



# SOMALIA

## WHAT HAPPENED IN MARCH?

President Mohamud officially launched the **second phase of the government offensive** against Al-Shabaab, concentrating on the southern states of Jubaland and South West, where the group's **strongholds are located**; militants continued to resist, notably in recovered areas in central regions.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The offensive against Al-Shabaab is at a **critical juncture**. To consolidate gains in central Somalia as it goes on the offensive elsewhere, Mogadishu will have to put in place holding forces, work toward communal reconciliation and step up service delivery.

## FEBRUARY TRENDS

The government and clan militia offensive against Al-Shabaab **faced resistance** in centrally located Hirshabelle and Galmudug states, as a **new front opened** further south in Jubaland state. Meanwhile, political elites in South West state agreed on a **plan to de-escalate tensions**.

### 1 ➡ Offensive officially launched in Al-Shabaab's southern bastions

President Mohamud on 26 March announced the second phase of the anti-Al-Shabaab offensive, concentrating on **southern Jubaland and South West states**. Earlier, authorities said Ethiopia and Kenya would deploy troops to Somalia to help fight Al-Shabaab, but neither has confirmed.

The government's efforts to **reduce Al-Shabaab's footprint in central states** continued at a **slower pace**. The military in late March reportedly cleared Run Nirgood district in Middle Shabelle region (Hirshabelle), and secured villages in Galguduud region's El Dheere district (Galmudug).

### 2 ➡ Al-Shabaab continued to resist the government's advance

In Jubaland, Al-Shabaab on 7 March used **vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIEDs)** to briefly overrun Janay Abdalle military base in Lower Juba region; on 14 March, another VBIED attack targeted government officials in Bardheere town, Gedo region, leaving several dead and injuring Gedo Governor Ahmed Bulle Gared.

In Hirshabelle, Al-Shabaab on 21 March launched a VBIED attack targeting a local militia base in Adan Yabal district, Middle Shabelle region, and on 29 March stormed Bardhere military base in Hiraan region.

### 3 ➡ Drought continued to drive hunger, displacement

A UN and Somali government report released 20 March estimated that 135 people die each day in Somalia due to the ongoing drought, projecting a total of **18,100 to 34,000 drought-related deaths** in the first six months of 2023.

As southern Somalia bears the brunt of the drought, its residents are particularly hard hit by Al-Shabaab's **burdensome taxation of their crops and tiny harvests**. This is one reason farmers in Jubaland's Lower Juba region continue to flee Al-Shabaab-controlled territory.

## WHAT TO WATCH

The government will likely find military operations in Al-Shabaab's southern heartlands **more challenging** than its push in central Somalia. Clan militias are set to play a much lesser role in the offensive, and **political fissures**, both between the federal and state levels, and within member states, could undermine efforts.

Perhaps even more arduous for Mogadishu in coming months will be **holding territory and ensuring stabilisation** in the regions it has recovered.



## TRENDS TIMELINE

