

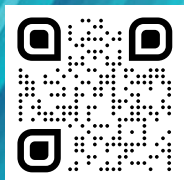


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OCTOBER 2023

SUDAN

RSF EXTEND PRESENCE TO NEW AREAS IN SUDAN'S AL-JAZIRA STATE

OCTOBER 7, 2023 (KHARTOUM)

One day after asserting control over the Al-Ailfoun area in Khartoum State, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have now penetrated additional areas within Al-Jazira State, located in central Sudan. On Thursday and Friday, RSF operatives seized the town of Al-Alifoun, situated 30 kilometres east of Khartoum. This operation resulted in the displacement of thousands of residents, with allegations of looting, shop raids, and confiscation of civilian vehicles, along with the arrest of dozens of individuals.

The RSF's incursion into Al-Ailafoun followed an attack launched by the Sudanese army, supported by airstrikes, on RSF positions and gatherings in the Soba area, east of Khartoum. According to eyewitnesses who spoke to Sudan Tribune, following their takeover of Al-Ailfoun, the RSF expanded their presence eastward, passing through areas such as Um Dawa Ban, Al-Asilat, and Katranj. They eventually established military outposts in Al-Bashaqra, Wad Rawah, and Al-Aidij within Al-Jazira State. These sources noted that the RSF imposed restrictions on the movement of many citizens seeking to reach areas east of the Nile. Instead, they were compelled to return to the city of Rifa'a. Additionally, several citizens were detained on suspicion of being mobilized to support the army.

Abu Aqla Kikl, the commander of the Al-Jazira State Mobile Forces of the RSF, addressed the situation in a video broadcast on the forces' communication channels. He stated, "We harbour no ill will towards any citizen, and we shall not harm any citizen. Furthermore, we have refrained from looting or occupying their homes." Abu Aqla Kikal founded the self-proclaimed Sudan Shield Forces, which emerged in 2022. He was active in the states of Al-Jazira, Gedaref, and Khartoum, where he criticized the Juba Peace Agreement and the armed groups he advocated for integration into the military establishment. After the outbreak of hostilities between the army and the RSF on April 15, 2023, Kikel went missing for several months. He resurfaced on August 8, 2023, announcing his forces' alignment with the RSF. With the RSF's presence established in the villages east of Al-Jazira State, they have effectively severed a crucial supply route used by the army to transport troops and military provisions to the East Nile locality in Khartoum State. Previously, the army had deployed forces to the capital from Gedaref and Al-Jazira states, using this eastern corridor.

Furthermore, the RSF has gained control over the western road connecting Khartoum and Al-Jazira states, encompassing areas such as Al-Masoudiyah, Al-Nuba, Al-Jadid Al-Thawra, and Jiyad, all the way to Al-Baqair. The ongoing conflict in Sudan, which originated in Khartoum and has expanded to encompass extensive regions in Darfur and Kordofan, is approaching its sixth month, marked by a widening scope of confrontations between the involved factions.

Source: www.SudanTribune.com

SUDANESE ARMY DENIES RSF CONTROL OF NEW AREAS IN AL-JAZEERA STATE

OCTOBER 9, 2023 (KHARTOUM)

Sudanese army spokesman Brigadier General Nabil Abdallah denied on Monday that the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) had taken control of new areas in Al-Jazeera State in central Sudan. On October 7, RSF field commander Abu Aqla Kikl threatened to invade Wad Madani, the capital of Al-Jazeera State, after appearing in a video clip with dozens of soldiers in front of the entrance to the town of Al-Aidij in the eastern Al-Jazeera locality. On Sunday, platforms affiliated with the Sudanese army published a video of soldiers standing in the same location where Abu Aqla Kikel spoke at the entrance to Al-Eidj. Abdallah confirmed to Sudan Tribune on Monday that the RSF does not control the region, saying, “There is no expansion of the militia in Al-Jazeera State.” He further rejected accusations against the Sudanese army of refraining from protecting civilians and added, “The armed forces cannot fail to protect their citizens. The problem is that the rebels are taking refuge in residential neighbourhoods and homes in the capital, but all areas surrounding the military sites enjoy security and stability.”

The army had been blamed for failing to protect civilians in Al-Ailafon of Khartoum state last week when the RSF fighters seized the area. The war in Sudan, which began in Khartoum and expanded to include large areas in Darfur and Kordofan, is about to complete its sixth month. The fight continues in Sudan despite the intense pressure exerted by international and regional parties, other political forces, and civil groups to stop the bloody conflict. Both sides ignore calls for a truce and insist on fighting to achieve a sweeping military victory. The fighting has led to highly complex humanitarian conditions, the displacement of more than five million people internally and externally, and the conflict has caused massive destruction of infrastructure in the country.

Source: www.sudantribune.com

D.R.C

DENIS MUKWEGE, DRC'S NOBEL PRIZE WINNER, ANNOUNCES PRESIDENCY BID

THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE-WINNING DOCTOR WORKED WITH VICTIMS OF RAPE AND BROUGHT ATTENTION TO ROLE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE DURING CONFLICTS.

PUBLISHED ON 2 OCT 2023

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's Denis Mukwege, a doctor who won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work on sexual violence in warfare, has said he will seek the presidency. The 68-year-old Mukwege made the announcement before a crowd of supporters in the DRC capital of Kinshasa on Monday, challenging current President Felix Tshisekedi in the upcoming December elections.

"I agree to be your candidate for president of the republic," he stated, adding that he would focus on issues such as insecurity and political leadership. Mukwege, a surgical gynaecologist who jointly won the Nobel Prize in 2018 with Yazidi activist Nadia Murad for their efforts to combat the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, now hopes to confront problems facing the DRC. The doctor founded Panzi Hospital in eastern DRC during a period of brutal conflict in 1999, treating hundreds of victims of rape and bearing witness to the injuries and diseases inflicted on them. Today, the Central African nation faces deteriorating security, with numerous militia groups, including one known as M23, fighting for control of territory in the country's eastern regions. Bottom of Form President Tshisekedi has struggled to contain the violence during his first term in office, and hastened the withdrawal of a United Nations peacekeeping force in September amid complaints about its ineffectiveness and lack of popularity.

A month earlier, the country's military came under heavy criticism for using lethal force against a planned protest against the UN force, in a harsh crackdown that killed 56 people. In a press release last month, Mukwege said he was "deeply outraged by the shocking images of the massacre" and called for "far-reaching reform" to professionalise the country's security services. Debate over issues such as security and economic hardship have become more acute as the country approaches parliamentary and presidential elections, scheduled to take place on December 20. Opposition leader Martin Fayulu, who came in second behind Tshisekedi in the 2018 elections, also announced over the weekend that he will mount a bid for the presidency.

SOURCE: [AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES](#)

RWANDA

DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA IS NOT A WESTERN IMPOSITION

PUBLISHED ON 25 OCT 2023

On September 19, Rwanda's President Paul Kagame confirmed that he would stand for re-election in his country's August 2024 presidential election, and attempt to win an unprecedented fourth term in [office](#). "I am pleased with the confidence that Rwandans have placed in me. I will always serve them, as long as I can," the 66-year-old was quoted as saying in an interview with *Jeune Afrique*, a French-language news magazine. It is not surprising that Kagame is gearing up for another presidential contest. After all, it appears that, over the years, Rwanda's president has developed an effective blueprint not only for winning elections, but also for doing so with seemingly universal public approval.

Indeed, the former army general, who has led Rwanda since June 2000, won the 2010 and 2017 presidential elections with 93 percent and 98.6 percent of the votes respectively. And before that, in his first presidential election in 2003, he had gained the support of 95.05 percent of Rwandan voters. According to constitutional amendments approved via a referendum in [December 2015](#), Kagame can seek a third seven-year term next year, and has the right to run for further two five-year terms thereafter, meaning he can theoretically remain in power till 2034. On the face of it, seeking another term in office seems to be a reasonable way forward for an incredibly popular and successful head of state.

Rwanda has certainly made significant socioeconomic strides since the 1994 genocide that killed at least 800,000 mainly ethnic Tutsi and moderate Hutu civilians, with many observers describing the country as an African success [story](#). However, this commendable progress does not erase the fact that Kagame is a ruthless despot and a major obstacle to true democratic progress. Indeed, elections in Rwanda have been marred by extensive government crackdowns on free speech, independent media, and political [opposition](#) since the very beginning. And it is highly suspect whether Kagame would have been able to secure the support of almost all Rwandan voters repeatedly over the years if he had faced his rivals in truly free and fair elections. The Rwandan government, under Kagame's guidance, has long engaged in reprehensible lawfare to eliminate those who have sought to challenge Kagame at the polls. Authorities thwarted attempts by presidential hopefuls [Victoire Ingabire Umuhoya](#) and Diane Rwigara to stand against [Kagame](#) in 2010 and 2017 respectively, for example.

Kigali has also reportedly abducted and assassinated dissidents and opposition leaders, both at home and [abroad](#). Suspected state [agents](#) allegedly murdered Patrick Karegeya, the former external intelligence chief and co-founder of the Rwandan National Congress, in [South Africa](#) in January 2014. So, as proven time and again, Kagame is not a true democrat. Thus, it's impossible to determine with any degree of certainty whether a significant percentage of

Rwandans really have “confidence” in his leadership and want to see him run for office once again next year. Rwanda, after all, is not really a democracy. Sure, it has all the elementary structures of a [democracy](#) and it seems to be able to hold elections on a regular [basis](#). Under this democratic facade, however, Kagame is actually ruling Rwanda like his personal fiefdom. His is an undisputedly authoritarian, anti-democratic regime – and one that many other despots in the region look up to.

In April, for example, while hosting Kagame for a two-day visit in Conakry, Guinea’s military ruler, Colonel Mamadi Doumbouya – who overthrew former president Alpha Conde in a September 2021 military [coup](#) – expressed great admiration for Kagame’s de facto dictatorship and even said he “draws inspiration from the Rwandan model” describing it in a presidential statement as an “African reference”. Fast-forward to September 21, it wasn’t surprising to hear Doumbouya criticise democratic governance as a Western imposition at the 78th United Nations General Assembly. “Africa is suffering from a governance model that has been imposed on it ... a model that is good and effective for the West but is difficult to adapt to our realities, our customs and environment,” he told world leaders gathered in [New York](#). This is an old trope that [Kagame](#) himself has long been using to deflect attention away from his atrocious human rights record. At his inauguration ceremony in September 2010, for instance, he slammed “the self-proclaimed critics of Rwanda,” and claimed that the “lack of democracy” was not “Africa’s biggest problem”.

More than a decade later, Kagame is still in power, and is still arguing that Africa does not really have a democracy problem. This, despite unelected military governments being in power in Sudan, Gabon, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and [Guinea](#). And supposedly “democratic leaders” like Kagame himself, who remain in power on the back of bogus elections, presiding over many others. Sure, it is the right and duty of any African leader to condemn and resist any colonial and neo-colonial transgression. This continent has suffered more than enough from Western impositions. But democracy is no longer an exclusively Western model or aspiration. And it is not a Western imposition – in fact, these days’ Western powers seem to prefer dealing with friendly dictators rather than independently minded and democratically elected African leaders. Today, the West is not imposing democracy on unwilling African nations. It is Africans themselves, who long for true democracy on the continent. A study published by Afrobarometer in January [2023](#) revealed that most Africans – including 77 percent of [Guineans](#) – support democracy and would like to see stronger democratic institutions in their countries. In the same study, 74 percent said they reject military governments and 82 percent voiced their dislike for the type of strongman rule with a democratic facade that Kagame has established in Rwanda.

This is the unspoken truth: Africans love democracy and want to see it work. Of course, democracy is not a perfect governance model – no system is. That being said, it’s the ideal vehicle for peaceful socioeconomic development, and Africans know this. The large-scale adoption of democracy across Africa in the 20th century was essentially a homegrown [response](#) to the social injustices inflicted on Africans by colonial and settler [regimes](#). It wasn’t, as Doumbouya sought to underhandedly suggest at the UN, predicated on Western impositions alone. Look at South Africa’s 1995 Freedom Charter – it advocated for a multi-racial democracy as a remedy to apartheid rule. African democracies are laden with locally agreed standards that are also universally acclaimed values ([PDF](#)).

They include principles that Kagame, Doumbouya and many other leaders have routinely chosen to disregard: the unhindered participation of citizens, equality, accountability, the rule of law, political tolerance, free and fair [elections](#), and human rights.

Most Africans – myself included – have simply never experienced the true and expansive fabric of democracy, as African leaders have mostly refused to fully embrace or implement it. In this sense, Kagame’s Rwanda is not an “African success story”, or the “African reference” for successful governance as Doumbouya hypocritically claimed, but a guidebook for newly empowered despots across the continent on how to create an illusion of democracy. Africans, and Rwandans, deserve and demand better. Kagame should reconsider his ill-advised decision to run for office again. Rwanda can become a real African success story – a genuine reference for other African nations – but only if Kagame allows democracy to prosper.

Source: www.aljazeera.com

KENYA

KENYA TO SCRAP VISAS FOR ALL AFRICAN NATIONALS

PRESIDENT WILLIAM RUTO SAYS CHANGE AIMS TO BOOST TRADE AND ALLOW GOODS, SERVICES, PEOPLE AND IDEAS TO MOVE FREELY ACROSS CONTINENT

Visas to visit Kenya are to be scrapped for other African nationals from next year as part of a movement towards opening up trade and travel within the continent.

“By the end of this year, no African will be required to have a visa to come to Kenya,” Kenya’s president, William Ruto, said at a climate change conference in Congo-Brazzaville. Costly and time-consuming visa requirements, as well as high air fares, have long created barriers to inter-African travel for African passport holders; 32 out of 54 African countries still require the nationals of half or more countries on the continent to obtain a visa.

“Our children from this continent should not be locked in borders in Europe and also be locked in borders in Africa,” Ruto said.

Kenya will be the fourth African country to make the change and offer unrestricted travel to Africans, after the Gambia, Benin and Seychelles. Seychelles, an east African island nation that relies heavily on tourism, was the first to do so in 2016. Ruto said the removal of barriers was necessary to facilitate the implementation of the African continental free trade area. “It is time we realise the importance of trading among ourselves and allowing goods, services, people and ideas to move freely across the continent,” he said.

The African Union has doubled down in recent years on its calls for more African countries to remove travel barriers. It launched an “AU passport” in 2016 to allow unrestricted travel for Africans within the continent. However, the rollout has been limited and the passports are mainly used by diplomats and high-ranking officials. African countries have been slow to make changes over concerns around crime and security. However, most countries have been simplifying entry procedures, according to the 2022 Africa visa openness report. The majority of African countries offer visa-free travel to at least five other countries, with more freedom of travel within regional blocs. The number of nations offering e-visas has also more than doubled since 2016. Kenya’s announcement has been met with positive reactions from Africans online, and hopes that other countries will follow suit. “This is a move all presidents on the continent must get behind,” said one social media user. “Free movement within the continent should be a priority.”

Source: www.guardian.co.uk

REMARKS BY A BUCKINGHAM PALACE SPOKESPERSON ON THE FORTHCOMING STATE VISIT TO KENYA

PUBLISHED 11 OCTOBER 2023

The King and Queen will undertake a State Visit to Kenya, from Tuesday 31st October to Friday 3rd November 2023, to celebrate the warm relationship between the two countries and the strong and dynamic partnership they continue to forge. The visit is at the invitation of President Ruto and comes as Kenya prepares to celebrate 60 years of independence. His Majesty's first visit to a Commonwealth nation as King is therefore to the country in which Queen Elizabeth II's reign began, as she acceded to the throne in Kenya in February 1952. Their Majesties will have the opportunity to meet Kenyans even before they depart for the country, when, on October 24th, they host a pre-State Visit reception at Buckingham Palace, for Kenyan diaspora here. This will be an opportunity to celebrate the links between people in both countries. The King and Queen will then travel out to Kenya at the end of the month, visiting Nairobi City County, Mombasa County and surrounding areas. Their Majesties' programme will reflect the ways in which Kenya and the United Kingdom are working together, notably to boost mutual prosperity, tackle climate change, promote youth opportunity and employment, advance sustainable development and create a more stable and secure region.

During the visit, Their Majesties will meet President Ruto and the First Lady as well as other members of the Kenyan Government, UN staff, CEOs, faith leaders, young people, future leaders and Kenyan Marines training with UK Royal Marines. The King will also attend an event to celebrate the life and work of the Nobel Laureate the late Professor Wangari Maathai, together with Wangari's daughter, Wanjira Mathai. The King and Queen's programme will celebrate the close links between the British and Kenyan people in areas such as the creative arts, technology, enterprise, education and innovation. The visit will also acknowledge the more painful aspects of the United Kingdom and Kenya's shared history, including the Emergency (1952-1960). His Majesty will take time during the visit to deepen his understanding of the wrongs suffered in this period by the people of Kenya. Together, Their Majesties will tour a new museum dedicated to Kenya's history and will lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior at Uhuru Gardens, where they will also visit the site of the declaration of Kenya's independence in 1963.

The King and Queen's programme will also include:

- Their Majesties will be greeted in Nairobi with a ceremonial welcome at State House and will each attend bilateral meetings – The King with The President and The Queen with the First Lady, before The President hosts a State Banquet for the Royal couple at State House.
- His Majesty will visit the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON), home of UN Habitat and the UN Environment Programme, to learn more about their work. UNON is the only UN Headquarters in the Commonwealth.

- His Majesty will attend a technology showcase, meeting Kenyan entrepreneurs who are driving forward innovation in the country's important tech sector. Kenya has the third largest start up eco-system in Africa.
- His Majesty will host a reception focussed on Kenya's young people and future leaders across development, trade, media, the creative arts and environmental conservation.
- Their Majesties will visit a Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery, joining British and Kenyan military personnel in an act of remembrance, before hearing about the Commission's recent work to ensure all those who supported Britain's efforts in both World Wars are commemorated.
- The King and Queen will visit Nairobi National Park to witness the vital conservation work being undertaken by the Kenya Wildlife Service, which is integral to Kenya's thriving tourism industry.
- Her Majesty, Patron of the equine welfare charity Brooke, will hear how the charity is working with the Kenya Society for the Protection and Care of Animals to rescue donkeys at risk and promote their welfare.
- The King, as Captain General of the Royal Marines, and The Queen, will visit Mtongwe Naval Base in Mombasa. There, Their Majesties will witness Kenya's newly established Marine Commando Unit, trained by the Royal Marines, demonstrating a covert beach landing, showing defence collaboration in action.
- The Queen will meet survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, learning how they are supported and sharing her own insights from working in this area.
- The King will meet faith leaders from Mombasa's diverse community hearing how they are working together to promote harmony amongst the city's population.

Source: www.un.org

SOMALIA

INSECURITY WORSENS, CIVILIANS PAY THE PRICE

19 OCTOBER 2023 PEACE AND SECURITY

INSECURITY PERSISTS IN SOMALIA, WITH EXTREMIST GROUP AL-SHABAAB AND FIGHTING IN THE LAASCAANOD REGION TAKING A HEAVY TOLL ON CIVILIANS, THE UN ENVOY FOR THE COUNTRY TOLD THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THURSDAY.

Briefing Ambassadors in New York, UN Special Representative for Somalia Catriona Laing, described the country as being at a critical juncture. “Last year, we saw the largest increase in civilian casualties since 2017. Sadly, early data indicate a similar trend in 2023, with 1,289 civilian casualties recorded so far,” she said. The military campaign against Al-Shabaab in central Somalia faced setbacks, though the national army and allied clan militias were able to initially retake significant territory. “In response to its own setbacks, Al-Shabaab has increased the use of 107mm rockets, particularly in Mogadishu. It has also conducted targeted attacks on high profile Somali politicians,” Ms. Laing added.

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

The Special Representative, who also heads the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) highlighted collaboration with the Government through a joint programme on women’s involvement in peacebuilding. These include strengthening the role of women as peacemakers, capacity building to increase the number of women parliamentarians and enhancing legal frameworks against sexual violence. “I recently met with courageous Somali women leaders and heard of their pioneering work to ensure women play a significant role in critical areas, from politics to climate change,” Ms. Laing said.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

The humanitarian situation in the country remains deeply concerning, with nearly four million people facing hunger and about 1.2 million people displaced, the UN envoy said. The situation may deteriorate due to enhanced Deyr rains and the El Niño climate effect, leading to floods that could push hundreds of thousands more into food insecurity. It is crucial to address the root causes of the crisis and integrate climate adaptation, Ms. Laing urged, calling for resources towards the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, which remains severely underfunded. Catriona Laing, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia, briefs the Security Council meeting on the situation in the country.

NATIONAL DEBT

The Special Representative also noted progress in Somalia's pursuit of reaching the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) completion point by December, noting the passing of the national Audit Bill in that regard. The HIPC is a World Bank-International Monetary Fund (IMF) initiative to help poorer countries manage their debt burden and ensure sufficient resources towards key services and development.

Source: www.un.org

AL-SHABAAB STRIKES BACK AT LOCAL ADMINISTRATORS

20TH OCTOBER 2023

From 9 September to 13 October 2023, ACLED records 279 political violence events and 1,752 reported fatalities in Somalia. Political violence has increased by over 80% in Hirshabelle and Galmudug states over the past 10 weeks – since the government officially launched *Operation Black Lion* against al-Shabaab on 6 August – compared to the 10 weeks prior. Bakool region saw the highest number of reported fatalities, with over 800 recorded during the reporting period. Mudug region followed, with 400 reported fatalities. The government's campaign against al-Shabaab centered in Galmudug state – which consists of Mudug and Galgaduud regions – where Somali forces and Habar Gedir militias took control of several locations. The most common event type was battles, with 172 events, followed by explosions/remote violence, with 87 events. ACLED records 32 incidents of bombings by Somali and international forces – United States, Kenya, and the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) – against al-Shabaab positions, with about 10 reportedly affecting civilians.

AL-SHABAAB TARGETS LOCAL ADMINISTRATORS DURING THE COUNTER-INSURGENCY OPERATION

Since August 2022, the Somali federal government has engaged in a counter-insurgency campaign against al-Shabaab. Somali troops achieved some successes, including dislodging the militants from hundreds of locations previously under al-Shabaab's control in Hirshabelle and Galmudug states in central Somalia. Clan militias and local power brokers provided active support to the counter-insurgency, sharing operational information with the government and giving legitimacy to government forces. This collaboration proved to be instrumental in weakening al-Shabaab's support base and enabling the government's advances.

Yet, over the past year, al-Shabaab has turned against Somali state officials in an effort to

discourage support for the campaign. Al-Shabaab militants staged attacks against local officials to either retaliate against those who support the counter-insurgency or intimidate others to prevent further support. This report discusses how these attacks have taken place not only in central Somalia, but have also expanded to southern Somalia and the capital Mogadishu, in a sign that al-Shabaab is conducting such attacks to strategically weaken the government's local support more broadly.

LOCAL OFFICIALS AND AL-SHABAAB COMPETE FOR CLAN SUPPORT

In July 2022, shortly before the beginning of the operation against al-Shabaab, the Hawadle Macawiisley and other clan militias took up arms against the group in Hiiraan. This uprising was a prelude to the government-backed counter-insurgency campaign launched the following month. Alliances with local clans, including the Abgal, Habar Gedir, and Hawadle clan militias,¹ were key to enabling the initial successes of the military operations in Hiiraan, Middle Shabelle, Mudug, and Galgaduud regions. Clan support had long allowed al-Shabaab to retain control over large swathes of territory in central and southern Somalia, and their defection to the government therefore proved essential.

Competition over local governance has been at the heart of the decade-long conflict with al-Shabaab. The militant group has established its own local governance institutions, justice mechanisms, and tax collection to sustain its operations.² In addition to appointing officials within the territories under its control, al-Shabaab also created shadow local administrations known as *Wilaayaats*, installing self-styled governors hailing from influential local constituencies.³ One al-Shabaab *Wilaayaat* consists of two regions. For instance, *Wilaayaat* Jubooyinka consists of Middle Juba and Lower Juba regions. This creates a competitive relationship between the local officials and al-Shabaab by contesting for the support of local clans. As the federal government is weak in providing services across central and southern regions, it relies on the clans' support to mitigate this weakness.⁴

Without support from local power brokers, the Somali federal government found itself unable to reclaim control over territories fallen under al-Shabaab. Local officials in the Somali government assumed a new role in the counter-insurgency, spearheading the mobilization of clan militias in support of the government and visiting the freed locations to boost support among clan leaders.⁵ Some members of parliament, regional governors and other local officials have joined the fight against al-Shabaab.⁶ At the same time, al-Shabaab continues to negotiate with clan leaders to contain local resistance and support the operation.

AL-SHABAAB TURNS AGAINST SOMALI LOCAL OFFICIALS

Confronted with the government's advances, al-Shabaab has responded in various ways. Militants engaged in heavy clashes with government forces and clan-based militias, often staging sophisticated attacks against troops and institutions. The group also began negotiating with various clans to consolidate or regain support among local constituencies in Hirshabelle and Galmudug states, where the government had co-opted local elites away from al-Shabaab. In parallel, the militants also waged violence against the local representatives of the Somali

state that they deemed disloyal or threatening to their power.

Between August 2022 and October 2023, ACLED records 76 instances of violence perpetrated by al-Shabaab against local Somali state officials. Since the beginning of the operation, one of the biggest attacks against local officials occurred on 3 October 2022, when several Hirshabelle local officials and members of the federal parliament were among the 64 people killed by a suicide bomb inside the Lamagalay administration center in Belet Weyne town of Hiiraan region. Overall, most attacks take place in the capital Mogadishu, followed by Hiiraan and Lower Shabelle regions in Hirshabelle state. Even though the counter-insurgency operations against al-Shabaab do not include Mogadishu, local officials in Mogadishu have been soft targets for al-Shabaab because the militants have a high number of operatives within the capital. As the 17 districts in Mogadishu have their own administration services, the lack of a unified administration creates more opportunities for al-Shabaab to target local officials in the city.

When comparing the two phases of the operation, some differences arise. During the first phase of the operation, most of the attacks were concentrated in Mogadishu and central Somalia. The number of attacks against local officials then slightly decreased starting from February 2023 until the beginning of the second phase in August. This might be linked to the political turmoil in Hiiraan, Lower Shabelle, Nugaal, and Gedo regions, which put a pause on the counter-insurgency operation and also gave an opportunity for al-Shabaab to renegotiate with clan leaders to regain the territories that were lost during the operation (*see graph below*).

In contrast to the first year of the counter-insurgency, the number of attacks against local officials began to rise again in August 2023, after the beginning of *Operation Black Lion*. Attacks increased in Somalia's south, and especially in Gedo region (*see map below*). Here al-Shabaab has taken advantage of an ongoing dispute between Jubaland security forces and the Somali National Army (SNA) allied with the former administration in Gedo to target local officials who support the counter-insurgency operation.⁷

Al-Shabaab's attacks against local state officials in Gedo are likely a reaction to an attempt initiated in April 2023 by the local administration to mobilize local clan militias to participate in the military operation against al-Shabaab in the region. The Jubaland state government opposes their mobilization, due to fear of creating a power imbalance between Marehan and Ogaden sub-clans of the Darod clan – which have been feuding for control in Jubaland state for decades.⁸ The majority in Gedo region are Marehan sub-clan and participating in the operation would give the clan militias access to more weapons provided by the federal government.

In September, al-Shabaab shifted their targets to several high-profile officials. On 11 September, a member of the Galmudug state parliament and an official from Dhusamareb municipality were killed in an explosive attack near Ceel Garas town in Galgaduud region. These officials were visiting Ceel Garas town, which the SNA recaptured that same day. Four days later, two members of the federal parliament and the Galmudug state president were injured in a vehicle-borne suicide attack while they were touring liberated areas to show support to the security forces and clan militias. Al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for both attacks.⁹

Through these attacks, al-Shabaab aims to portray itself as a powerful entity capable of striking top government officials while boosting the morale of its existing fighters. Such attacks also have the potential to limit the movement of local officials to administer newly liberated areas, frustrating mobilization among the clans and providing an opportunity for al-Shabaab to regain control of areas in Galgaduud, Hiiraan, and Mudug regions.

The geography of the attacks also reveals al-Shabaab's strategy to weaken the government's local support. In order not to lose its stronghold areas in southern Somalia – where the government plans to expand the operation next – it is likely al-Shabaab will intensify its attacks against local administrators as one of its techniques to retaliate against the government's operations against the group.

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