



Avoiding a New Cycle of Conflict in Somalia's Galmudug State

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What's new? The Somali federal member state of Galmudug has experienced recurrent strife during its eight-year existence. The causes are elite infighting, clan rivalries and battles with non-state armed groups. Interference from Mogadishu often worsens matters. Though Galmudug is quiet at present, elections likely coming in 2024 could increase tensions.

Why does it matter? The success of Somalia's federal model is dependent on creating stable member states. Galmudug's conflicts weaken its capacity to address numerous challenges, including the Al-Shabaab insurgency, which is strong in the area. Other member states are experiencing similar problems.

What should be done? The Galmudug administration should convene a state-wide conference to work out key details of the forthcoming polls well ahead of the vote. Mogadishu should refrain from manipulating the process. After elections, Galmudug officials should focus on social reconciliation and economic development to further calm tensions and unlock the state's potential.

I. Overview

With its complex clan makeup and multiple strands of Islam, the state of Galmudug in central Somalia is riven by the fault lines running through all of Somali society. One of five subnational units known as federal member states, Galmudug has seen armed conflict several times in its eight-year history. Elections likely to be held in 2024 could sharpen tensions. Patterns of confrontation in the diverse state sometimes track clan lines. Non-state armed groups are also active, notably the Salafi-jihadist Al-Shabaab and, sporadically, the Sufi movement Ahlu Sunna wal Jama. Interference from Mogadishu is a recurrent problem. Averting a new round of bloodshed starts with the next state elections. Public consultations to plan a competitive process free of manipulation by federal and state authorities should help limit conflict risks. A clean election can help give the next administration a mandate to address social frictions and to bolster an economy that suffers from under-development.

A variety of geographical and political factors contribute to making Galmudug one of Somalia's more contested areas. It occupies a strategic central location between

regions, lying along the main road from northern ports, such as Bossaso, that channels imported goods to parts of the country farther south. To its north is the more developed Puntland, which sees Galmudug as a buffer against Al-Shabaab encroachment.

A large number of Somalia's political elite call Galmudug home. Several prominent federal politicians hail from the state, including incumbent President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and his predecessor Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo" as well as three recent prime ministers (Abdi Farah Shirdon, Hassan Ali Khaire and Mohamed Hussein Roble). Hence, there is a close connection between political dynamics in Galmudug and those in Mogadishu. With few revenue streams of its own, the state is dependent on subventions from the capital, which retains both an outside interest and great influence in the state. This relationship presents a further obstacle to achieving lasting stability in Galmudug, given Mogadishu's propensity for interventions that exacerbate rather than resolve tensions.

Galmudug suffers many of the same challenges to development and security that plague other federal member states. Elite political infighting is common, particularly during election cycles. These quarrels in turn inflame already significant clan dissension, which erupts periodically into conflict, and heighten local grievances. In late 2022, Mogadishu launched an offensive against Al-Shabaab, which has been dominant in the southern portion of the state for more than a decade. Federal forces have taken back territory, but persistent distrust among communities has hampered further advances by preventing a coordinated focus on the jihadists.

Galmudug is in a period of political calm, but there are signs of trouble, especially with state elections on the horizon. Elite infighting remains just below the surface and is likely to re-emerge as the polls draw near, with Galmudug becoming a battleground for national political forces. Similar occurrences of elite discord have hurt Galmudug in the past, dragging on well past electoral cycles. Meanwhile, Al-Shabaab, though facing pressure in Galmudug as the offensive proceeds, still controls swathes of rural territory and remains a threat. A contentious election season could present the insurgency with opportunities to re-mobilise and recruit.

Another potential point of friction is the process of forming new government bodies called district councils. This process has several phases, culminating in local elections for representatives to serve each district. The government is pursuing council formation at the same time as it makes preparations for state elections. Proceeding cautiously would be wise. If authorities press ahead with council formation before undertaking meaningful steps to address community grievances through social reconciliation, they could worsen clan conflict. The risk is that without reconciliation, clans may resort to fighting over what share of power – and scant resources made even scarcer by climate change – they will gain when these councils come into being. District council formation should therefore be delinked from the state's electoral calendar and instead made conditional on adequate social reconciliation efforts.

As authorities consider how to put Galmudug on a sounder footing, the sequencing of key tasks will be critical. Right now, the battle to defeat Al-Shabaab occupies the vast bulk of government attention. Even as that continues, starting preparations for clean state elections with broad public support must quickly become another priority. Efforts to transform Galmudug into a stable and secure federal member state will have the best chance of success if it has a government seen as legitimate by the

widest possible cross-section of residents. Past flawed polls deepened grievances and set the stage for prolonged strife.

Authorities in Galmudug and Mogadishu should begin as soon as possible to lay the groundwork for a better result. They should hold statewide consultations to lay out a roadmap detailing election timing and rules of the game. They should also reach agreement on how the polls will be managed, including with respect to security arrangements. Then, following the elections, the next Galmudug administration should concentrate on social reconciliation, including by creating an elders' council to arbitrate clan disputes, and aim to further develop revenue streams to enhance the state's self-sufficiency.

Mogadishu and elites in Galmudug have a shared interest in stabilising a state that is a key building block of Somalia's nascent federal project. Cooperating rather than undermining one another as elections loom would help bolster stability in Galmudug and deny would-be spoilers like Al-Shabaab the chance to reap benefits from political discord. Turning next to healing communities so that local government can take root, and bolstering the state economy, can then help demonstrate to the country and the world the promise reconciliation holds for Somalia and its federal member states.

II. A Bumpy Experiment with Devolution

Somalia's 2012 provisional constitution outlines a two-tier federal structure of governance – a national federal government and governments for the member states.¹ After experiencing centralised governance under the military dictatorship of Siad Barre (1969-1991) prior to state collapse in 1991, many Somalis argued that a federal structure would offer better protection from the concentration of power in Mogadishu.² Somalia now counts five federal member states – Puntland, Galmudug, Hirshabelle, Southwest and Jubaland.³ While Puntland, created in 1998, existed prior to the establishment of the Transitional Federal Government in 2004, the government created the rest of the member states between 2013 and 2016, when Hassan Sheikh Moham-

¹ A third layer of governance consists of district administrations, as outlined in the 2016 Wadajir Framework produced by the interior ministry. Formation of district administrations is progressing at different speeds in each of the member states. The research for this briefing was conducted primarily in Mogadishu, Dhusamareb and Adado. Crisis Group interviewed current and former government officials at the federal, state and district levels, clan leaders and militia members, security professionals, businesspeople, civil society representatives, researchers, ordinary citizens of Galmudug and internally displaced people. The majority of the interviews were conducted with men, reflecting the make-up of these interview cohorts in Somalia. Efforts were made to interview women when possible.

² Some Somalis argue that Ethiopia heavily influenced the decision to form the Transitional Federal Government as a means of exporting its version of federalism to other Horn of Africa countries and ensuring that Somalia's central government remains weak, so that it will not emerge as a competitor. "The Search for Peace: A History of Somali Mediation since 1988", Interpeace, 2009. Politicians from Puntland insist that they strongly advocated for a federal model. Crisis Group interviews, Puntland politicians and intellectuals, Garowe, August 2023.

³ Somaliland, which seceded from Somalia in 1991 but is not recognised internationally, claims control of five other regions. For more, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N° 174, *Building on Somaliland's Successful Elections*, 12 August 2021.

ud was first president. More than ten years after its adoption, Somalia's federal structure remains weak, which prevents Somalia from tackling numerous governance and security challenges, including Al-Shabaab's enduring insurgency.

The fraught relationship between the federal government and the member states is holding back state building, as successive administrations have struggled with tensions, competition and mistrust. A main reason is that in the provisional constitution of 2012, many questions relating to the division of power and resources were left for subsequent discussion and remain unresolved to this day.⁴ Many observers, including Crisis Group, have argued that a comprehensive agreement between the federal government and member states is needed.⁵ But first, Somalia's political elite will have to develop a common vision of how federalism should function, so that the federal-member state relationship becomes one of cooperation rather than competition.

Another key issue that does not get as much attention is the dynamics within member states themselves. A core assumption of the federal model of state building in Somalia is that member states serve as building blocks of a more coherent state. Yet the member states – to varying degrees – are hobbled by divisions stemming from their establishment, often stoked by political interference from a federal administration in Mogadishu that sometimes tepidly embraces or even undermines federalism amid lingering interest in greater centralisation, while also suffering from internal tensions over the division of power and resources. Weak member states undermine the wider state-building project, as the Somali government struggles to entrench its presence locally. Furthermore, weak member states do little to address security threats as they falter in confronting Al-Shabaab and resolving other forms of conflict.

III. Galmudug, a Familiar Story in Somalia

Galmudug, established as an official federal member state in 2015 from the Galgaduud region and much of the Mudug region, is home to a mix of social groups with a diverse set of religious practices. The largest groups are various sub-clans of the Hawiye clan, but Darod, Dir and other communities also live there.⁶ Tensions between the Hawiye and Darod, who dominate Somalia's national politics, sometimes play out in Galmudug. Many people in Galmudug adhere to forms of Islam rooted in Sufism (a mystical tradition widely followed in Somalia). In 2009, a Sufi-based armed

⁴ The 2012 provisional constitution did not set out the allocation of powers, aside from those relating to foreign affairs, defence, citizenship and monetary policy. Member states are at varying stages of development, which complicates finding a common position. The relationship between the federal government and Puntland, which is the most developed member state, highlights this challenge. Mogadishu and Garowe have developed overlapping functions and thus rarely agree on how to implement federalism.

⁵ "Stabilising Somalia for Elections and What Comes After," Crisis Group Commentary, 29 January 2021.

⁶ Members of eleven major sub-clans inhabit Galmudug, of which nine (Murosade, Sheikhal, Hawadle, Abgal/Wayeclse and five sub-clans of the Haber Gedir – Ayr, Sacad, Salebaan, Sarur and Duduble) are from the Hawiye clan family, with Dir (Qubeys and Fiqi Mohamed) and Darod/Marehaan also present. There are smaller numbers of Yahar, Midgan and Tumul people.

group, Ahlu Sunna wal Jama (ASWJ), emerged to resist Al-Shabaab.⁷ ASWJ checked Al-Shabaab's expansion toward northern Somalia, reinforcing Galmudug's status as a buffer zone, especially for neighbouring Puntland.⁸ Al-Shabaab is still strong in parts of Galmudug's south, however, where it preaches its Salafi-jihadist creed.⁹ Economically, Galmudug has an important place in the livestock trade, in production as well as transport over the roads that connect it with both the south and northern ports.

Galmudug offers a kaleidoscope of the shortcomings of Somalia's federal system.¹⁰ High levels of political division coupled with clan rivalries, interference from Mogadishu and the presence of two influential non-state armed groups have ensured that Galmudug's short history has been marked by cycles of violence. These issues, on top of a weak resource base (though the Hobyo port, as yet undeveloped, could bring in significant revenue in the future), mean that the Galmudug administration struggles to project its authority or restore stability. Key institutions – in the executive, parliamentary and judiciary branches – remain embryonic, with little capacity or independence.¹¹ The state is trying to decentralise government services by forming district councils, essentially a set of local authorities tasked with managing the day-to-day affairs of Galmudug's districts, but this project is very much a work in progress.

A. *Galmudug's Divided Elites and Interference from Mogadishu*

A source of strength for Galmudug is perhaps also its greatest weakness – much of Mogadishu's political and business elite call the state home. The list of luminaries includes President Mohamud, former President Farmajo and former Prime Ministers Roble and Khair. Developments in Galmudug thus often attract special notice from Mogadishu, but the attention translates into fiercer political competition in the state. A brief overview of Galmudug's political history shows how difficult it has been to create an inclusive governance framework for the state.

⁷ Sufi *tariqas*, or orders, in Galmudug include both the Qadariyya and the Ahmadiyya, with the latter found more along the coast. Zakaria Mahamed Sheikh, "Ahlu Sunnah wal Jaam'ah in Somalia – A Prospective Analysis", CPG, October 2010.

⁸ "If Galmudug is stable, Puntland is stable". Crisis Group interview, former Puntland official, Mogadishu, June 2022. Puntland has vacillated between viewing the Galmudug administration as an obstacle (see fn 12 below) and cooperating with it closely in security arrangements near the state line, particularly in Galkacyo. As an example of the latter, by agreement with Galmudug, Puntland has on occasion sent forces to fight Al-Shabaab and resolve clan conflicts. Crisis Group interviews, Puntland officials, Mogadishu and Garowe, 2023. Puntland is less active in Galmudug politically, but it has sometimes tried to form a common front with Galmudug in opposition to Mogadishu's policies. "Puntland leaders forms an alliance against Hassan Sheikh", Keydmedia, 8 December 2022.

⁹ In late 2022 and early 2023, the federal government teamed up with local clans and Galmudug state to clear Al-Shabaab militants from strongholds in the southern districts of Harardheere and Ceel Dheere. Al-Shabaab remained present in Ceel Buur, Galhareri and rural parts of the state, however, and a new push to clear those areas began in August. Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°187, *Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive Against Al-Shabaab*, 21 March 2023. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug politicians, Mogadishu, March 2023.

¹⁰ As one publication argued: "If Galmudug is 'settled', the whole country will stabilise". "Clans, Contention and Consensus: Federalism and Inclusion in Galmudug", Saferworld, June 2020.

¹¹ Some of Galmudug's ministries have very few employees, and the administration struggles to provide basic services, like justice, throughout the state. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug officials and residents, Dhusamareb, November 2022.

Galmudug was divided from the start, due to accusations that Mogadishu's involvement had marred the state formation process. Before the state came into being in 2015, four main actors were in control of parts of its future territory.¹² Three – an entity called Galmudug (dominated by the Sacad, a Hawiye sub-clan), another known as Ximan and Xeeb (made up largely of Salebaan) and ASWJ, which is composed of Ayr, Marehaan and Dir) – agreed to form a federal member state. The fourth group holding territory, Al-Shabaab, which regards the entire Somalia government apparatus as illegitimate, sat out the process.

Combining these three entities into a member state proceeded in fits and starts. First, ASWJ, having committed to the exercise, pulled out of the deal, complaining of meddling from Mogadishu.¹³ The group formed its own administration and parliament based in Dhusamareb in the state's centre, while the other two set up the Galmudug state bodies in Adado toward the north. But then, a group of clans objected that they had received too few seats in the new state's 89-member parliament.¹⁴ Still another point of contention was the selection on 4 July 2015 of Abdikarim Guled Hussein, a close ally of President Mohamud, as state president, which fuelled allegations that Mogadishu had manipulated state formation to serve its own interests.¹⁵

Guled's sudden resignation in February 2017 offered an opportunity to fix some of Galmudug's problems. He stepped down claiming poor health, but he was facing increasing discontent in Galmudug, while his support from Mogadishu was flagging with Farmajo assuming the presidency.¹⁶ Galmudug's parliament selected Ahmed Ducale Xaaf to take Guled's place that April.¹⁷ But while Xaaf recorded some early successes, his tenure as a whole was not a period of unity – quite the opposite, as he had to fend off several no-confidence motions. Xaaf angered many by coming to an

¹² Puntland initially contested Galmudug's formation, as it administers a portion of Mudug north of Galkacyo (on the basis of clan ties) and was concerned that merging the Galkacyo and Mudug regions would challenge its position there. Zakaria Yusuf and Abdul Khalif, "Galkacyo and Somalia's Dangerous Faultlines", Crisis Group Commentary, 10 December 2015.

¹³ Kainan Mussa and Yusuf Hassan, "Conflict Déjà Vu in Mudug Region", *New Access International*, June 2020.

¹⁴ Crisis Group interviews, politicians from Galmudug, Mogadishu and Dhusamareb, June and October 2022. The seat allocation did not follow a set formula but rather roughly combined the 4.5 clan formula used in national politics with the number of districts to distribute seats among the clans. The 4.5 formula gives equal representation to Somalia's four major clan families and half a share to other clans. "Determining how to divide power was the hardest part". Crisis Group interview, former Somalia government official involved in formation of Galmudug, Mogadishu, June 2022. Some say President Mohamud short-changed his own Abgaal/Waceysle clan in making the negotiating concessions necessary to form the state. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug state MPs from Waceysle sub-clan, Mogadishu, June 2022. Prime Minister Khaire said he would not reopen the seat allocation during negotiations in 2019-2020. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug state MPs, Mogadishu, June 2022.

¹⁵ As one state MP complaining about Mogadishu's interference in Galmudug affairs argued, "Mogadishu won't allow Galmudug to be federal". Crisis Group interview, Dhusamareb, November 2022. Guled is now serving as Mohamud's special envoy to Somaliland.

¹⁶ "Galmudug president steps down citing health concerns", *Hiraan Online*, 26 February 2017.

¹⁷ Mogadishu was not heavily involved in choosing Xaaf, as the Farmajo administration was still getting its bearings and locally there was consensus that Guled, a member of the Sacad clan, should be replaced by another Sacad who would serve out the remaining two years of Guled's term. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug intellectuals, Dhusamareb and Mogadishu, November 2022 and March 2023.

agreement with ASWJ, which temporarily brought the Sufi-based group into the government. (Reactions to this move among clans and political leaders are discussed further below.) Negotiations to keep ASWJ in government fizzled, resulting in armed conflict as detailed below.¹⁸ Xaaf also butted heads with the Farmajo administration throughout his time in office, arguing against the need to hold a state presidential election as scheduled in 2019.¹⁹

The run-up to that election gave Mogadishu an opening to replace Xaaf, while serving the Farmajo administration's ambition of bringing member states under its influence.²⁰ Prime Minister Khairé travelled extensively around Galmudug, with the objective of reconciling various parties so that they would all back establishing a new state administration.²¹ He reached agreements with Xaaf and ASWJ to hold the elections, but both fell apart. After backing out of the deal, Xaaf tried to set up his own process in the Galmudug-administered southern part of Galkacyo, the state's major city, where the Hawiye clan (Xaaf belongs to the Sacad sub-clan of the Hawiye) are most of the population.²² (The majority-Darod northern part of the city is administered by Puntland, where the Darod are the predominant community.) The result was months of delay, followed by a state presidential election in February 2020 that was tainted by more accusations of interference by Mogadishu. Opposition candidates boycotted the vote, and Ahmed Abdi Kariye "Qoor Qoor" (Farmajo's preferred candidate) became president – reprising a pattern whereby Mogadishu's involvement ensured that its favourite won.²³

Qoor Qoor, like Guled and Xaaf before him, inherited a divided Galmudug. Violent conflict with ASWJ, now completely severed from the government, broke out immediately, as the group tried to set up a parallel administration in Dhusamareb. But there were also positive developments: Qoor Qoor's administration made progress in reconciling Galmudug's elites. Xaaf dropped his objections to the election

¹⁸ A faction of state parliament allied to speaker Ali Asir and Galmudug vice president Mohamed Hashi Arabay put forward the unsuccessful motions. "Adado based MPs 'sack' president Haaf in another controversial vote", *Goobjoog*, 15 September 2018.

¹⁹ Xaaf argued that the ASWJ agreement had ushered in a new term, meaning that the presidential election should be pushed back. His opponents insisted that the vote take place on schedule by mid-2019.

²⁰ Farmajo spent significant political capital trying to replace member state presidents with leaders more supportive of Mogadishu as part of a plan to centralise power. Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°158, *Ending the Dangerous Standoff in Southern Somalia*, 14 July 2020. Xaaf aligned with the leaders of other member states who publicly supported the United Arab Emirates during the Gulf Cooperation Council crisis, when Abu Dhabi joined Riyadh and others in blockading Qatar, diverging from Mogadishu's ostensibly neutral but, in reality, pro-Doha stance. Crisis Group Africa Report N°260, *Somalia and the Gulf Crisis*, 5 June 2018.

²¹ Crisis Group interviews, former Somali government officials, Mogadishu, August 2021.

²² Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug politicians and intellectuals, Mogadishu and Dhusamareb, June and November 2022.

²³ An influential group of Galmudug politicians referred to as *waayo arag* (experienced), seen as close to Khairé, convinced the Farmajo administration to back Qoor Qoor for the Galmudug presidency. Crisis Group interview, Galmudug MPs and intellectuals, Mogadishu, June 2022. Some involved in the process complained that Mogadishu handpicked a number of the delegates involved in parliamentary selection and physically prevented presidential candidates from meeting with the new MPs. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug personalities involved in the 2020 election, Mogadishu and Dhusamareb, June and November 2022.

result, while Qoor Qoor included two opposition members in his cabinet.²⁴ Two major factors contributed to the reconciliation: a sense among Galmudug's political class, despite its discontent, that rejecting Qoor Qoor's election would only bring further conflict; and a feeling that, five years after state formation, Galmudug lagged behind other federal member states in terms of development.²⁵

The 2021-2022 federal elections, however, saw a resurgence in tensions. These elections were notorious for the level of control state presidents asserted over the choice of federal parliamentary representatives under Somalia's indirect electoral system.²⁶ In Galmudug, supporters of Farmajo, as well as Khaire, initially were selected as the state's Lower House representatives in Mogadishu.²⁷ Other presidential candidates were angry, and a group of state MPs attempted but failed to bring a no-confidence motion against Qoor Qoor.²⁸ Later, tensions diffused, with Qoor Qoor overseeing selection of a more politically diverse group of MPs.²⁹

B. *The Challenges of ASWJ and Al-Shabaab*

Along with elite political rivalries that sometimes boil over, Galmudug struggles with non-state armed groups ASWJ and Al-Shabaab. Both have occupied territory and clashed with the government. There have been multiple failed attempts to integrate ASWJ into the Galmudug government. Confrontations between federal and state security forces and ASWJ have resulted in deadly violence – including five days of fighting in October 2021 that killed more than 120 people.³⁰

Galmudug has struggled to develop a robust security apparatus. Official state-level forces, which include the clan-based Darwish forces (which combine military and policing responsibilities) and the police, are limited in number and capacity.³¹

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Galmudug presidential candidates, Mogadishu, June 2022. These were Saabir Nur as ports minister and Ahmed Fiqi as security minister.

²⁵ The Haber Gedir, who pressured Xaaf to drop his objections, felt particularly strongly about these matters. Other elites were at least satisfied that ASWJ was no longer playing a major political role. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug intellectuals, Mogadishu and Dhusamareb, June and November 2022.

²⁶ Somalia has struggled to implement universal suffrage. Instead, it uses an indirect model based on clan input to select representatives. For more, see Omar Mahmood, "A Welcome Chance for Reset in Somalia", Crisis Group Commentary, 31 May 2022. In June, Abdiaziz Lafta-Gareen, president of Southwest state, admitted that state presidents played an outsize role in determining MPs in the 2021-2022 parliamentary elections. "President Lafta Gareen said that he rejected one-person, one-vote elections due to personal reasons", Kulmiye News Network, 8 June 2023.

²⁷ In February 2021, Qoor Qoor pressured Galmudug MPs to support Farmajo's two-year presidential term extension, threatening that they would not be re-elected if they refused. Crisis Group interview, Galmudug MPs, Dhusamareb, November 2022.

²⁸ Crisis Group interview, Galmudug MP, Dhusamareb, November 2022.

²⁹ A prominent Galmudug politician said the decision to select more diverse MPs staved off violence. Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, June 2022.

³⁰ ASWJ and government forces have clashed in Galmudug on numerous occasions, but the October 2021 fighting was particularly intense. The UN estimated that the confrontation displaced 100,000 residents. Abdi Sheikh, "Somalia death toll in fighting between army and former allied group rises to 120", Reuters, 25 October 2021. "Flash update on the situation in Guriceel", OCHA, 24 October 2021.

³¹ The federal government retains some control of the state police, as the federal police commissioner appoints the state chief. Galmudug benefited from the training of 400 police under the first phase

Recurrent political disputes – on top of the aforementioned limited resources – have hindered security reforms. When he came to power in 2020, President Qoor Qoor announced his intention to minimise the use of clan militias and incorporate them into the Darwish system. He has struggled to make progress, however, and local security units remain predominantly clan-based.³² In the interim, the administration continues to rely on Mogadishu, including the Somali National Army and its elite units, to provide security.³³ Indeed, the fight with non-state armed groups in Galmudug has progressed only when Mogadishu has deployed forces in the state.

1. ASWJ: Failure to integrate

ASWJ rose to prominence in Galmudug as a Sufi response to Al-Shabaab's incursion, clashing with the Salafi-jihadist insurgency and checking its expansion in 2009. ASWJ then sought to parlay its success on the battlefield into political power – essentially transforming itself from a militia into a political force demanding a seat at the decision-making table. While ASWJ pulled out of the Galmudug state formation process in 2015 and had a poor relationship with Guled, Xaaf set about improving ties with the group after his election, in part to create a wider support base. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), a Horn of Africa body, facilitated the agreement between Xaaf and ASWJ in 2018, which as noted above brought ASWJ temporarily into Galmudug's government, allowing authorities to relocate the state capital to Dhusamareb.³⁴

The inclusion of ASWJ nonetheless stirred up dissent in Galmudug, where advance consultations had been limited.³⁵ Many politicians, largely from the Marehaan, Murosade and Salebaan clans, opposed the deal, complaining that it upset the distribution of power.³⁶ These figures set themselves up in Adado, the former seat of government, and threatened not to recognise the accord, in effect dividing Galmudug.

The Xaaf-ASWJ administration was an uneasy cohabitation that did not last.³⁷ During his 2019-2020 intervention to establish a new administration in Galmudug, Prime Minister Khaire had reached an agreement with ASWJ about the group's share of positions in the state administration, but it fell apart just before state elections

of the UN's Joint Police Program in 2022, but it only started participating late in the program cycle. Crisis Group interviews, diplomat, researcher and security implementing partner, 2022-2023.

³² Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug intellectuals, Mogadishu and Dhusamareb, November 2022.

³³ The 21st division of the Somali National Army, which has integrated former ASWJ fighters, is based in Dhusamareb, while elite units like the Danab and Gorgor are also stationed in the state. In addition, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia has troops at Dhusamareb airport, though they are scheduled to depart as part of the mission's drawdown by the end of 2024.

³⁴ As part of the agreement, ASWJ leader Sheikh Mohamed Shakir obtained the new position of chief minister, which was to be the second highest in the state. No other member state had a chief minister at the time. Without this measure, an IGAD official explained, there would have been no deal. Crisis Group researcher's interview in a previous capacity, 2019.

³⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug intellectuals, Dhusamareb and Mogadishu, November 2022 and March 2023.

³⁶ As part of the deal, parliament doubled in size to 178 seats, with ASWJ receiving half of them. In addition, members of non-Haber Gedir clans (primarily Murosade and Marehaan) complained that Haber Gedir members occupied Galmudug's top two positions.

³⁷ Residents say Xaaf-ASWJ governance was ineffective because the two sides did not work well together. Crisis Group interviews, Dhusamareb and Mogadishu, November 2022 and March 2023.

in February 2020.³⁸ The deal reportedly did not work out in part because ASWJ did not secure a parliamentary leadership position it wanted.³⁹ (Some argue that the federal government never intended to follow through with either this deal or the separate one it made with Xaaf, but rather planned to use both bargains to push for a greater federal role in the state, including with regard to security.⁴⁰) The agreement still weakened ASWJ militarily, as under its terms the group began merging some of its forces into the Somali army units then deploying to Galmudug.⁴¹ When fighting started up again, some of these integrated ASWJ fighters returned to the group, but others did not.

Fighting between Galmudug state forces and ASWJ broke out almost immediately after the 2020 elections, when ASWJ attempted to inaugurate its own administration in Dhusamareb. Mogadishu sent in federal troops to defeat the militia, and ASWJ's leadership subsequently fled the country.

But ASWJ returned to the scene a year and a half later, in September 2021, when its leaders began mobilising in a northern corner of the state between Guricel and Mataban in neighbouring Hirshabelle. It was an opportune time to assert influence ahead of the selection of Galmudug's federal parliament members as part of the national electoral process. Mogadishu again sent federal forces to protect Galmudug, and in late October heavy clashes took place in Guricel. ASWJ forces retreated to Bohol, a small northern town, following local mediation, but the next May they attacked both Guricel and Dhusamareb. The offensive proved to be an overreach, as Galmudug, with federal troop support, managed to take the group's Bohol base in response, with ASWJ's ranks decimated in successive battlefield defeats.⁴² The failed efforts to integrate ASWJ in the state government, and recurrent conflict between it and state and federal security forces, highlight not only the difficulties in bringing the group into the political fold, but also Galmudug's reliance on Mogadishu for security.

2. Al-Shabaab: Under pressure but projecting power

Al-Shabaab can and does project power in Galmudug, though with constraints. ASWJ's emergence limited its reach. Al-Shabaab stages fewer and smaller attacks in Galmudug than in parts of southern Somalia, like Southwest state or Jubaland, where its raids are daily occurrences. But its operations in Galmudug are nonetheless substantial – both in resisting the federal government's offensive (which, as discussed below, it is doing at present) and in targeting civilians opposing expansion of its rule. The

³⁸ Under Khaire's deal, ASWJ got twenty of 89 seats in parliament, which returned to its original size. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug politicians and intellectuals, Mogadishu and Dhusamareb, June and November 2022.

³⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug intellectuals and politicians, Dhusamareb, November 2022.

⁴⁰ As a government minister explained, Mogadishu made initial promises to both ASWJ and Xaaf. But because Galmudug is home to eleven clans who also need to be involved in political arrangements, a more complicated deal was then later required that challenged the original ones. Crisis Group interview, Galmudug official, November 2022.

⁴¹ Crisis Group interviews, ASWJ spiritual leader and former ASWJ leader, July 2022 and April 2023.

⁴² Galmudug officials stress that they were prepared to negotiate until ASWJ captured Guricel. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug officials, Dhusamareb, November 2022. A former ASWJ member concurred that the group should not have resorted to armed conflict. "ASWJ fought unnecessary wars". Crisis Group interview, April 2023.

group has maintained strongholds in the southern portion of the state over the past decade, largely in the districts of Xaradheere, Ceel Buur and Ceel Dheere.⁴³ But it has also advanced farther north at times, especially between 2020 and 2022 (following the weakening of ASWJ), threatening Dhusamareb's southern and western vicinities, in addition to areas around Baxdo and Qayib.

By late 2022, federal troops had moved against Al-Shabaab on multiple fronts in Galmudug, notably recovering the towns of Xaradheere and Ceel Dheere, thus encircling the insurgents in Ceel Buur and nearby Galhareeri.⁴⁴ This offensive stalled in early 2023, in part due to the re-emergence of disputes among clans and a lack of coordination between the federal and state governments – the former of which did not consult with the latter at times on operational practicalities.⁴⁵ The disjointedness hurt efforts to forge a united front to fight Al-Shabaab.⁴⁶ In early August, President Mohamud temporarily moved his office from Mogadishu to Dhusamareb to breathe life into the flagging effort – although, at the time of writing, federal troops were advancing only slowly amid stiff Al-Shabaab resistance.

Efforts to erode Al-Shabaab's strength (and ASWJ's) will also need to employ non-military means. Both state and national authorities will need to reach out in order to reconcile with communities that supported the groups. In addition to ensuring delivery of government services to areas where the armed groups were dominant, authorities should seek to address simmering local grievances about representation in government and tensions with neighbours. Absent such work, it will be easier for the armed groups to mobilise public opinion, especially after the attention of federal troops turns elsewhere. The flare-ups with ASWJ in 2021-2022, and Al-Shabaab's resilience in parts of the state amid the 2023 offensive, are cases in point.⁴⁷

C. *Clan Conflict*

Galmudug experiences regular clan conflict, often resulting in small-scale but deadly clashes.⁴⁸ The disputes, typically focused on competition for water, pasture and arable land, are exacerbated by climate change and perceptions that clans are expanding their areas of control as resources become scarcer. Galmudug residents cite a number of fault lines, ranging from disagreements among sub-clans to tensions among

⁴³ Al-Shabaab has conducted occasional large-scale attacks in Galmudug. On 17 June 2022, it hit the town of Baxdo, less than 100km from Dhusamareb, resulting in more than 70 deaths, albeit primarily on its own side. Abdi Sheikh, "Somalia security forces, residents kill 70 militants in attack", Reuters, 18 June 2022. Almost a year later, on 30 May 2023, the group deployed a suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device at a government base in the southern town of Massagaweyne. Both the government and Al-Shabaab claimed to inflict nearly 150 casualties in this fighting. "Deputy minister of information says 150 militants killed in Galgaduud region", *Hiraan Online*, 5 June 2023.

⁴⁴ Crisis Group Briefing, *Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab*, op. cit.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*; and Crisis Group interviews, January-June 2023.

⁴⁶ Cohesion among the federal government, state actors and local communities underpinned the late 2022 successes in rolling back Al-Shabaab's territorial control in central Somalia. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Sustaining Gains in Somalia's Offensive against Al-Shabaab*, op. cit.

⁴⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Mogadishu and Galmudug, June and November 2022.

⁴⁸ An elder in Galmudug says its inhabitants have more weapons than those of any other federal member state. Crisis Group interview, October 2022.

larger clans.⁴⁹ The Galmudug government has attempted to address some of these problems, with mixed success.⁵⁰ Part of its strategy is resource management, such as declaring safe areas for grazing and banning weapons there, backed by government policing.⁵¹ But it should do more to break cycles of revenge.⁵² When left to fester, disputes between neighbouring communities become entrenched, resulting in periodic outbreaks of violence which then require the government's attention to quiet. But de-escalation efforts only go so far; deeper reconciliation is needed to address the roots of conflict.

Moreover, while the government often views clan conflict as manageable, it becomes more complicated when the underlying competition shifts from natural resources to politics.⁵³ One political event that can lead to clashes between clans is the formation of district councils. Aimed at developing a layer of governance responsive to local populations, council formation can get heated, particularly if pursued without achieving the sort of reconciliation described above.⁵⁴ In Abudwaq, for example, violence erupted in late 2022 between Marehaan sub-clans over the control of seats in the new district council, leading to several deaths and injuries.⁵⁵

Creating new governance mechanisms without first building consensus can unleash a scramble for control. The pattern over two decades is familiar: zero-sum thinking, grievances and insecurity associated with Somali political processes, such as member state formation.⁵⁶ With Galmudug aiming to form district councils throughout

⁴⁹ Most clans in Galmudug have experienced conflict with neighbours. Crisis Group interview, Galmudug minister, Dhusamareb, November 2022. A 2021 think-tank report listed eight major flashpoints among clans. "Galmudug Reconciliation: Processes, Challenges and Opportunities Ahead", Somali Public Agenda, February 2021. See also Abass Kassim Sheikh et al., "Conflict Assessment: Galmudug State", Berghof Foundation, 2019.

⁵⁰ In one case, Prime Minister Khaire appointed Abdurahman Badiyow to lead a reconciliation effort that focused at first on the Dir/Fiqi Mohamed sub-clan. The sub-clan, which had been riven by internal feuds, agreed to a ceasefire and compensation packages, which the government paid. Badiyow stressed, however, that this accord should not serve as a model. He argued that if the government pays compensation, it may spur further conflict because it has, in effect, absolved the clans of responsibility for the consequences. Crisis Group interview, government official, June 2022. A Galmudug MP summed up the difficulty he faced when he tried to initiate talks between the Salebaan and a Marehaan sub-clan. The Salebaan told him they would only negotiate with the entire Marehaan clan, which introduced a broader and more complicated set of issues to the discussion. Crisis Group interview, Mogadishu, June 2022.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug ministers, Dhusamareb, November 2022.

⁵² Community-led processes are important elements of peacebuilding as well. In early 2023, youth in Guricel and Balanbale, a town north of Dhusamareb, started talks about recurrent conflicts. These dialogues evolved into an initiative incorporating the wider community, which has helped air grievances and reduce tensions. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug residents, 2023.

⁵³ Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug officials, Dhusamareb, October 2022.

⁵⁴ "All district council formations are manipulated", said a government minister, reflecting the degree of interference by the state government in the local process. Crisis Group interview, November 2022.

⁵⁵ The dispute owed to perceptions that Dhusamareb was favouring one of the sub-clans. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug intellectuals, October 2022.

⁵⁶ Galmudug is adding nine new districts to the ten that already exist. While new districts are subject to approval by the state government, which stipulates that they satisfy certain requirements, the process is political. Officials are also trying to maintain clan balance. For example, the Galmudug government promoted Galinsor (north of Adado) to a district as the Sacad/Reer Jalaf clan did not have a district of its own, but then added Baxdo to give another district to the Salebaan. If the

the state ahead of the election expected in 2024, the state officials in charge should seek to learn from past mistakes, ensuring that sufficient attention is paid to making progress on community reconciliation prior to discussing political representation.

D. *Dependency and a Weak Resource Base*

Galmudug's weak resource base is a key factor behind its dependence on Mogadishu. Despite much of Somalia's elite hailing from the state, a common complaint is that the federal government tends to invest in the capital and ignore Galmudug economically, except in order to serve the purpose of political meddling.⁵⁷ Galmudug's economy revolves around livestock and commerce between southern Somalia (as well as parts of Ethiopia's Somali region) and northern ports. Galmudug itself lacks a major port, as attempts to develop one in Hobyo have faltered.⁵⁸ While the state is rich in other resources – such as mineral deposits like uranium and plentiful fish off the long coastline – exploiting them will require infrastructure.

State finances are certainly constrained. Galmudug encompasses a territory of 100,370 sq km, and the state government has a small budget. The budget has lately increased almost tenfold, from \$3 million in 2019 to \$32 million in 2022, thanks in part to external program support, enhancing government functions.⁵⁹ But, with more funds, the administration could do more. State tax revenue remains low. Mogadishu also provides budget aid to Galmudug, but state officials complain the funding is ad hoc.⁶⁰

The limited resources constrain Galmudug's ability to develop its administration, in turn increasing its dependency on Mogadishu. Security offers a prime example: Dhusamareb relies heavily on federal forces, unlike member states Puntland and to a lesser degree Jubaland, which boast stronger local contingents. The dependency in turn reduces Galmudug's leverage vis-à-vis Mogadishu, giving the latter license to play its above-referenced outside role in state affairs. Thus, Galmudug's lack of resources has the dual impact of undermining its development and eroding its institutional autonomy within Somalia's federal system. Increasing its revenue and reducing reliance on Mogadishu are two important factors in building up Galmudug's stability.

government frees more areas from Al-Shabaab control, the residents are likely to ask for districts to be set up there as well. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug government officials, Dhusamareb and Adado, November 2022.

⁵⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug intellectuals, Mogadishu and Dhusamareb, June 2022 and March 2023.

⁵⁸ In 2016, Galmudug signed a deal with an Iraqi company to develop Hobyo, followed by another with Qatar in 2019. Little came of either initiative. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug officials, former federal government official and Qatari diplomat, Mogadishu and Dhusamareb, June and November 2022. In 2020, representatives of the Haber Gedir community pledged \$90 million for the port, but the money did not arrive. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug politicians and intellectuals, Mogadishu and Dhusamareb, June and November 2022.

⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, Galmudug official, Dhusamareb, November 2022. In comparison, Puntland's budget in 2023 was \$376 million, while Jubaland's was \$46 million.

⁶⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug officials, Dhusamareb, November 2022.

IV. Building Firmer Foundations

After all the tumult in its short history, Galmudug is experiencing a period of political calm, even as the renewed offensive against Al-Shabaab rages in the southern portions of the state.⁶¹ But policymakers have yet to resolve the recurrent conflicts among elites that Mogadishu's election-season interference exacerbates. The election of President Mohamud in May 2022 should help. His administration promised not to retaliate against state leaders who opposed him during the campaign, as long as they endorse key items on his agenda, such as fighting Al-Shabaab.⁶² The forthcoming electoral cycle will test this commitment.

A. Managing the Next Elections

The top priority for Galmudug officials should be to ensure that the next state elections are inclusive and competitive, thus laying the foundation for a government that enjoys broader legitimacy and better prospects to start addressing the state's other shortcomings. Avoiding significant political discord will be difficult once the election cycle begins. The majority of debilitating conflicts in Galmudug have revolved around elections, and the level of antagonism is likely to be high given the polarisation of politics at both the national and local levels in recent years. Preventing the next election from becoming a battleground of manipulation is vital for Galmudug's near-term stability and long-term development.

Ideally, the government would hold a conference outlining the rules of the electoral game by late 2023 to allow stakeholders in Galmudug, including women, enough time for agreement on a roadmap with clear timelines and benchmarks for preparations. (While late 2024 is the provisional window for the elections, it remains uncertain at the time of writing.⁶³) This conference would allow both Mogadishu and Dhusamareb to commit that they will refrain from seeking to manipulate the electoral cycle to their advantage and instead promise a clean election. Publicly or privately, Mohamud should also reaffirm his promise that he will not oppose Qoor Qoor for the remainder of his tenure, in return for his cooperation on Mogadishu's priorities, such as the battle against Al-Shabaab.

Mogadishu and Dhusamareb will also need to come to agreement about the conduct of the polls.⁶⁴ Questions about who has authority over the state election body

⁶¹ In one measure of the calm, parliament has agreed to limit the use of no-confidence motions, as MPs had been using them more as political tools to weaken the government than as good-faith censures of government performance. Crisis Group interview, Galmudug speaker of parliament, Dhusamareb, November 2022.

⁶² "President Mohamud heads to Galmudug in move to rebuild ties with FMS leaders", *Goobjoog*, 2 June 2022.

⁶³ Some opposition politicians insist that February 2024 be the date for the next elections, as Galmudug President Qoor Qoor's four-year term will end then. In September 2022, however, Galmudug's parliament changed the state constitution to create a five-year term, pushing the next election to February 2025. Then, the following May, the National Consultative Council, a group consisting of federal government and member state leaders, decided to hold all member state elections concurrently in November 2024. This last agreement is subject to parliament's approval, which it has not yet given.

⁶⁴ Although Mohamud and Qoor Qoor are collaborating in the offensive against Al-Shabaab, by early 2023 it appeared the détente between them had cooled. Some people in Mohamud's camp view

and who will control security forces on the ground will be key sources of contention. While the federal government has a role to play in ensuring that elections across the country are conducted in line with best practices, and even to provide technical or financial support, the Galmudug Independent Election Commission should take the lead role in overseeing the polls. Additionally, Galmudug should develop a security plan for the elections, while requesting supplementary federal forces where it will need additional help. These issues will need to be worked out between Galmudug and the federal government in the lead-up to the polls – a discussion that can start at the electoral roadmap conference.

Authorities should also make important decisions about the timing of district council formation. At present, Galmudug intends to move forward with council formation – first selecting temporary councillors in each district and then proceeding to local elections – ahead of the next vote. It hopes to use this process to move away from the present indirect electoral system, which relies on clan elders to select candidates, and adopt the one-person, one-vote universal suffrage.⁶⁵ Yet the timeline for completing this transition is uncertain, and some suspect that politicians will use it as an excuse to further delay elections for the state parliament and presidency. Efforts to make the 2021-2022 national elections contingent on such a transition not only proved futile but also caused tensions to spike. Similar dynamics are flaring up in neighbouring Puntland.⁶⁶

So, what to do? As part of discussing the rules of the game, Galmudug elites should agree to delink the district formation process from the electoral cycle, as rushing it could fuel clan conflict. They should treat social reconciliation as a prerequisite of district council formation, to help ensure the process does not exacerbate sub-clan competition for political power or engender violence. In some districts, achieving reconciliation will take more time, likely extending past the current electoral calendar.⁶⁷ Galmudug's next statewide elections may thus need to be restructured, but the conference can address this issue in the electoral roadmap it will be developing.

B. *Post-election Priorities*

After the state elections, the Galmudug administration should improve inclusivity by revisiting the clan-based power-sharing arrangements that underpin Galmudug's governance, including the allocation of positions in the parliament, cabinet and civil service.⁶⁸ The next administration should initiate a statewide discussion of this issue,

Qoor Qoor as close to Farmajo and Khaire, heightening perceptions in Galmudug that Mogadishu will throw its weight behind a different candidate for the state presidency. Qoor Qoor is likely to run for a second term. Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug intellectuals, Mogadishu, March 2023.

⁶⁵ Galmudug election commissioner Halima Ismail Ibrahim "Yarey" said one-person, one-vote elections should begin in districts where it is possible, though that will not be possible everywhere. Crisis Group interview, Dhusmareb, November 2022.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Galmudug official and intellectuals, Dhusamareb and Mogadishu, November 2022 and March 2023. Galmudug is planning pilot elections in three districts in 2023. Crisis Group interview, NGO employee supporting elections in Galmudug, February 2023.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, Galmudug official, August 2023.

⁶⁸ While the current framework enjoys a degree of acceptance, some Galmudug communities – particularly the Abgaal/Waceysle – complain of being under-represented in government positions. Re-examining the allocations made in 2015 may help address these grievances. Crisis Group

including with women's groups. A further step would be for Galmudug to develop a more detailed framework outlining modes of cooperation between the state government and the new district councils, which would spell out the division of authority between the two, as well as security arrangements and the degree of financial support Dhusamareb should provide. If and when more of Galmudug's territory is liberated from Al-Shabaab, demands to refresh the state's governance architecture will only grow louder, underscoring the need to tackle these questions.

Relatedly, the Galmudug authorities should begin to address clan conflicts below the elite level. Resolving clan conflicts in turn will support the extension of Galmudug's governance. It will take painstaking work to map each of these conflicts, allow for the airing of grievances and chart ways to resolve them in accordance with local custom – ideally as part of the social reconciliation efforts described above.⁶⁹ The government should act on this issue ahead of district council formation, in order to make that process smoother. Some fault lines will be easier to address than others. The state government will also need to develop the capacity to serve as a neutral guarantor for local agreements, including policing and rapid responses to flare-ups.

While the current administration can start this work, it is important for the next government to continue with it. One option, which various actors have floated at times, has been to establish an elders' council made up of respected mediators from all the sub-clans. When conflict erupts, Dhusamareb could use the elders' council to keep it contained.⁷⁰ With time and experience, the council could go further, leading deeper social reconciliation efforts, rather than just responding to fresh crises.

Finally, Galmudug's post-electoral government should focus on developing the state's resource base, which will help it generate funds to build up its security forces, deliver services and provide funds to the new district councils – while lessening its reliance on transfers from Mogadishu.⁷¹ Having more resources would help the state continue efforts to refashion the Darwish into a coherent statewide force, while also recruiting additional state police. More money will also help Galmudug address the question of how to handle clan militias battling Al-Shabaab: can it sustain the cost of integrating them into formal state security structures like the Darwish, or should it seek to demobilise them at the conclusion of fighting?

In service of these objectives, Galmudug should develop a broader framework for economic development in the state and work to provide a conducive environment for investment. It should map the state's value chains, including in the vibrant livestock sector, and identify areas where investment would have the highest yield, while also examining state regulations to ensure that development is fairly distributed in the state. Then, the Galmudug government could better channel investment dollars to

interviews, Galmudug MPs, officials and intellectuals, Mogadishu and Dhusamareb, June and November 2022.

⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, former Somali security official focused on reconciliation in Galmudug, August 2023.

⁷⁰ Intellectuals in the state raised this idea during Galmudug's formation, but it was never put into practice. Crisis Group interview, Galmudug federal MP, Mogadishu, June 2022.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, district official, Adado, November 2023.

specific projects. Hobyo is an example: if developed, a port there could increase state revenue and support local business development.⁷²

As part of its economic strategy, Galmudug officials will need to target outside investment. They should try to convince businesspeople based in Mogadishu or the diaspora who have ties to Galmudug to invest more in the state while leaving political machinations aside. Moreover, international donors and NGOs should channel development funds to Galmudug, including to support programming that helps the state cope with climate shocks; this task may be easier in Galmudug than elsewhere in Somalia due to the relative security in Dhusamareb and its surrounds.⁷³ Such projects could also aid Galmudug's fight with Al-Shabaab, by curbing the insurgency's appeal and helping the state project a more robust presence. That said, while Galmudug officials routinely call for outside engagement, foreign help cannot be a substitute for a well-thought-out commitment to development and service delivery by the government itself.

C. *Beyond Galmudug*

Consolidating governance in Somalia's member states is a long-term project, and though Galmudug is unique in some ways, its lessons could apply more broadly. In other Somali states, especially Hirshabelle and Southwest, there are similar levels of elite conflict, social tensions and limited resource bases. Top-down state formation and Mogadishu's interference have exacerbated these problems. The lack of a common framework between the federal government and member states for sharing power and revenue also hinders Somalia's state-building progress.

While it will take time to develop a wider cooperative framework, a starting point for progress in other states should be agreements between the federal government and state authorities ahead of the next round of state elections, likely scheduled for 2024. As in Galmudug, the federal government should at minimum commit to non-interference in state elections, in return for states making credible commitments to mount well-organised, consensus-based and competitive state-run processes. States would thus be less vulnerable to elite contestation that boils over to exacerbate local grievances. Local figures could also then emerge to transform the states into better functioning entities. For their part, the leaders of Somalia's member states should seize the opportunity that the next round of elections will offer for reforms allowing higher levels of development in their states.

By seeing through its part of this bargain, Mogadishu can demonstrate its support for the strengthening of the federal system. A heavy hand with regard to states' internal affairs will stunt the states' growth, with negative implications for the federal government as well. Functional and coherent member states underpinned by a common vision will in turn strengthen the federal government and help it resolve problems on the national scale. Of course, in order for that to happen, member state

⁷² Another necessary step would be feasibility studies examining whether a port at Hobyo can serve a function beyond competing for business with the recently developed Garacad port, nearby in Puntland.

⁷³ In June, the UN mission in Somalia broke ground for an office in Galmudug. "UN and Galmudug Government Hold Groundbreaking Ceremony for New UN Office", press release, UNSOM, 3 June 2023.

authorities must do their part as well, showing a commitment to good governance, and turning their minds to economic development in their states.

V. Conclusion

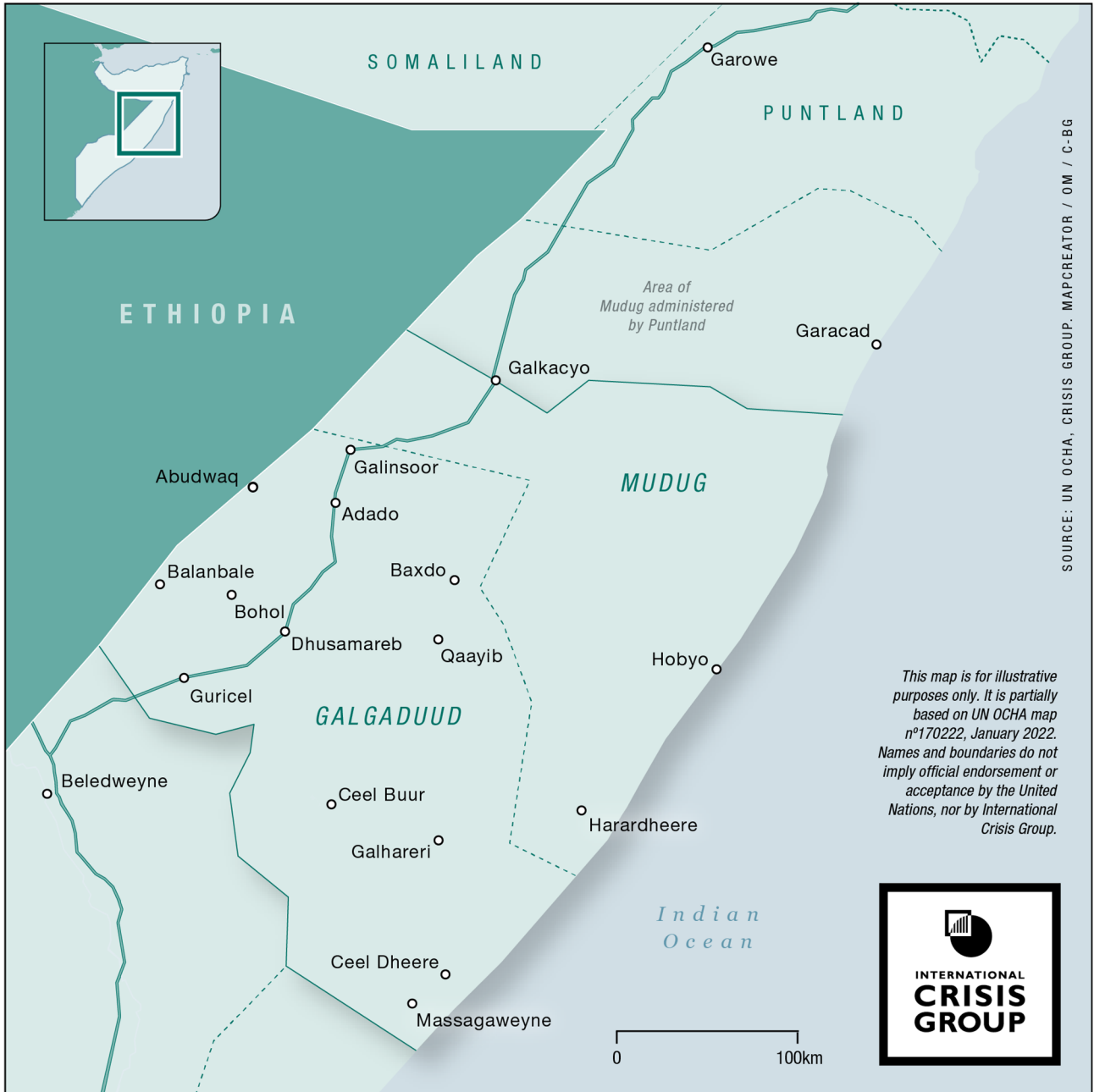
Galmudug's recurrent political strife, clan conflicts and struggles to advance economically – in addition to Mogadishu's political interference – are similar to the problems in Somalia's other federal member states. Like the others, Galmudug will likely continue to face these challenges as it completes its first decade of existence. Yet with political conflict low, a focus on fighting Al-Shabaab and people looking for improvements to their lives, there is now an opportunity to alleviate the problems.

State elections planned for November 2024 should be the first step in Galmudug's – and Somalia's – next phase of development. Competitive polls followed by concerted efforts at political reform, social reconciliation and economic growth would help reduce conflict and lay the groundwork for progress in state building. A tainted election, on the other hand, would risk trapping Galmudug on its familiar path, beset by infighting and mounting grievances that could divide the state.

At this moment of risk and opportunity, Galmudug's elites have a big decision to make: they can either work together in support of election integrity or run a process that weakens an already weak state. Mogadishu, too, has important choices. It can help Galmudug administer clean polls, offering support rather than manipulation, or it can throw its weight around in ways that undermine the federal project. The choices that will most benefit the people of Somalia are clear. Making them will be critical to the future of not only the Galmudug administration and government of Somalia, but also the populations they are meant to serve.

Mogadishu/Nairobi/Brussels, 25 September 2023

Appendix A: Map of Somalia's Federal Member State of Galmudug





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