

This column is written for the **Anglo-Somali Society Journal**, which is published twice a year. If you are interested in receiving the journal, it is free with membership of the Anglo-Somali Society. Please join at <http://www.anglosomalisociety.org.uk>

## Current Affairs in the Horn of Africa (*Autumn 2019*)

by Run Doon

### ***Somalia***

#### *New UN Special Representative for Somalia takes up position*

As reported in the last issue of Run Doon, UN Special Representative for Somalia, Nicholas Haysom, was forced from his position by the Somali Federal Government after he questioned the killing of civilians protesting against the decision to bar Mukhtar Robow from contesting elections. Haysom's expulsion occurred in December 2018 and marked a significant deterioration in the relationship between the Mogadishu administration and the UN, who were left without their most senior diplomat in Somalia for almost six months.

The US diplomat, James Swan, was announced on 30 May as Haysom's replacement, and arrived in Mogadishu to assume that position on 25 June. Swan is no stranger to Somalia, having served, between 1994 and 1996, as a Political Officer to the US Special Envoy to Somalia, followed by a two year stint to 2013 as US Special Representative to Somalia. He has also represented the US government in the Democratic Republic of Congo and as Ambassador to Djibouti from 2008 to 2011.

#### *Drought eases in most areas but heavy rain brings floods and poor security hampers relief*

Climate change has continued to effect the region, with 2019 *Gu* rains (normally April to June) arriving late, but continuing in some areas through the normally dry *Xagaa* (summer) season, and into the normal period of *Dayr* rain (usually September to November). The results have been mixed, with food security in most areas improving gradually since late 2018, but floods claiming lives and causing significant damage and loss of livestock in others.

Exceptionally heavy rain in June in Somaliland

damaged a bridge in Burco and claimed at least three lives in Hargeysa, while heavy rains in Ethiopia prompted a flood warning in September for the Middle and Lower Shabelle areas, and particularly around Jowhar town, as the Shabelle River reached dangerously high levels.

Food insecurity was evident from climate volatility as cereal production in southern Somalia dipped to levels 70% below average for the 2019 harvest; the worst seen since 2011. This has led to steep rises in cereal prices, resulting in areas of substantial hardship even where rainfall has improved.

The humanitarian relief effort has been further threatened by pressure from the Kenyan Government and within the US Administration for the US to impose sanctions on al-Shabaab that replicate those applied to al-Qaeda and Islamic State. Were those demands acceded to, all contact with al-Shabaab would be deemed criminal under US law, including those of humanitarian relief agencies. Humanitarian agencies and their employees could then face heavy penalties, severely hampering delivery of food aid.

In addition, funding for food relief was reported in late August to have reached less than 50% of the US\$1 billion estimated by the UN to be required to address existing needs.

#### *Somalia narrowly fail to advance in football World Cup qualifiers*

In early September, Somalia surprised many fans by beating Zimbabwe 1-0 in Djibouti in the first round of a World Cup qualifying leg in which they were widely expected to fall short. Then, in the return match on 10 September, the Somalia Ocean Stars came agonisingly close to progressing at Zimbabwe's expense, only to lose the Harare match in stoppage time, having led through much of the game. Zimbabwe were very much the fancied team in both matches, having

recently competed in the African Cup of Nations (Afcon), but they have been the focus of considerable controversy in recent months. Firstly, as players protested the fact they had not been paid fully during the Afcon tournament, with that upset compounded when key players were dropped for the first match against Somalia, apparently as punishment for the earlier protest.

Even given those troubles for Zimbabwe, a Somalia victory would have been astonishing. Their strong performance in falling narrowly short was in itself creditable.

### *Kenyan troops accused of destroying telco masts*

In late August, the Somali Federal Government accused Kenyan forces of destroying mobile telephone masts in an attempt to thwart al-Shabaab communications. Hormuud telecommunications company complained that 12 of their masts had been disabled in Gedo Region, effectively cutting off about 4,000 customers.

### *US targets Islamic State in drone attacks*

In April and May, the US resumed drone attacks in Somalia, this time specifically targeting Islamic State fighters in Puntland. Such attacks had briefly appeared to cease after a highly critical March report by Amnesty International, which detailed significant civilian casualties in the attacks.

Islamic State remains very small in Somalia, compared with al-Shabaab, but the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) claimed to have killed the Islamic State deputy leader in Somalia in a targeted April attack, then targeting an IS camp in the Golis mountains on 8 May, which apparently killed 13 people.

### *Al-Shabaab attacks Gof Gadud livestock market, Bay Region*

Fighters likely from al-Shabaab detonated a large bomb in the livestock market of Gof-Gadud village in the Bay Region, killing eight in May. All the reported casualties were civilians attending the market to buy or sell livestock. Although al-Shabaab did not immediately claim responsibility for the attack, reports indicate that it was undertaken in retribution for refusal by

market traders to pay the 'tax' demanded by the militant group.

### *Dohar and Mogadishu agree terms for new port in Hobyo while Qatar denies involvement in Puntland attack*

The Federal Somali and Qatari governments agreed in August to construct a new port facility in the ancient coastal city of Hobyo. Port development has long been an ambition for authorities in the area, with the Himan and Heeb regional state determined to begin construction before they agreed to become part of the Galmudug state.

The deal reflects the Federal Government's closeness to Qatar, who remain bitterly divided from Gulf neighbours Saudi Arabia and UAE, each of whom has also been actively building relations with Somali governments. While the Federal Government officially remains neutral in the dispute, Regional Member States and Somaliland are all closely aligned with the Saudi/Emirati faction. UAE in particular have a tense relationship with Mogadishu, in part because of their deal with Somaliland to invest US\$400 million to develop Berbera port as part of a 30-year concession.

In July, the New York Times had added to tensions with a report based on an audio recording that seemed to show a Qatari businessman claiming that an attack in Boosaaso, Puntland, had been conducted "to advance Qatar's interests by driving out its rival, the UAE". That sensational claim was unsurprisingly and immediately denied by Doha and Mogadishu.

The attack to which the NY Times referred took place in May and involved a bomb blast near the court premises in Boosaaso, which injured at least ten. An Islamic State-affiliated group claimed responsibility.

## **Mogadishu**

### *USAID opens 'permanent' office in Mogadishu*

In 2018, the US establish a permanent diplomatic mission in Mogadishu; a status that falls short of

that of an embassy, though is a significant advance on the US presence in Somalia since the early 1990s. This strengthening of relations with the Somali Federal Government was further enhanced when USAID opened their own permanent Mogadishu office in June. The US is Somalia's largest donor, contributing about US\$670 million in the past year and remains a strong supporter of the Federal Government, often placing them at odds with Federal Member States.

### *Al-Shabaab attacks*

In the six months to September 2019, Mogadishu remained the primary target of al-Shabaab, with a series of attacks.

On 28 February, in the last issue of Run Doon, we reported a complex attack on the Maka al-Mukarama Hotel, which claimed 25 lives. That report was based on al-Shabaab claims on the day to have targeted the hotel, which they had attacked before - notably in 2015. In a bizarre twist that became apparent later, they in fact attacked the neighbouring two-storey building rather than the hotel. Whether that was a deliberate tactic or a mistake is unclear, though al-Shabaab do not normally attack mixed business targets. Having entered the building, the fighters held out for a number of hours, under siege from security forces. Al-Shabaab erroneously claimed to have killed 45 government officials in the hotel and no civilians. In truth, the attack killed 25 people, of whom all but two were civilians, and 21 were women.

Three weeks later, at least 15 people, including the Deputy Minister of Labour, were killed in an attack on the Ministry offices, and a few days after that, on 28 March, a further 15 were killed in an attack on a hotel and restaurants on the main Maka al Mukarama thoroughfare, when a vehicle-borne device was detonated.

April was relatively quiet with respect to attacks, but 22 May saw nine die when another vehicle bomb was detonated near a checkpoint in the Daljirka area, and a double car bomb attack on 15 June claimed a further eight lives. That attack involved two explosions: the first at a checkpoint outside Villa Somalia, while the second followed shortly afterwards at a checkpoint near the

airport. A second attack near the airport was mounted on 22 July and claimed 17 lives when a suicide bomber drove his vehicle into a busy checkpoint before the explosives detonated.

Three days later, a suicide bomber was able to enter a hall within the Benadir authority headquarters, where a meeting involving the city Mayor was taking place. Once inside, the attacker detonated his device, killing eleven people and seriously injuring Mayor Abdirahman Omar Osman, known to many as Injineer Yariisow. The Mayor's injuries were critical, and he was flown to Qatar for treatment, where he died a week later. Al-Shabaab rapidly claimed responsibility for the attack, noting that the intended target was UN Special Representative, James Swan, who had indeed been at the venue just prior to the blast. However, he was not present by the time the attack took place.

Recent months have seen an increase in the pattern of vehicle-borne explosives being used by suicide bombers to target checkpoints in the city. That appeared to continue in early September, when three were killed at a security check on the outskirts of the city, when the vehicle approaching from Afgooye was stopped. The occupants were able to leave the vehicle and started a gunfight before they detonated the vehicle. However, in that case, security officials claimed the attack had been intended for the central city.

### *Security forces kill six civilians as riots follow protests*

Security forces shot a Mogadishu tuk-tuk driver and his passenger dead in the early hours in mid-April, sparking protests in the Bakara Market area. The protests degenerated as protestors started throwing stones at the police and setting tyres alight, with the police responding by opening fire. A further four people were killed in the ensuing violence.

Security personnel have killed more than 20 Mogadishu tuk-tuk drivers in recent years, with the tuk-tuk transport industry now a key economic sector. With many streets closed to larger vehicles in an effort to improve security, tuk-tuks are the favoured means of transport for many, and account directly or indirectly for the

livelihoods of an estimated 20,000 people, most of whom are young. Videos of police mistreatment of drivers are frequently circulated online, including extortion and the fatal shooting of the driver and passenger that prompted the protests.

## ***Jubaland***

### *Al-Shabaab lays siege to Kismayo hotel, kills 26*

At least four al-Shabaab fighters attacked the Asasey Hotel, first detonating a car bomb at the gate, then storming the compound. Elders and government officials were meeting in the hotel at the time, which was popular with visitors. In the end, the death toll of 26 included a regional presidential candidate and politicians, as well as the well-known online personality Hodan Nalayeh and her husband.

Nalayeh, a Canadian citizen and founder of Integration TV, was pregnant at the time of the attack, and was renowned for her efforts to present positive stories from around the Somali region. She was an energetic proponent of reconciliation and urged Somalis to appreciate “the beautiful blessings we have”.

Canadian PM, Justin Trudeau, condemned the attack as “heinous”; a view echoed by many in Somalia and beyond in the period following.

### *Ahmed Madobe re-elected President*

Ahmed Mohamed Islam ‘Madobe’ won re-election for a further four-year term as Jubaland President on 22 August, securing 56 of the 74 votes cast by regional MPs. The only woman to contest the election, Andab Mohamed Dahir, came second with 17 votes.

The vote was controversial, with some opposition politicians complaining that the electoral commission was not impartial, and one group declaring their own candidate, Abdirashid Mohamed Hidig, the rightful winner. Security concerns had also prompted the UN Special Representative, James Swan, to join the Federal Government in calling for a delay to the poll.

## ***Puntland***

### *Civilians lynched by local militia in revenge for al-Shabaab attack in Galkayo*

Nine civilians were executed in June by armed locals in Galkayo in retaliation for an attack in which al-Shabaab fighters killed a policeman. The executions targeted a Rahanweyn clan group, following the belief that many of that clan are al-Shabaab members. Members of the police forces in Galkayo condemned the killings, noting that they appeared to be motivated by unsubstantiated assumptions of clan loyalty. The victims were rounded up from their homes shortly after the policeman was killed, and executed as a group. No evidence was offered of any links with al-Shabaab.

### *Death sentences upheld in Galkayo rape case*

As reported in the last edition of Run Doon, two rape cases in quick succession in the city of Galkayo caused outrage in Puntland. Both involved young girls and the second ended with the murder of the 12-year-old victim. In both cases the Puntland courts passed death sentences, with the second going to the Puntland Supreme Court, who agreed in August to uphold the sentence. Originally, ten men were arrested, with three eventually convicted. The case was the first in the region to rely on DNA evidence.

## ***Somaliland***

### *Burco restaurant closed for allowing men and women to eat together*

Warsan Restaurant, an Ethiopian eatery in the city of Burco, was forcibly closed and the manager and staff arrested on 31 August by police for allowing men and women to eat in unsegregated dining areas. The Mayor of Burco, Mohamed Yusuf Abdirahman, retrospectively announced a ban on the practice, although there is no Somaliland law that prohibits it.

The insistence that men and women be segregated is not traditional in Somali culture, although many restaurants do offer separate dining areas if patrons wish to use them. The decision marks a significant tightening in

conservative interpretations of Islamic law in that regard and Burco is leading the process in Somaliland, having already banned music in public places, including hotels, and men and women are prohibited from attending wedding ceremonies together.

The Warsan staff who were detained - all of them Ethiopian nationals - were released shortly afterwards, and the restaurant is to be allowed to reopen, providing they adhere to the segregation policy.

### *Press harassment continues in Somaliland*

The Horyaal television station was forcibly shut by the Somaliland government on 6 September, apparently for broadcasting a story about Somali women who chew *qaad*. The owner, Mohamed Osman Mire Sayid, was arrested at his home the following morning.

In June, both Horyaal TV and Eryal TV were forced off the air for broadcasting ‘propaganda’ that the government claimed threatened national security. Although the bans were rescinded shortly afterwards, the Director of Eryal, a journalist and a camera operator were all arrested on 30 July at Hargeisa University, when they were interviewing students who complained of government corruption. The journalist and camera operator were released after a few hours, but the Director was held for another day for ‘further investigation’. Although none of those arrested were held for long, the footage they had recorded was deleted and they were warned not to report such stories.

In early September, a Hargeysa court ordered local internet service providers to block the popular outlet Hadhwanaag News. The judgement arose from action taken by the government in the wake of a story by the website which accused the Governor of Somaliland’s central bank of corruption. The Governor denies any wrongdoing, though the court decision was not based on evidence that corroborated his innocence.

This pattern of arbitrary and sometimes blatantly politically-motivated media harassment is unfortunately long-standing in Somaliland, and tarnishes an otherwise mostly impressive record.

### *Somaliland elections face further delays*

Some progress has been made in resolving the stand-off between the Somaliland Government and the largest opposition party, Waddani, over the composition of the electoral commission. The two parties reached agreement some time ago that the commission would be increased from seven members to nine, with the additional two members to be nominated by the two opposition parties. However, agreement was not reached until September as to whether the extra members would be added before or after now overdue elections for the lower house of parliament and local councils.

With that dispute now resolved in favour of the expansion occurring after the next election, considerable ground remains to be covered as to the geographic distribution of parliamentary seats and a number of other issues.

Parliamentary elections are long overdue, with MPs now having retained their seats since the last election in 2005 without any renewed popular mandate. It is, however, unclear when elections might be held.

### *12th Hargeysa International Book Fair again a success*

The 2019 Hargeysa International Book Fair took place between 20 and 25 July, with Egypt this year’s guest country and ‘coexistence’ the theme. The festival is East Africa’s largest literary event and this year hosted guests from 23 countries, as well as over 150 Somaliland panellists, artists, writers and others and large local crowds in attendance. The audience each year is estimated to be in excess of 10,000 people.

The UK site Book Brunch considers the Fair to be “an astonishing revival of commercial and cultural activity” in Somaliland (see <http://www.bookbrunch.co.uk/page/free-article/the-horn-of-africas-best-kept-cultural-secret/>), and it attracts considerable support from supporters locally and internationally.

The success of the Hargeysa International Book Fair has spawned similar events elsewhere in the Somali Horn, with the 3rd Kismayo Book Fair taking place between 5 and 7 July; the Garoowe Book Fair between 23 and 25 July and the 5th

Mogadishu Book Fair running from 21 to 25 August 2019.

*British PM's partner refused entry to US after Somaliland visit*

Carrie Symonds, the partner of British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, was refused a visa to the US in August because she had visited Somaliland in 2018 with anti-FGM campaigner Nimko Ali. Somaliland is considered by the US to be part of Somalia, which is subject to the travel ban introduced by President Donald Trump.

While foreigners who have visited Hargeysa are usually able to secure a US visa waiver after a short interview, UK media reported that Ms Symonds had not been successful with her application, ascribing the refusal to her visit last year to "war-torn Somalia". That description prompted an outcry from Somalilanders pointing out that the territory is not, in fact, conflict-ridden and unilaterally claims independence from Somalia.