



Somalia-Somaliland: The Perils of Delaying New Talks

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Principal Findings

What's new? Relations between Somalia and Somaliland, while back from the brink after a difficult 2018, remain tense. International actors are leading efforts to revive dialogue between the two sides.

Why does it matter? Absent progress toward dialogue, the parties' relationship is likely to deteriorate in ways that could endanger regional stability.

What should be done? The two sides should agree to technical talks as a step toward negotiations on more sensitive political subjects. These talks should focus on security and economic issues where tangible gains can build mutual confidence. Discussing Somaliland's political status could create counterproductive dynamics, including with Gulf states, and should happen later.

Executive Summary

Tensions between Somalia and Somaliland remain high. The core bone of contention is still Somaliland's political status in light of its 1991 declaration of independence, which Somalia rejects. Relations frayed in 2018 when troops from Somaliland and Puntland, a semi-autonomous regional state in Somalia notionally loyal to the federal government in Mogadishu, clashed over disputed territory. Somaliland's deal with an Emirati conglomerate and Ethiopia to manage its main port – which Mogadishu saw as challenging its claim to sovereignty there – deepened antagonism. But frictions have eased in 2019, and outside pressure has created some momentum toward renewed negotiations between the two sides, which last gathered to talk in 2015. The two sides should meet for technical talks, focusing on security and economic matters of mutual concern, and avoiding for now the polarising issue of Somaliland's political status. A neutral party such as the African Union ought to convene the talks, so that none of the many states vying for regional influence sees the mediation as threatening its interests.

Getting back to talks will likely not be easy. In addition to historical grievances and decades of separate rule, efforts to restart dialogue face political opposition on both sides. With parliamentary and presidential elections approaching in 2020 and 2021, respectively, Somalia's President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo" is particularly susceptible to pressure from his nationalist support base to shy away from talks and the give-and-take they may entail. Somaliland leader Muse Bihi, a former rebel commander who fought against the government in Mogadishu in the late 1980s, is less open to compromise than his predecessor. He will also face political pressure from hardline separatists, including other former insurgents, for whom any concession to Somalia is anathema.

Moreover, Gulf states could very well use their influence with leaders and others in Somaliland and throughout Somalia (including in its federal member states) to play the spoiler if talks are not carefully designed to take their interests into account. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) in particular enjoys close relations with the Somaliland government in Hargeisa and is unlikely to welcome a negotiation in which Somaliland is pressed to yield decision-making power to Mogadishu on issues that affect its interests. The Emiratis would likely prefer to engage on weighty matters with Somalia after its next elections in the hope of dealing with a federal government more sympathetic to their concerns.

But there are issues short of Somaliland's political status that the two parties could meaningfully tackle to the benefit of both. Some relate to security. Defeating Al-Shabaab's Islamist insurgency will require Mogadishu and Hargeisa to share intelligence and pool resources. And calming the volatile military standoff between Somaliland and Puntland over contested territories along their border will require Hargeisa to commit to de-escalation and Mogadishu to support, as it did in 2018, UN-led mediation efforts.

Other mutual interests are economic in nature. Agreements on freedom of movement and trade are essential in order for businesses in Somalia – especially livestock farmers – to benefit from the upgrade of Somaliland's Berbera port and de-

velopment of the trade corridor between it and Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. Both Somalia and Somaliland also have incentives to cooperate on sharing the benefits of debt relief packages under discussion with international financial institutions and on negotiating access to shared territorial waters for companies interested in oil and gas exploration.

Given high levels of suspicion between Somalia and Somaliland, international mediation will be crucial to achieving progress, but roles need to be assigned carefully. While Turkey and Ethiopia have been diplomatically very active in both Mogadishu and Hargeisa, neither is ideally positioned to play the lead role. Turkey's relationship with Saudi Arabia, which also has deep interests in both Somalia and Somaliland, is too fraught. And despite Ethiopia's recent improvement of ties with the Farmajo administration, it has historically enjoyed too close a relationship with Somaliland for Mogadishu to trust it fully.

The most promising approach might be for the African Union to convene the talks, ask an eminent statesperson to lead them and solicit technical assistance from a "group of friends" that might include countries like Turkey, Ethiopia, Sweden and Switzerland – which have been at the forefront of efforts to encourage talks – as well as the European Union.

The time for serious discussions about Somaliland's political status will likely come after Somalia's next elections. But waiting until then to have any talks at all would be dangerous: tensions between the two sides persist, regional powers are competing for advantage at a cost to local stability, and Somaliland and Puntland remain at loggerheads as forces gather in border areas. Against this backdrop, drifting along with no movement toward reconciliation raises risks of conflict. Engaging in technical talks about common security and economic challenges might help defuse those tensions and could build mutual confidence and create good-will for the more difficult negotiations down the road.

Nairobi/Brussels, 12 July 2019

Somalia-Somaliland: The Perils of Delaying New Talks

I. Introduction

Tensions between Somalia and Somaliland centre on a dispute over Somalilanders' claim to political independence, which they declared in 1991. Neither Somalia nor any other country has ever accepted the claim. But the frictions are rooted in events several decades earlier.

When they gained independence in 1960 from two different colonial powers – Somaliland from the British and Somalia from the Italians – the two territories unified to become the Somali Republic. But many Somalilanders both felt that the new country's government in Mogadishu was dominated by representatives from the south (which it was) and blamed economic policies set in Mogadishu for their region's underdevelopment.¹

The situation boiled over in the 1980s, when the Somali National Movement (SNM), led by members of Somaliland's dominant Isaq clan, launched an insurgency against military dictator Siad Barre, who in turn ramped up repression of Isaq civilians in the north. In 1988, the Barre regime responded to insurgent attacks on Hargeisa and Burcao with a brutal bombing campaign that left Hargeisa in rubble and forced some half a million Somalilanders to flee to Ethiopia. Barre's regime came to an end in 1991, when rebel movements in the south ousted it from Mogadishu and the SNM routed it from the north. As warlords continued to fight for dominance in the south, Somaliland's leaders decided to break away. On 18 May 1991, they proclaimed the independent Republic of Somaliland.

Since then, Somaliland has developed many trappings of a state.² It has its own civilian administration, armed forces and currency. It administers its own elections, which international observers have broadly described as free and fair.³ Its private sector, especially in the export of livestock, has driven local economic growth. As discussed below, Somaliland and donors also struck a "special arrangement" under which donors channel their support directly to Hargeisa. Nevertheless, no country recognises its statehood.

The question of Somaliland's sovereignty is, of course, at the centre of tensions between Mogadishu and Hargeisa. During previous rounds of talks between 2012 and 2015, the two sides made progress on practical issues of cooperation, such as airspace management, but failed to close the gap on the fundamental issue of Somaliland's status. While negotiations were ongoing, tensions eased. Yet after talks collapsed in 2015, relations deteriorated once again, taking a dramatic turn for the worse.

¹ See Crisis Group Africa Report N°66, *Somaliland: Democratisation and Its Discontents*, 28 July 2003, pp. 2-7.

² *Ibid.*

³ See "An island of stability in a sea of armed chaos", *The New York Times*, 7 March 2007.

This report looks at how and why the dispute between Somalia and Somaliland heated up – and then cooled down – over the last two years. It then makes the case for renewed talks between the parties, suggesting ways of making those discussions as productive as possible while limiting acrimony. The report also assesses the role of outside powers, primarily the Gulf states, Turkey and Ethiopia, in Somalia-Somaliland dynamics and the ways in which they might contribute to mediation between the two sides. It is based on interviews with serving and former officials, journalists, civil society representatives and diplomats, in Mogadishu, Hargeisa and Nairobi, conducted in the period February-May 2019, as well as follow-up telephone interviews with these sources, and supplemental interviews with officials in Abu Dhabi, Ankara, Doha and Riyadh.

II. Mogadishu and Hargeisa: To the Brink and Back

In 2018, Somalia-Somaliland relations frayed to such an extent that renewing talks became, at the time, untenable.

The downward spiral began with military clashes between Somaliland and its neighbour, Puntland, a semi-autonomous region that remains part of Somalia. In January 2018, Somalia's minister of planning, investment and economic development, Gamal Mohamed Hassan, angered the Somaliland government by making an unannounced visit to Badhan town in his home region of Sanaag, one of two regions claimed by both Somaliland and Puntland. The territorial dispute is longstanding.⁴ But Gamal's was the first visit to the region by a minister from Mogadishu since Somaliland declared independence in 1991. Hargeisa perceived the visit – and the fact that Mogadishu did not consult with Somaliland before Gamal appeared in Badhan – to be a form of meddling in the contested areas and a signal that Somalia did not respect Somaliland's claims there.⁵ Hargeisa warned the move could “jeopardise the relationship” between Somaliland and Somalia and might “lead to clashes”.⁶

It did. Days later, on 8 January, Hargeisa ordered Somaliland forces into Tukaraq, a strategic town then held by Puntland forces on the trade corridor that links the two disputed regions, Sool and Sanaag, with eastern Ethiopia. The fighting left dozens of soldiers dead and sparked an escalation that led to more bouts of fighting between Somaliland and Puntland forces in May, June and November 2018.⁷

Although Mogadishu sought to defuse the situation that it had helped spark by calling for restraint on both sides, it is ill suited to the role of peacemaker. Hargeisa continues to see it as an adversary and obstacle to its territorial claims. Moreover, throughout the Farmajo presidency, Mogadishu has been in a tug of war with Puntland, along with all of Somalia's federal member states, over both power and resources.⁸ The role of mediator accordingly fell principally to the then special representative of the UN Secretary-General for Somalia, Michael Keating.⁹ The situation on the ground remains volatile and the two parties continue to clash periodically.¹⁰

There were other sources of tension as well. In March 2018, Farmajo's government reacted angrily to the conclusion of a deal between Hargeisa and the Emirati conglomerate, DP World. The deal provides for DP World – a public company in which

⁴ Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°141, *Averting War in Northern Somalia*, 27 June 2018.

⁵ Crisis Group telephone interview, former Somaliland official, June 2019.

⁶ “Somaliland slams Somalia minister's visit to disputed region”, Goobjoog, 3 January 2018. BBC Monitoring translated original article from Somali.

⁷ See Crisis Group Briefing, *Averting War in Northern Somalia*, op. cit.

⁸ Since coming to office, Farmajo has attempted to move authority away from the federal member states – regional entities that function with a high degree of autonomy – and centralise it in Mogadishu. See Crisis Group Africa Report N°260, *Somalia and the Gulf Crisis*, 5 June 2018. Against this backdrop, the leadership in Puntland has been sharply at odds with Farmajo's administration on a number of issues, including what it perceives as Mogadishu's failure to consult with federal member states on resource sharing. See “Somalia talks end without deal on contentious issues”, Garowe Online, 11 May 2019.

⁹ Although the UAE has ties to both Somaliland and Puntland, Dubai has deeper interests in the former and Abu Dhabi the latter, making it an unlikely mediator.

¹⁰ “Somaliland, Puntland forces clash, three soldiers killed”, *Somaliland Standard*, 21 May 2019.

the Dubai government indirectly holds a majority stake – to modernise and manage Somaliland’s primary port at Berbera.¹¹ Mogadishu formally protested to the Arab League, declaring the contract null and void and “a violation of Somalia’s sovereignty”.¹² The cabinet also introduced a bill, which was passed by both houses of parliament and signed into law by President Farmajo, rejecting the deal and banning DP World from operating in Somalia.¹³ In Hargeisa, Bihi called Somalia’s opposition to the Berbera deal “a declaration of war” and – in light of what he described as “uncalled-for hostility from Somalia” – halted preparations then under way to restart dialogue with Mogadishu.¹⁴

The intensity of Mogadishu’s reaction in March 2018 marked an escalation from what had previously been more measured opposition to the Berbera deal. After DP World first announced the venture in September 2016, neither then-President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud nor the Farmajo government when it took power had much of a public reaction at all. The UAE maintained that it had an oral agreement with Mogadishu that it could move forward with the project so long as Abu Dhabi continued to uphold a one-Somalia policy.¹⁵

Two factors might explain Somalia’s subsequent shift in tone. First was the early March 2018 announcement that neighbouring heavyweight Ethiopia would take a 19 per cent stake in the Berbera project – a move that Mogadishu may well have seen as a strategically threatening demonstration of growing closeness between Addis Ababa and Hargeisa. And second was growing antagonism between Mogadishu and the UAE.¹⁶

The rift between Mogadishu and Abu Dhabi was of particular importance. It had been expanding since June 2017, when Saudi Arabia and the UAE cut off ties with and imposed a blockade on Qatar. At that time, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi pressed countries across the region, including Somalia, to cut their ties with Doha. Farmajo asserted that he would not take sides in the dispute, but UAE officials were convinced that, as a practical matter, he had aligned himself with both Qatar and Turkey.¹⁷ In response, Abu Dhabi increased its support to Somaliland and the federal member states, several of which had announced their support for the Saudi-led bloc during

¹¹ Under the terms of the deal, DP World holds 51 per cent of shares, Somaliland 30 per cent and Ethiopia 19 per cent. For a fuller account of the episode, see Crisis Group Report, *Somalia and the Gulf Crisis*, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

¹² “Somalia protests to AU and Arab League over Berbera port deal”, Radio Dalsan, 8 March 2018.

¹³ “Somalia: Senate approves law banning DP World from the country”, Garowe Online, 15 March 2018.

¹⁴ Bihi and Farmajo were reportedly set to meet in Djibouti later in March 2018. “Warlike declarations lead Somaliland to suspend planned resumption of talks with Somalia”, MENAFN, 11 March 2018. “Somaliland: President accuses Somalia of declaring war against Somaliland”, *Horn Diplomat*, 8 March 2018. Statement by President Muse Bihi, “Somaliland’s \$442m port project with DP world and Ethiopia will go ahead”, *The National*, 21 March 2018.

¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, senior UAE official, Abu Dhabi, March 2018. See also “DP World wins 30-year concession for port of Berbera in Somaliland”, DP World press release, 5 September 2016.

¹⁶ “Ethiopia acquires 19% stake in DP World Berbera port”, DP World press release, 1 March 2018. “DP World signs agreement with Somaliland and Ethiopia”, *Gulf News*, 1 March 2018.

¹⁷ By way of evidence, they argued that funds Farmajo received from Doha prior to his election and his appointment of officials with strong Qatari ties belied his claims of neutrality. See, generally, Crisis Group Report, *Somalia and the Gulf Crisis*, op. cit.

the crisis.¹⁸ This move exacerbated tensions between Abu Dhabi and Mogadishu. As Mogadishu and Hargeisa came to see each other as allies of opposing Gulf powers, their antagonism intensified.¹⁹

After Somalia enacted legislation against DP World, Mogadishu and Hargeisa hardened their respective positions. Foreign aid delivery became a battleground. In June 2018, Mogadishu opposed a donors' proposal to renew the Somaliland "special arrangement", which came into force in 2013 and expired in 2016, and which permitted donors to bypass Mogadishu (the normal channel for delivering aid to the federal member states) and send assistance directly to Hargeisa.²⁰ The Farmajo government expressed concern that "singling out an individual state or region for special arrangements could have serious impact on the efforts to deepen federalism and nation-building".²¹ Western donors pushed back, arguing that Somaliland's "special circumstances" merited a different approach.²² Hargeisa viewed Mogadishu's opposition to formal renewal of the "special arrangement" as a hostile act.²³

The dispute also played out in the immigration arena. In mid-2018, authorities on both sides took measures to hinder travel between their territories. Somaliland stamped Somalia passports with a visa, on the grounds that Somaliland was a separate country.²⁴ For their part, Somalia immigration officials began confiscating passports that contained such visa stamps, replacing them with clean ones at a cost – thus penalising citizens of Somalia who travelled to Somaliland.²⁵

Mogadishu also asserted itself in the field of airspace management. In March and June 2018, the federal government took significant steps toward assuming full control of the airspace over Somalia and Somaliland from the International Civil Aviation Organisation, which had been playing this role out of Nairobi since the 1990s.²⁶ These steps ignored a 2013 agreement Hargeisa had struck with the previous Soma-

¹⁸ Crisis Group Report, *Somalia and the Gulf Crisis*, op. cit.

¹⁹ In April 2018, the Somalia government confiscated \$9.6 million from a UAE plane in Mogadishu, in response to which Abu Dhabi suspended military cooperation, withdrew Emirati trainers and ceased aid operations. Ibid, pp. 17-18.

²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Somali civil society activist, Nairobi, 8 May 2019.

²¹ Letter dated 9 June 2018 from Gamal Hassan, minister of planning, investment and economic development, to Somalia Donor Group, in "Somalia moves to block Somaliland special arrangement with international partners", *SomTribune*, 20 June 2018.

²² Letter dated 13 June 2018 from the development agencies of the UK, Sweden and Italy, chair of the Somalia Development and Reconstruction Facility and co-chairs of the Somalia Donor Group, respectively, in "Special Arrangement with Somaliland a symbol of depoliticised aid relations – partners tell Mogadishu", *Somaliland Press*, 21 June 2018. Donors appear to have continued to furnish assistance directly to Hargeisa; it is unclear whether or not Mogadishu has given its consent.

²³ Crisis Group interview, former Somaliland government official, Hargeisa, February 2019.

²⁴ Crisis Group interview, adviser to Somaliland immigration agency, Hargeisa, 9 February 2019.

²⁵ Crisis Group interview, deputy director, Immigration and Naturalisation Directorate of Somalia, Mogadishu, 12 February 2019.

²⁶ See "Mogadishu takes over FISS airspace responsibilities of Nairobi amid more disturbing gaps and transfer rumors", *SomTribune*, 18 June 2018.

lia government during talks in Turkey, according to which a new body based in Hargeisa would jointly manage both territories' airspace and revenues from air traffic.²⁷

Tensions have eased a bit since 2018. For the most part, the first half of 2019 saw a de-escalation in rhetoric and action. On the positive side of the equation, both Hargeisa and Mogadishu say they are ready to reengage in talks, likely as a result – at least in part – of international pressure.²⁸ In conversations with Crisis Group, a high-level Somaliland official described Somaliland and Somalia as “partners” and recognised the need to resolve their disagreements.²⁹ The Somalia government has appointed a point person for talks in the presidency, Dr Nur Dirie Hersi Fursade, who says Mogadishu is ready to talk “without preconditions”.³⁰

But there is also less positive news, including Somalia's decision to pull its delegation out of a 25 June 2019 consultative meeting convened in Nairobi by a private Swiss-based organisation. While Mogadishu's decision could reflect fraying bilateral relations with Kenya – which is embroiled in a diplomatic dispute with Somalia over a maritime boundary – the incident illustrates the challenges of designing a workable framework for talks.³¹

Moreover, Somaliland's ongoing efforts to project itself as a sovereign state and build support elsewhere in Africa are a continuing source of tension between Mogadishu and Hargeisa. Recently, Somaliland's foreign minister visited Kenyan foreign ministry officials in Nairobi, after which Nairobi provocatively tweeted that the talks had covered issues of concern to “both countries”. Shortly after that, President Bihi travelled to Guinea where he was given a red-carpet welcome. Somalia responded with ire in both cases. It formally protested the Kenyan tweet as an “affront to Somalia's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity”, and announced that it was cutting diplomatic ties with Guinea.³²

²⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Somaliland former official and journalist, Hargeisa and Nairobi, February-May 2019. See also “Press release regarding the second round of talks between Somalia and Somaliland”, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 10 July 2013.

²⁸ “Somalia: Somaliland leader softens tone on talks with Mogadishu”, Garowe Online, 19 May 2019.

²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Dr Edna Adan, then Somaliland's envoy for Somalia-Somaliland talks, Hargeisa, 10 February 2019.

³⁰ Crisis Group telephone interview, Dr Nur Dirie Hersi Fursade, chief of staff, Office of the President of Somalia, 11 May 2019.

³¹ “Somalia skips international-community attended meeting with Somaliland in Nairobi”, *SomTribune*, 25 June 2019. As bilateral relations have soured, Nairobi has taken a number of steps against the Farmajo administration in recent months, including barring Somali officials travelling on diplomatic passports from attending meetings in Kenya. In a move seen as aimed at punishing Somalia for its stance on the maritime dispute, Kenya has also ramped up relations with Hargeisa. Kenya Airways, its flag carrier, announced on 25 June that it would soon start direct flights to Somaliland. “Kenya to start direct flights to Somaliland amid frosty relations with Mogadishu”, Garowe Online, 25 June 2019.

³² “Somalia cuts diplomatic ties with Guinea over Somaliland”, *Alternative Africa*, 4 July 2019. See also “Somalia summons Kenyan ambassador over ‘offensive’ tweet”, *The Star*, 1 July 2019; and “Somalia lodges protest after Kenya calls Somaliland a country”, *Arab News*, 1 July 2019.

III. Getting to New Talks: Challenges and Opportunities

A. *The Case for Talks*

Any resumed dialogue should focus on how Mogadishu and Hargeisa can improve cooperation in mutually beneficial ways. Much as it will be important to resolve the political conflict over Somaliland's status and overcome a major obstacle to regional stability and economic integration, the time is not yet right. The gap between the parties is too great and could be widened by the likelihood that, with Somalia's parliamentary and presidential elections coming up (they are planned for 2020 and 2021, respectively), Mogadishu would be under pressure to take hardline positions.³³

Regional actors may also object to any talks they deem too ambitious in scope. Abu Dhabi especially has shied away from dealing with the Farmajo government on major policy matters since the Gulf crisis of 2017. The UAE is likely to prefer waiting for Somalia's next elections – which they hope will replace Farmajo with a new leader more sympathetic to their stance – before proceeding with negotiations in which Somalia might push Somaliland to make substantial concessions that could affect UAE interests.³⁴ Abu Dhabi may in particular worry about the prospect that talks could shift the balance of power between Mogadishu and Hargeisa to their disadvantage, put Mogadishu in a position to interfere with commercial and military contracts signed solely with Hargeisa, or benefit a rival, such as Qatar or Turkey, that enjoys close ties to Somalia.³⁵

Against this backdrop, the best course right now would be to pursue preliminary agreements on relatively non-sensitive, technical matters in order to build mutual confidence and pave the way for more sensitive political negotiations.

Much can be done within that framework. To begin, enhancing security cooperation would help both sides reduce the threat from Al-Shabaab, a priority likely to become yet more urgent as the African Union mission (AMISOM) draws down.³⁶ Intelligence sharing would help, as some of Al-Shabaab's leaders belong to Isaq, Somaliland's majority clan, and the group maintains a strong foothold in its territory.³⁷

Talks between Hargeisa and Mogadishu likewise could facilitate resolution of the volatile military standoff between Somaliland and Puntland. Somaliland is more likely to withdraw troops from the front line – an essential step toward de-escalation – if it can secure credible assurances that Mogadishu will not weigh in politically or

³³ Questions remain over whether Somalia can hold one-person, one-vote parliamentary and presidential elections in 2020 and 2021 as planned. In March 2019, the electoral commission chairperson expressed optimism from a technical point of view, but raised concerns on financial, security and political fronts. See "UNSOM Newsletter", Issue #10, March 2019.

³⁴ Crisis Group interviews, UAE foreign ministry officials, May and June 2019. Since coming to office, Bihi has also visited Ethiopia, Djibouti and the UAE.

³⁵ Crisis Group interview, UAE foreign ministry official, Abu Dhabi, May 2019.

³⁶ AMISOM plans to undertake a gradual handover of security responsibilities to Somali forces "with the aim of Somali security institutions taking the lead by 2021". UN Security Council Resolution 2472 (2019), 31 May 2019.

³⁷ Crisis Group interview, senior Somali politician and businessman, Nairobi, 9 May 2019. See also Crisis Group Africa Briefings N°99, *Somalia: Al-Shabaab – It Will Be a Long War*, 26 June 2014; and N°113, *Somaliland: The Strains of Success*, 5 October 2015, pp. 13-14.

militarily on Puntland's side.³⁸ Although, as outlined above, relations between Mogadishu and Puntland are tense, Mogadishu is still closer to Puntland – a federal member state that has representation in the parliament and government in Mogadishu – than Somaliland.

Somalia and Somaliland also stand to gain from greater economic cooperation. Agreements enabling freer cross-border movement and trade could boost exports from both sides of the border through Somaliland's Berbera port, including livestock exports to the Arabian Peninsula, and help Somalia's and Somaliland's economies.³⁹ Somaliland's ambitious Berbera corridor project linking the port to Addis Ababa could similarly stimulate economic growth in Somalia provided the governments agree on how to work together.⁴⁰ Agreement on joint management of civil aviation and its revenues – something the two governments achieved in past talks but never implemented (and over which Somalia has recently been working to gain full control) – could give a boost to that sector, with gains for both sides.⁴¹ Somaliland's banking sector, which is stronger than Somalia's, might begin working to both sides' benefit if they agree to bolster integration of their respective financial services.⁴²

Recent developments on the economic front underline the need for both sides to work together. Since his appointment in 2017, Hassan Ali Kheire, Somalia's reformist prime minister, has made the pursuit of debt relief, which would be a major financial windfall for the country, a central goal.⁴³ Successfully implementing any agreement on debt cancellation, however, would require consensus between Hargeisa and Mogadishu on how those benefits would be shared. In the same vein, Western companies have shown a growing interest in exploring for oil and gas in shared territorial waters. The federal government in Mogadishu has – over the bitter objections of the federal member states – asserted that it will take the lead in these negotiations because it is the internationally recognised sovereign government.⁴⁴ But as a practical

³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Puntland politician, Nairobi, 9 May 2019.

³⁹ In 2016, livestock represented 81 per cent of exports from Somalia (including Somaliland) and headed to Saudi Arabia (68 per cent), Oman (25.4 per cent), Yemen (6.4 per cent) and Kuwait (0.1 per cent). "Somalia: Transport Sector Needs Assessment and Investment Programme", African Development Bank Group, October 2016, pp. 158-159.

⁴⁰ According to the World Bank, the Berbera corridor has "[s]trong potential for generating jobs, services, investment opportunities and revenues". See "(Draft) Regional Initiative in Support of the Horn of Africa", World Bank, 2014, p. 25.

⁴¹ The federal government has continued to pursue efforts to take over from international agencies the management of airspace over Somalia and Somaliland and control of associated revenues without consulting Somaliland. Following steps in 2018, it signed a further agreement with the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the International Air Traffic Authority in late June 2019, to take effect on 30 July 2019. Somaliland reportedly lodged a complaint with the UN in light of the 2013 arrangement that the two governments would share airspace management and revenues. See "Somaliland makes belated move to challenge Somalia control of its airspace", MENAFN, 3 July 2019.

⁴² Crisis Group telephone interview, political and economic analyst, 24 May 2019.

⁴³ "PM meets with John Bolton in Washington", Shabelle Media Network, 11 April 2019.

⁴⁴ Talks between Mogadishu and federal member state presidents in May 2019 in Puntland ended without agreement after the regional presidents demanded that Mogadishu drop a petroleum bill giving it the lead role in awarding oil blocks. "Somalia talks end without deal on contentious issues", Garowe Online, 11 May 2019. Mogadishu and Hargeisa have not engaged on this issue, although the sea floor off Somaliland is said to be a highly promising site for oil and gas finds. The UN has warned

matter Mogadishu will need to cultivate consensus with Hargeisa and federal member states to ensure that the agreements it negotiates can be effectively implemented in areas where it has little to no control.⁴⁵

By contrast, the costs of continued non-cooperation could be high. A deepening rift between Hargeisa and Mogadishu could trigger greater instability and possibly prompt violence, especially in the militarised areas contested by Somaliland and Puntland. Growing division could also leave both sides open to manipulation by outside powers seeking to play out transplanted rivalries. The Gulf states may be particularly tempted to intervene as Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, on the one hand, and Doha on the other, continue to vie for influence in and around Somalia. These rival powers funnel resources to their competing allies in Somalia and Somaliland, elevating some over others and exacerbating social and political schisms within both systems.⁴⁶

B. Managing Nationalist Politics

The presidents of Somalia and Somaliland face political constraints and expectations that shape their manoeuvring room. They will need to navigate them carefully to maximise chances for successful talks.

Of the two leaders, Farmajo faces the greater limitations and is likely to be the more reluctant to entertain a return to negotiations. Having come to power in 2017 touting a nationalist message, he has emphasised the importance of a strong central government even as he struggles (not always successfully) with leaders of federal member states. Toward the end of 2018, state leaders, frustrated with what they described as Farmajo's failure to consult them on key issues (including resource sharing, the balance of power between them and Mogadishu, and Mogadishu's alleged efforts to swing elections in federal member states in favour of candidates it backs), threatened to cease all cooperation with the central government.⁴⁷ Early the next year, Farmajo sought to mend fences, publicly apologising for his part in the souring of relations.⁴⁸ Still, tensions remain high.

Against the backdrop of these disputes, and amid Al-Shabaab's continued security threat, Farmajo's once-broad base has begun to erode. With the presidential election approaching, he likely will be cautious about moves that could cost him further support, including initiating negotiations with Hargeisa in which he inevitably would be

that major gas and oil finds in that region could further feed tensions between Somaliland and Mogadishu and, by extension, Puntland. See "Somalia's untapped oil is already creating problems", 7D News, 2 March 2019; and "UN experts wary of Somaliland plan for armed oil protection unit", Reuters, 30 May 2014.

⁴⁵ Crisis Group interviews, European diplomats who regularly engage with Mogadishu and Hargeisa, Nairobi, June 2019.

⁴⁶ An AU official told Crisis Group, "Farmajo could not build relations with the federal member states and this is opening loopholes for ... let's call them 'complicators' from the Gulf. The Gulf crisis is really undermining a lot of things now. ... The way the Gulf countries are coming in with their money can polarise or even politicise institutions", Crisis Group interview, African Union senior official, Addis Ababa, June 2019.

⁴⁷ "Somalia regional states suspend cooperation with federal government", Voice of America, 8 September 2018.

⁴⁸ "President Farmajo seeks pardon from regional state heads, Puntland vows to crush Al-Shabab", Dalsan Radio, 27 January 2019.

pressed to make concessions. He will doubtless be especially wary of making compromises relating to Somaliland's sovereign status.⁴⁹ For the Somali nationalists who form the bedrock of Farmajo's political base, there is no question that Somaliland belongs in a unified Somalia.

In Hargeisa, President Bihi has more flexibility. Many Somalilanders are drawn to the idea of talks that could advance their claims to independence.⁵⁰ Moreover, he faces no presidential vote until 2022, affording him more time than Farmajo before he must turn his attention to campaigning.

Still, Bihi would confront his own internal challenges should he wish to re-embark on talks. Influential hardline separatists would likely pressure him to refrain from moving toward greater cooperation with Mogadishu.⁵¹ Many from Bihi's generation lost loved ones in the late 1980s when the Siad Barre regime attacked northern cities. They prize the level of autonomy that Somaliland obtained and chafe at the prospect of conceding anything on that point. Bihi himself, a former commander in the Somali National Movement (the insurgent movement that fought against Siad Barre), is less open to compromise than his predecessor Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud "Silanyo". As for the generation of Somalilanders who became politically aware after 1991, they may wonder why the current state of limbo – which is all they have ever known – needs to be addressed at all.⁵²

Bihi also faces other claims on his attention and political capital. Tensions with Puntland continue to trigger bouts of fighting in contested areas and inter-clan clashes in Sanaag also seem to be on the rise.⁵³ In addition, Bihi is under pressure to resolve a dispute with the opposition party, Waddani, which contests the electoral commission's credibility, so that long-delayed parliamentary polls can take place this year.⁵⁴

In seeking to minimise political obstacles on both sides, as well as demands on political leaderships' time, the parties could borrow from the two-tiered structure they employed with some success during the 2012-2015 discussions. At the time, small delegations often met at the technical and ministerial levels in the absence of the two

⁴⁹ Crisis Group Commentary, "The Regional Risks to Somalia's Moment of Hope", 22 February 2017.

⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, Mohamed Behi Yonis, former foreign minister of Somaliland, Nairobi, 10 May 2019.

⁵¹ Crisis Group interviews, former minister of Somaliland, Hargeisa, 9 February 2019; civil society leader, Hargeisa, 10 February 2019.

⁵² Crisis Group interview, Mohamed Behi Yonis, former foreign minister of Somaliland, Nairobi, 10 May 2019.

⁵³ On ongoing clashes with Puntland, see "Somaliland, Puntland forces clash, three soldiers killed", *Somaliland Standard*, 21 May 2019. In Sanaag, a long-running feud between two major branches of the Isaq clan – Habar Jecllo and Habar Yonis – has intensified in recent years, especially during the 2017 election. Bihi's victory, backed by a Habar Jecllo-led alliance, left the Habar Yonis angry and feeling marginalised. See Crisis Group Briefing, *Averting War in Northern Somalia*, op. cit., p. 3. Bihi sought to curb reprisals between the groups by imposing a state of emergency in three districts in Sanaag that would have empowered the military. But the motion met staunch parliamentary opposition. Violence could escalate, especially if Puntland tries to mobilise Bihi's local opponents. See, "Somaliland: President slams state of emergency rule on 3 Sanaag districts", MENAFN, 30 April 2019, and "Somaliland parliament fails to approve president's 'state of emergency' bill", *SomTribune*, 2 May 2019.

⁵⁴ "Somaliland's fragile democracy faces more election delays", Institute for Security Studies, 19 March 2019.

presidents.⁵⁵ They steered clear of status-related issues, worked on building a positive rapport and kept their sights set on more achievable confidence-building measures – such as an agreement on the management of airspace and division of associated revenues.⁵⁶ The presidents met less frequently and focused primarily on endorsing points agreed upon at the working level and committing to further talks. Although talks broke down in 2015 over an issue related to the composition of the Somalia delegation, past participants remain positive about the two-tiered structure.⁵⁷

Officials tasked with preparing the ground for talks also could work with private-sector and civil society leaders including elders to foster domestic support for dialogue and potentially encourage them to engage in track-two talks.⁵⁸

C. Harnessing International Interest

As the Horn of Africa's strategic importance has grown – the combined result of the Yemen war, proximity to important shipping lanes, and concerns over the presence of terrorist groups Al-Shabaab and, in still relatively small numbers, the Islamic State in Somalia – there has also been a resurgence of international interest in Somalia-Somaliland relations. The greater interest is reflected, in part, in growing competition among various outside actors for influence, notably between the U.S. and China but also among regional states.⁵⁹

Regional interest is especially high among both Gulf powers and neighbours on the continent. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, are all competing for influence, as are the U.S. and China. The UAE has made a major investment in Somali-

⁵⁵ Crisis Group interviews, participants in past talks, Nairobi, May 2019.

⁵⁶ The heads of the two delegations over several rounds of talks, Somalia's then Interior Minister Abdikarim Hussein Guled and Somaliland's Minister of Trade and International Investment Mohamed Omar, developed a good working relationship. Crisis Group interview, Abdikarim Hussein Guled, former interior minister of Somalia, Nairobi, 5 May 2019; telephone interview, former minister of Somaliland, Mohamed Omar, 8 May 2019.

⁵⁷ The negotiations broke down after Somaliland pulled its delegation from the March 2015 round in Istanbul. Hargeisa was protesting the inclusion in the Somalia delegation of representatives who came originally from Somaliland and whom Hargeisa characterised as "traitors". Crisis Group interviews, participants in past talks, Nairobi, May 2019.

⁵⁸ Business leaders who already work across the Hargeisa-Mogadishu divide (eg, in the banking and telecom sectors) benefit from friendly bilateral relations and have an interest in promoting stability and security. Elders and religious leaders could also play a positive role in informal discussions. Both businesspeople and elders played a critical role in getting past talks off the ground in 2012. Crisis Group interviews, Somali civil society leader, Somali politician, Nairobi, 8-9 May 2019.

⁵⁹ The U.S. and China are competing in the commercial, diplomatic and military spheres. In June, a Chinese firm inked a deal to expand a port in the ancient Red Sea town of Eyl in Puntland. "Puntland signs oil deal with China-based firm", Garowe Online, 1 June 2019. In December 2018, Mogadishu granted 31 Chinese firms rights to fish in Somalia's maritime waters, a move seen as signalling China's growing interest in expanding commercial ties with Somalia. "China will start fishing along Somalia's coastline just as piracy makes a comeback", *Quartz*, 24 December 2018. At the same time, the U.S. has ramped up its diplomatic presence. The Trump administration tapped a senior diplomat, Donald Yamamoto, a former assistant secretary for African affairs, as envoy to Mogadishu. U.S. oil majors are reportedly interested in exploring in Somalia's off-shore blocks and the U.S. has offered to mediate the simmering border dispute between Somalia and Kenya. "Kenya-Somalia maritime row to be heard in September", *The Star*, 5 July 2019.

land's long-term future; beyond the port, DP World in 2018 signed an agreement to create a 12 sq km economic free zone in Berbera.⁶⁰ Abu Dhabi separately secured rights to a military base nearby. The road connecting Berbera to the Ethiopian border is being renovated with financing from the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development.⁶¹ At the same time, both Abu Dhabi and Riyadh are keen to ensure that none of their primary rivals – Qatar, Turkey and Iran – can gain access to the Red Sea coastline, of which Somaliland controls 850km. Already, they are keeping a wary eye on Turkey's construction of its largest overseas military base in Mogadishu. So long as Mogadishu remains close to Doha and Ankara, Abu Dhabi and Riyadh will likely resist Somali federal government control over Somaliland. It remains to be seen whether they might become more open to compromise after Somalia's next elections if there are significant changes suggesting that Mogadishu will be friendlier to their interests – for example, if Somalis elect candidates willing to support rescinding the legislation barring DP World from the country.

As for neighbours on the continent, landlocked Ethiopia has a significant stake in the Berbera port deal and is eyeing the economic opportunities offered by a modernised port and trade corridor to link it to the coast. Egypt, which has traditionally backed Mogadishu, has begun signalling that it seeks a warmer relationship with Somaliland, partly due to Mogadishu's close relations with its rivals in Doha and Ankara.⁶² And as described above, Kenya seems intent on strengthening relations with Somaliland – a move it is making against the backdrop of a recent escalation in its longstanding maritime border dispute with Somalia.⁶³

Among these countries, Turkey and Ethiopia have shown particular interest in facilitating renewed dialogue between Mogadishu and Hargeisa.

Turkey has worked hard both to foster close relations with Somalia – which it sees as central to its regional strategic interests – and to position itself as an honest broker in its talks with Somaliland. From 2011, when it provided humanitarian relief amid a biting famine, Ankara has built close relations with Mogadishu. In 2016, it opened a new embassy, physically its largest in the world. It has offered scholarships to thousands of young Somalis, and Turkish companies operate the city's principal sea port and airport. But it also sought to maintain ties with Somaliland, and between 2012 and 2015 it was the driving force behind the Mogadishu-Hargeisa talks.⁶⁴

Turkey has also taken a number of steps to restart negotiations. In December 2018, Ankara appointed Dr Olgan Bekar – who served as ambassador in Mogadishu from 2014 to 2018 – as its special envoy for Somalia-Somaliland talks. Bekar visited Hargeisa and Mogadishu in early February 2019 and elicited the views of the main parties

⁶⁰ Sarah Townsend, "DP World finalises deal for Berbera port free zone", *The National*, 4 March 2018.

⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, Qatar Fund for Development, Doha, April 2018

⁶² Hargeisa sent a delegation to Cairo in March 2019 and Egyptian officials met President Bihi in Hargeisa in May. "Somaliland: President Bihi receives Egyptian delegation, sides talk of cooperation", MENAFN, 7 May 2019.

⁶³ See "Kenya to open mission in Hargeisa to boost social, economic links", *East African Business Week*, 29 April 2019; "How Somalia's internal politics fuels obstinacy on boundary row with Kenya", *The East African*, 2 June 2019.

⁶⁴ See, for example, "Somalia, Somaliland sign 'talks' deal", *Daily Nation*, 20 January 2014.

and international partners on a new framework for talks, though he has not yet released a plan.⁶⁵

For its part, Addis Ababa has also tried – through its own separate initiative – to act as a mediator between Somalia and Somaliland. Ethiopia historically has had better relations with Hargeisa than Mogadishu (and, to the latter’s chagrin, cultivated relations with Somalia’s federal member states), yet since taking office in April 2018, Abiy has made an effort to develop a relationship with Farmajo. But Abiy appears to have moved precipitously in proposing to accompany Farmajo in a visit to Hargeisa in March 2019, and Somaliland officials rejected his request.⁶⁶

In any case, given regional dynamics, Ankara and Addis Ababa would more usefully contribute to the next phase of talks by playing a supporting – rather than leading – role in the process.

Ethiopia is still too close to Somaliland to play the role of mediator. Mogadishu is of course keenly aware that Addis Ababa historically has enjoyed warmer ties with Hargeisa than itself. Somalia has also watched closely as Ethiopia has recently taken steps to integrate its economy with Somaliland through the Berbera port trade corridor in seeking to reduce its dependence on Djibouti for access to the sea. To be sure, Prime Minister Abiy has somewhat flipped Ethiopian policy since coming to office by building stronger ties with Farmajo than all his recent predecessors. But Mogadishu still sees the Ethiopian security and foreign policy establishment as hewing to its traditional approach to Somaliland and doubts that Addis Ababa can project true impartiality.⁶⁷

Moreover, the idea of Ethiopian mediation could face opposition in Hargeisa, too, as Abiy’s failed attempt to broker a Farmajo visit soured some officials there on the prospect of Ethiopia playing this role.⁶⁸

As for Turkey, the reaction from its regional rivals could well be highly negative. Chief among the objectors would likely be Saudi Arabia, which sees Mogadishu as an historical ally, a key part of its western security flank in the Horn of Africa, and a place where it has been working to claw back influence after the strain created by the Gulf crisis of 2017.⁶⁹ Riyadh would likely bristle at seeing an adversary like Turkey play a lead role in any talks – all the more so given that the kingdom saw its already

⁶⁵ “Somalia-Somaliland talks to resume with Turkey, Sweden and HD as a mediation trio”, *Somaliland Sun*, 13 February 2019.

⁶⁶ Some Somaliland officials argued that Farmajo should be required to acknowledge that he was travelling outside Somalia before being received in Hargeisa, but the bigger issue appears to be that Abiy had not consulted them sufficiently to prepare the ground for the trip. Crisis Group interviews, Somali civil society leader, Nairobi, 8 May 2019; former government official, Nairobi, June 2019. See also “Somaliland ‘rejected’ visit by Somali and Ethiopian leaders”, Jowhar, 6 May 2019.

⁶⁷ Crisis Group interviews, former Ethiopian diplomat based in Somalia, Ethiopian and Somali officials, February-June 2019.

⁶⁸ Crisis Group interview, former senior Somaliland official, Nairobi, June 2019.

⁶⁹ Saudi officials note that the kingdom’s relations with Mogadishu never frayed to the same extent that the UAE’s ties with Somalia did. Over the last year in particular, Saudi Arabia has worked to reaffirm its links to Mogadishu. Crisis Group, senior Saudi official, Riyadh, December 2018. One marker of the proximity between Riyadh and Mogadishu is the plethora of statements and expressions of support that Somalia has offered on domestic Saudi Arabian issues in recent years, including a statement of support following Khashoggi’s killing.

poor relations with Turkey decline yet further following the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in its Istanbul consulate in October 2018. In light of Turkey's closeness to Qatar, and Riyadh's deep mistrust of Qatari influence in Somalia, Ankara would also have to go to significant lengths to demonstrate that it is not in lockstep with Doha. And the kingdom would not be alone in its concerns: Abu Dhabi would almost certainly react to any hint of Qatari involvement in talks. Egypt, too, would likely follow Riyadh's lead in opposing Turkish leadership given Ankara's support for the Muslim Brotherhood, which Cairo treats as its nemesis.⁷⁰

Turkey believes that it is nonetheless well suited to a leadership role. Turkish officials suggest that both Mogadishu and Hargeisa are open to Ankara taking the helm. They point to Ankara's deep and longstanding work in Somalia – including support for social programs, military training for Somalia's national army, relief operations and encouragement of private investment – and note that they began many of these efforts before the Gulf players began to take a greater interest in Somalia.⁷¹

Whatever the merits of Ankara's arguments, the risks are too great. Blowback from mistrustful Gulf powers is the last thing the nascent talks need. Gulf interference could prove particularly destabilising to any mediation effort. Each of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar has cultivated local politicians and community leaders throughout various parts of Somalia, whom they can call upon to act in pursuit of external interests. These allies can easily play the spoiler, and there is a chance that in so doing they could set off an escalating chain of provocations.

A less contentious way forward, under discussion among Western diplomats in Nairobi, would be for the African Union to convene the talks with the support of what they call a "group of friends". Under this arrangement, the African Union would appoint an eminent person to lead the talks, much like Kofi Annan led an AU-convened mediation effort during the post-election crisis in Kenya in 2008. Countries that have led efforts to bring the parties back to the table – including Turkey and Ethiopia as well as Sweden and Switzerland – could join the European Union and other supporters of the talks in offering technical support. By placing the AU at the forefront and affording roles to multiple concerned countries, such an approach would allow those with strong interests and influence to support the process while avoiding the kind of high-profile involvement that might backfire.⁷²

⁷⁰ As a senior European envoy told Crisis Group, "The Saudis will do anything to block the Turks everywhere, and given their concerns about the Muslim Brotherhood [which Turkey supports], the Egyptians will reinforce that stance". Crisis Group interview, Nairobi, June 2019.

⁷¹ Crisis Group interview, Turkish foreign ministry official, Ankara, September 2018. The official said Turkey, as the only major market economy in its near neighbourhood, engaged on a different level in the Horn of Africa than Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, Doha and Cairo did. He cast Ankara's interest in the region as a long-term bet on expanding economic ties, citing the large number of Turkish investors active in the region.

⁷² Crisis Group interviews, European diplomats and Somaliland officials, Nairobi, June 2019.

IV. Conclusion

As the 30th anniversary of Somaliland's declaration of independence approaches in 2021, Hargeisa and Mogadishu have important unfinished business. While political realities likely dictate that they neither can nor should immediately grapple with the paramount issue between them – the question of Somaliland's political status – they can take steps to avoid renewed escalation and pave the way for more sensitive political talks. With support from within the region and further afield, the parties might be able to initiate a technical dialogue focused on issues of mutual interest – such as countering terrorism and stimulating economic growth. These discussions ought to be convened by a neutral party – perhaps the AU – to avoid backlash from regional powers whose support can maximise chances of the dialogue's success and whose opposition would almost surely spell its failure.

Nairobi/Brussels, 12 July 2019

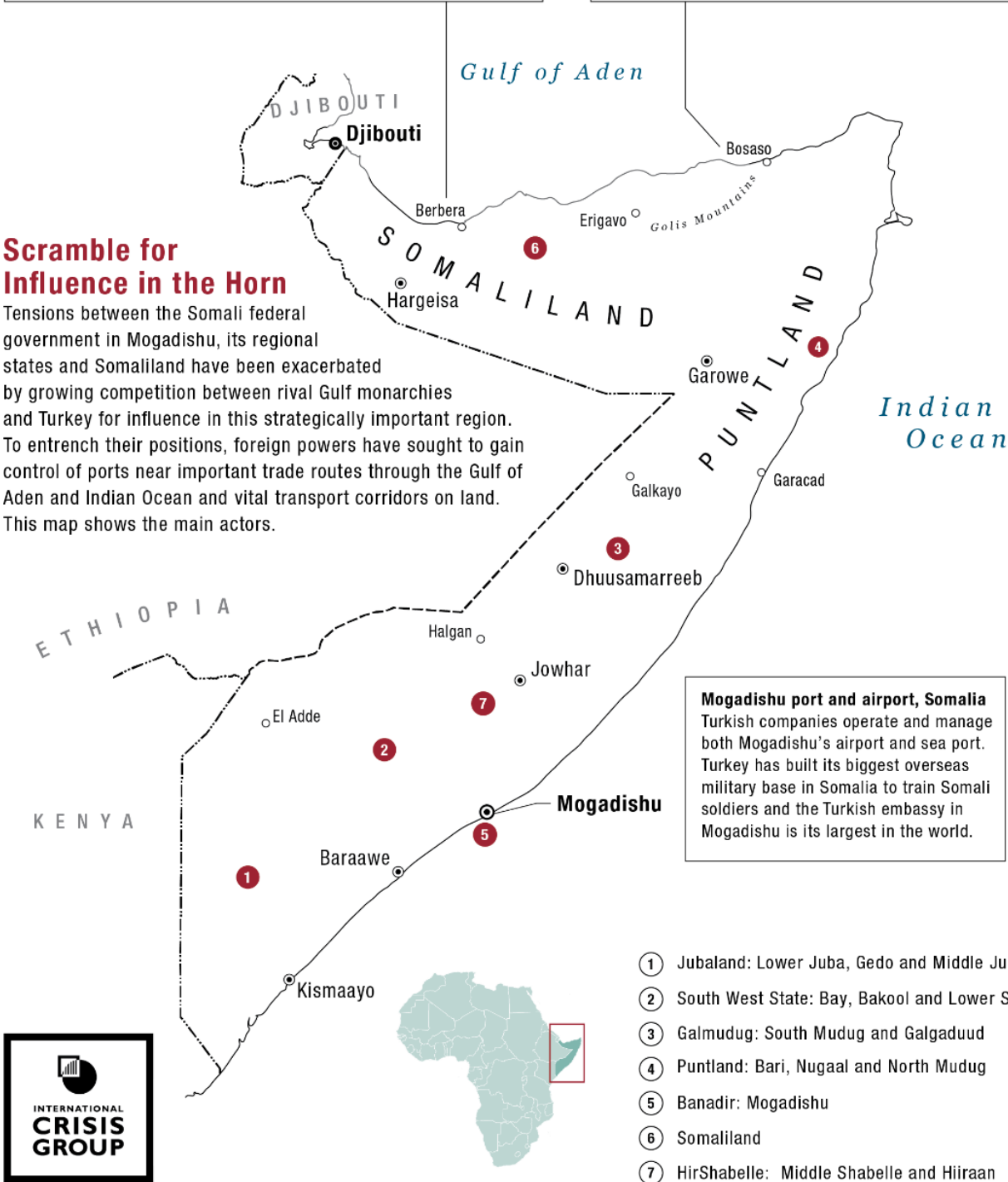
Appendix A: Map of Foreign Interests in the Ports of Somalia and Somaliland

Berbera port, Somaliland
 Dubai-based port operator DP World signed a 30-year concession in 2016 to develop and manage Somaliland's Berbera port at a cost of \$442 million. In 2018, landlocked Ethiopia acquired a 19 per cent stake in the project. Mogadishu opposes these plans and has also protested Somaliland's decision to allow the United Arab Emirates to build a military base in Berbera.

Bosaso port, Puntland
 P&O Ports, a fully-owned subsidiary of DP World, clinched a 30-year concession for the management and development of Bosaso port in Somalia's semi-autonomous region of Puntland. Puntland and neighbouring Somaliland dispute border areas and in recent years their troops have clashed in the contested zones.

Scramble for Influence in the Horn

Tensions between the Somali federal government in Mogadishu, its regional states and Somaliland have been exacerbated by growing competition between rival Gulf monarchies and Turkey for influence in this strategically important region. To entrench their positions, foreign powers have sought to gain control of ports near important trade routes through the Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean and vital transport corridors on land. This map shows the main actors.



INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP / KO / JULY 2019



Appendix B: About the International Crisis Group

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 120 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries or regions at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international, regional and national decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a monthly early-warning bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in up to 70 situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on its website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policymakers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord (Mark) Malloch-Brown.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Robert Malley, took up the post on 1 January 2018. Malley was formerly Crisis Group's Middle East and North Africa Program Director and most recently was a Special Assistant to former U.S. President Barack Obama as well as Senior Adviser to the President for the Counter-ISIL Campaign, and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region. Previously, he served as President Bill Clinton's Special Assistant for Israeli-Palestinian Affairs.

Crisis Group's international headquarters is in Brussels, and the organisation has offices in seven other locations: Bogotá, Dakar, Istanbul, Nairobi, London, New York, and Washington, DC. It has presences in the following locations: Abuja, Algiers, Bangkok, Beirut, Caracas, Gaza City, Guatemala City, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Johannesburg, Juba, Mexico City, New Delhi, Rabat, Tbilisi, Toronto, Tripoli, Tunis, and Yangon.

Crisis Group receives financial support from a wide range of governments, foundations, and private sources. Currently Crisis Group holds relationships with the following governmental departments and agencies: Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrian Development Agency, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, European Union Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, French Development Agency, French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, German Federal Foreign Office, Global Affairs Canada, Irish Aid, Iceland Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Principality of Liechtenstein, Luxembourg Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the UK Department for International Development, and the United Arab Emirates Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

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