets. Aviation Minister Fu'ad Ahmed Nuuh briefed the Cabinet on these measures, framing them as a necessary reinforcement of territorial sovereignty.

Ban

The Interior Ministry reiterated that Somalilanders participating in political activities and electoral processes on Somalia, will be prosecuted, citing domestic laws on sovereignty and independent institutions. The directive followed a local businessman Omar Abdulkadir Ahmedfiqi's announced interest in Somalia's 2027 presidential race and subsequent statements regarding his intent to campaign for new negotiations between Hargeisa and Mogadishu.

Military exercises, Laas Geel unrest

The Armed Forces launched a large-scale military exercise codenamed "Heegan 2026" exercise on 28–29 October in Benderwanaag, inaugurated by Commander Brig. Gen. Nim'aan Yusuf Gahnuug, the army chief. Planned as an annual event to improve readiness, coordination, and joint operations, the drill involved live-fire, tanks, artillery, armoured vehicles, and drones across multiple units. Public safety notices were issued for nearby residents and pastoralists.

Police announced the arrest of four suspects (including one police officer) linked to the 5 October killing of traveller Ibrahim Abdullahi Aar in Las Geel area. Local elders were dispatched to mediate the situation, but the tension is still unresolved, resulting in road security tensions along the critical Berbera–Hargeisa route.

Economic

The Cabinet reviewed mounting economic pressures stemming from Middle East tensions, specifically noting higher fuel prices, rising basic commodity costs, elevated maritime freight rates, and increased shipping insurance premiums. Officials noted these factors risk raising business operating expenses and reducing household purchasing power.

In response, the government emphasized monitoring global developments, maintaining market stability, and building economic resilience.

The Berbera port and the Ethiopia corridor were highlighted as vital strategic assets for trade and investment.

Domestically, the government presented recent public job recruitment results as a positive step for employment, while broader pitches to the US focused on securing investments in mining, oil/gas, fisheries, logistics, and energy alongside security offerings.

Media freedom

The Somali Journalists Syndicate and the Committee to Protect Journalists reported three journalist arrests over a two-week period (19–28 October) across Berbera, Hargeisa and Burco. The arrests were linked to media coverage involving interviews with a Somali presidential aspirant, local project grievances, and fighting along the Ethiopian border. One journalist, Abdirahman Mohamed Ege of Horn Cable TV, remained detained without charge as of late October, while the others faced restrictive bail conditions, fitting a broader pattern of recent arrests.

CONCLUSION

The events of the past month have placed Somalia in a state of constitutional limbo. The Supreme Court has given the government 90 days to hold elections, in effect declaring it a caretaker administration. The incumbent government is in essence a de facto government and exercises power in practice, but its constitutional mandate has lapsed. Until the window closes, all institutions are best understood as interim or transitional. International partners will have to decide how to respond to this situation, including how to approach the prospect of elections within the court-mandated timeframe and what may follow if that deadline passes.