

Gaalkacyo Conflict: Drivers, Contributors and Potential Solutions



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Cover: Top view of Gaalkacyo city

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Executive Summary

- Gaalkacyo has been a divided city since 1993, however, the renewed conflict is fundamentally driven by a struggle for land and resources and was triggered by the implementation of the federal system.
- The lack of genuine reconciliation, two administrations within the city, negative perceptions of each other among the two communities, weak central authority, and unhelpful media coverage have contributed to the continuation of the conflict.
- A joint non-political commission derived from city stakeholders should be established to start genuine discussions on finding a durable solution. Alongside this commission, the Puntland and Galmudug administrations should create a joint security task force to maintain peace.
- There are three possible options for managing the Gaalkayo conflict. They include designating Gaalkacyo a federally-administered city; a joint or agreed single administration for the city; dividing Gaalkacyo and the entire Mudug region into two regions. The study and analysis of these three options will be fundamental to solving the constitutional, land and resource-based conflicts.
- There should be no impunity for individuals fueling or allowing the continuance of the Gaalkacyo conflict. They should be held accountable for their actions. The killing and displacement of civilian population is a serious violation of national and international humanitarian law. The UN should take a leading role in the investigation of violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed in Gaalkacyo.

Background

Gaalkacyo, a city located in central Somalia, is divided between the Puntland and Galmudug administrations. The north side of the city is administered by Puntland while the south is controlled by Galmudug. On 4 June 1993, the then leaders of the Somali National Alliance (SNA), the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) and the Somali National Democratic Union (SNDU), General Mohamed Farah Aidid, Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed and Ali Ismail Abdi-Giir, signed an agreement in Mogadishu to solve a conflict that had devastated the city. Community elders and intellectuals from both sides of the divide also played a key role in these negotiations.

Following this agreement, the city experienced relative stability for almost two decades with no major conflicts until 22 November 2015 when a violent conflict broke out between the Puntland and Galmudug forces. This conflict, which lasted until December 2015, left at least 20 people dead and 120 others injured. Over 90,000 of the city's residents were also displaced.¹

A peace agreement was signed on 2 December between the Puntland and Galmudug administrations. It was witnessed by the Prime Minister of the Federal Government of Somalia, the leaders of the Jubaland and South West administrations, community elders and delegations from the United Nations, the European Union (EU) and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD).² Less than a year later, on 7 October 2016, another violent conflict broke out in the city leaving at least 45 people dead and

162 people injured. The conflict also displaced more than 85,000 of the city's residents.³

On 1 November 2016, the leaders of Puntland and Galmudug, Abdiweli Mohamed Ali and Abdikarim Hussein Guled, signed a ceasefire agreement in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which committed them to establishing a committee to find a solution to the conflict. However, this agreement was not implemented and the clashes continued. On 18 November, the same leaders met in Gaalkacyo and reached a cease fire agreement brokered by Prime Minister Omar Abdirashid Ali that established a two-kilometer-wide buffer zone between their fighters stationed in the city.

Following this agreement, an 18-member joint committee of Puntland and Galmudug was established with the responsibility of ensuring the implementation of the ceasefire and the building of confidence between the two sides. An international ceasefire team led by IGAD and supported by the UN was also deployed to Gaalkacyo to work with the joint committee and monitor the implementation.⁴

Methodology

The field research was conducted in the south and north of Gaalkacyo, Cadaado, Galdogob and Garoowe from November 3-13, 2016. Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS) researchers traveled to the two sides of Gaalkacyo, met and interviewed all segments of the society and captured their views on the fundamental drivers, contributing factors and potential solutions. Fieldwork in Cadaado and Garoowe was important in this research as some of Gaalkacyo's traditional elders, intellectuals and political lead-

¹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) report, <http://reliefweb.int/report/somalia/somalia-flash-update-humanitarian-impact-fighting-gaalkacyo-8-december-2015>

² UN, EU, AMISOM, IGAD welcome the signing of the Gaalkacyo agreement between Puntland and Galmudug, <https://unsom.unmissions.org/un-eu-amisom-igad-welcome-signing-gaalkacyo-agreement-between-puntland-and-galmudug>

³ "Displacement continues amid recurrent clashes in north-central Somalia – UN", <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=55539#.WD-YvjH3R0>

⁴ UNSOM Press Release on International Ceasefire Deployed to Gaalkacyo, <https://unsom.unmissions.org/international-ceasefire-team-deployed-gaalkacyo-support-implementation-agreement-reached-presidents>

ers were already there for the selection of the Lower House members of the next Somali Federal Parliament. The team also paid a two-day visit to Galdogob for observation and interviews.

During the fieldwork, the research team conducted a number of interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). In all locations, a total of 32 individuals were interviewed. They included politicians, clan elders, business people, women representatives, religious scholars, academics, youth as well as media representatives. Five separate FGDs were conducted with the youth, academics, clan elders and women.

The researchers also had many informal discussions with ordinary civilians in Gaalkacyo and other towns and cities visited. HIPS researchers were in Gaalkacyo on 6 November when heavy fighting broke out between the Puntland and Galmudug armies, which caused the deaths of more than 26 people and injuries to more than 50 others.

Root Causes of the Conflict

The conflict in Gaalkacyo is complex and multifaceted. It involves land and resources. The federal system and the formation of Galmudug, which consists of Galgaduud and half of the Mudug region, escalated the situation even further. The fight for land and territory and the demand for resource sharing became a priority after the formation of Galmudug on 4 July 2015.

Land

The competition for land in Gaalkacyo has historical roots. Territorial expansion of clans on both sides of Gaalkacyo and its environs has existed for more than a century. It is important to note that the Daarood clans in Mudug (particularly the Majeerteen and the Leelkase) and Hawiye clans (particularly the Sacad of Habargidir) share a long border in the Mudug region. The conflict in the countryside is about access to water and grazing lands and in Gaalkacyo it is about managing territory and resources. Both

the Puntland and Galmudug regional administrations accuse one another of land grabbing and territorial expansion.

Land was a cause of conflict in Mudug before and after Somalia's independence. The Italian colony demarcated clan-based lines known as "Tomaselli" line as a solution to land based conflicts. All past Somali governments including the military government failed to solve the land-based conflict in the region – although Gaalkacyo was under one administration. After the fall of the military regime and the subsequent civil war, the land-related clan conflicts instigated fierce fighting in and around Gaalkacyo, which resulted in the loss of many lives and the displacement of the city's population.

Puntland's construction of a new road and Galmudug's resistance to the road construction ignited the November 2015 conflict. The more recent October 2016 hostilities were related to a dispute over the construction of a livestock market that Puntland started to build in the Garsoor neighborhood of Gaalkacyo. These are locations which HIPS researchers in north Gaalkacyo were able to visit in November 2016. This shows that the trigger of the two major conflicts in Gaalkacyo in 2015 and 2016 was land based.

Although Gaalkacyo was the center of the recent conflict, the competition for land extends Mudug-wide. For example, those interviewed in Puntland argue that clan boundaries in the countryside are known to all communities in the region. Nevertheless, since the creation of Galmudug, there has been an intensive drive by the Sacad clan to grab land in the west of Mudug – land that they argue is known to belong to the Majeerteen and Leelkase clans.

Those interviewed also claim that communities from Puntland do not cross the known boundary towards the south. They further argue that members of the Galmudug community do not respect boundaries and trespass into Puntland territory, committing assassinations and escap-

ing back to Galmudug. However, the administration in Galmudug denies this and argues that Puntland is the one expanding to their territory. A politician interviewed by HIPS researchers contended that Puntland wants to control the entire city of Gaalkacyo.

Another area of contest is the management of the city's checkpoints. Galmudug controls the south checkpoint and Puntland the north checkpoint. However, Puntland placed a checkpoint at their 'border' with Galmudug, citing security concerns. This checkpoint, they argue, is needed to monitor the movement of vehicles and people to prevent Al-Shabaab attacks against Puntland.

Resources

The fight for resources, which has a strong link with the city's infrastructure, is the second major driver of the conflict. The majority of the schools, hospitals and military bases are located in the Puntland-controlled part of Gaalkacyo. Very few are in Galmudug's control. A majority of those interviewed in Galmudug view this as marginalization and injustice caused by the former colonial powers and past Somali governments.

The majority of those interviewed in Galmudug believe that national government built infrastructure, including the airport, belongs to all residents of the city and demand equal use of these public premises. They also accuse Puntland of selling military and police camps and industries to private individuals.

Puntland officials do not deny that most public premises are located on their side of the city. However, they state that these facilities are used for public service and are open to all Gaalkacyo residents regardless of their clan affiliation. They further argue that Puntland is solely responsible for managing public infrastructure under its control, in the same way Galmudug manages its public premises.

Due to weak federal government institutions, Somalia's regional administrations control all revenue sources and utilize public facilities. The management of Gaalkacyo airport has been in the hands of the Majeerteen clan of Puntland since 1993 following the tripartite agreement between Aidid, Abdullahi Yusuf, and Ali Ismail. The formation of ex-Galmudug in 2006, and the more recent Galmudug, amplified its demand to share airport revenues with Puntland, with representatives arguing that the airport lies on Galmudug land. Puntland representatives dispute Galmudug's argument, saying they assumed control of the airport following Aidid and Abdullahi Yusuf's agreement. They contend that they have the right to manage the airport as they have done for the past 23 years.

Federal System

Since the formation of Galmudug in mid-2015, the conflict in Gaalkacyo has escalated. It could be argued that its formation amplified the territorial and resource disputes of the city. The Galmudug administration faces both legal and constitutional challenges. Article 49 (6) of the Somali Federal Provisional Constitution demands the union of two or more regions to form a state. The Mudug region consists of five districts. While Gaalkacyo district is administered by both regional authorities, Puntland and Galmudug each control two districts. Administratively, the region is divided into two administrations. This leaves Galmudug controlling one and a half region – short of the constitutionally required two regions. However, Galmudug claims more territory than Puntland in the Mudug region.

Those we interviewed in Galmudug, politicians and citizens alike, want Galmudug to administer the entire Mudug region, including Galdogob and Jariiban districts, the home-bases of Abdullahi Yusuf and Ali Ismail who signed the Gaalkacyo accord with Aidid. Such coveting became more obvious when the Galmudug constitution delimited the administration's boundary to Burtinle, a Puntland city over 100 kilometers

away from Gaalkacyo. When outcry from Puntland and pushback from the international community intensified, Galmudug amended its constitution and delimited its boundary to where the Puntland administration ends.

Puntland, on the other hand, was established in 1998 before Somalia adopted the federal system of government and does not have the legal challenges [two regions] Galmudug is facing. Puntland maintains control of the two districts of Galdogob and Jariiban and contends that Galmudug only controls Hobyso considering Xarardheere is under Al-Shabaab control. Puntland further asserts that Galmudug's desire to administer the entire Mudug region is a manifest aggression and a major contributor in the recent conflict. Given the divergent views and seriousness of the strained relations, genuine reconciliation and dialogue over the issue and clarification of the status of Mudug in a federal Somalia are important factors when seeking solutions for Gaalkacyo's recurrent conflicts.

Contributing Causes

While there are fundamental drivers of Gaalkacyo conflicts, there are several other contributing factors for the continuing crisis. They include weak national government, two different administrations in the city, negative perceptions, the media, historical grievances, lack of genuine reconciliation, armed militias and civilians and the recent American airstrike. The accumulation of all these contributing factors escalated the crisis in Gaalkacyo.

Weak Central Authority

During the colonial period and three decades of national government rule in pre-1991 Somalia, Gaalkacyo had a single authority. This is evidence of how a strong central government can contribute to the peace and stability of Gaalkacyo. The transitional governments formed since 2000 were not able to extend their writ to the regions. The current federal govern-

ment has also been unable to find a lasting solution to the crisis in Gaalkacyo. In Puntland, politicians and citizens alike accuse the presidency of the federal government of colluding with Galmudug in the Gaalkacyo conflict.

A majority of those interviewed quote the President of the Federal Government, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, stating in a speech, "Before the formation of Galmudug, Gaalkacyo did not have one-tenth of its current appearance (development)."⁵ On the contrary, they argue that Puntland-controlled Gaalkacyo has three-quarters of the city and is well invested in terms of public and private infrastructure. They interpret the president's words as evidence that he denies their rights as legitimate residents of Gaalkacyo and that he recognizes the entire city under the full control of the Galmudug authority.

Different Administrations

Another contributing factor of the conflict is the two different administrations of the Mudug region. The region has two governors, Puntland and Galmudug. The city of Gaalkacyo also has two district commissioners and councils. This plays a part in the continuation of the conflict because it intensifies the struggle for land and tax revenue. Many interviewees on both sides believe that peace would prevail in the city if Gaalkacyo came under one administration.

Perceptions

Significant numbers of residents of the north and the south of Gaalkacyo have negative perceptions of each other. Many Puntland residents believe that south Gaalkacyo is chaotic – lacking any law and order, allowing Al-Shabaab to plan attacks against the north. They cite the example of the last terrorist attack on the north, which took place on 21 August 2016 and claimed the

⁵ The speech (in Somali) can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPzjwp116lw>

lives of at least 20 people and injured 30 more.⁶ They argue these attacks were planned in south Gaalkacyo. Furthermore, many in north Gaalkacyo claim that the assassinations of prominent business people, elders, and religious scholars were masterminded in south Gaalkacyo, which, they perceive serves as a safe haven for the culprits.

Those interviewed on the Galmudug side had similar negative perceptions. They believe that Puntland despises them and does not want south Gaalkacyo to have a functioning administration; that they call south Gaalkacyo “Baraxley”, which is a derogatory term; that they support Ahlu Sunna Wal Jamaac’a (ASWJ) in weakening Galmudug; that they refused to negotiate with Galmudug delegates as representatives from the Galmudug authority; and they always portray south Gaalkacyo as a highly insecure place.

The interaction between the dominant clans in Gaalkacyo is very limited. There is a perception that whoever crosses to the other side will be killed. They call it “Isbaaro waa Qalbi”, meaning a psychological barrier exists between the two communities. These negative perceptions accompanied by the lack of genuine reconciliation constitute some of the major contributions to the crisis in the city.

Media

The media also plays a major role in the Gaalkacyo conflict. Some of those interviewed, especially local media representatives, believe that the media fuels the conflicts by promoting the propaganda of the two sides and disseminating negative perceptions and accusations. Local radios interview individuals with strong views and who use belligerent and inflammatory language which further amplifies the hostilities. A more responsible media could contribute positively to the discussion and debate on Gaalkacyo

and advance solutions and peace initiatives as there had been no genuine reconciliation in Gaalkacyo. Without reconciliation, historical grievances among communities cannot be forgotten.

Other Contributing Causes

Additionally, there were no programs in Somalia aimed at disarming the civilian population. As a result, heavily armed civilians have been active participants in the conflict.

Moreover, many of those interviewed in Galmudug accuse Puntland of misleading US forces in the region, causing the American airstrike against Galmudug forces in late September 2016, resulting in 22 deaths and many injuries.⁷

All these factors have played a part in the continuation of the Gaalkacyo conflict and any solutions should take into consideration such drivers, contributors, and triggers.

Potential Solutions for Gaalkacyo

Gaalkacyo needs both temporary and permanent solutions. In the short term, the city needs to be peaceful through a negotiated settlement.

This paper proposes the formation of a community-led joint commission mandated to start genuine discussions and negotiations to find a lasting solution. Traditional elders, religious scholars, the business community and intellectuals from both sides of the divide should take part in the process. Highly respected and credible traditional elders and religious scholars from neighboring regions should also support and take an active role in the Gaalkacyo peace process.

⁶ “Al-Shabaab claims double suicide bombing in Somalia” <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/08/al-shabab-claims-responsibility-somalia-bombing-160821090836552.html>

⁷ “U.S. accused of killing 22 in misdirected Somalia air strike” <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-security-idUSKCN11Y0UC>

Genuine non-political discussions and negotiations would facilitate maintaining the current relative stability, advance social co-existence, if not integration, the revival of social confidence and the reduction of negative perceptions.

The Puntland and Galmudug administrations should then implement the comprehensive agreements of the joint peace commission. The Federal Government and members of the international community should also support and put more pressure on the two administrations in the implementation of such peace accord.

Furthermore, the Puntland and Galmudug authorities should form a joint security task force responsible for collaborating on the city's security. Such a joint security strategy would be key in advancing peace in Gaalkacyo. The security of the city would also come under the authority of this joint security force including controlling all checkpoints in the city. The Federal Government and members of the international community should offer support in the training, logistics and financing of these security forces.

Finally, there should be no impunity for individuals fueling or allowing the festering of the conflict. They should be held accountable for their actions. The killing and displacement of civilians is a serious violation of national law and international humanitarian law. The UN should take a leading role in the investigation of violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed in Gaalkacyo.

In the long-term, there are three options for a permanent solution to the Gaalkacyo conflict.

The first is to constitute Gaalkacyo as a federally-administered city. The second solution could be dividing Mudug into two regions including Gaalkacyo city. The final option is a genuine negotiation and agreement between Puntland and Galmudug, authorizing one administration to be responsible for administering the entire city or forming a joint administration.

Each option has its own merits and limitations.

Option One: Federally-Administered City

In this option, the Federal Government would handle the city administration, security, justice and management of customs and the airport. This would solve the struggle for power and resources between the two competing regional authorities. Since the tension was escalated by the implementation of the federal system, engaging in genuine dialogue and/or making the city a federal territory would be the appropriate means to de-escalate the tension as well as bring peace and development to the city.

Some federal governments in the region have similar arrangements. Closer to home is Dire Dawa in Ethiopia, which is a federally-administered city. Dire Dawa became a federal territory because Ethiopia's government deems it cosmopolitan since it is shared by the Somalis, the Oromo, and the Amhara. Gaalkacyo has some similar characteristics and designating it as a federally-administered city may be an option for its future administration.

This option will only be possible if the incoming leadership of the Federal Government earns the trust of the communities in Gaalkacyo in order to defuse the mistrust expressed by Gaalkacyo residents towards the government.

Placing Gaalkacyo under the national government's jurisdiction, however, has its own limitations and challenges. The major challenge is constitutional. If this route is taken, the provisional constitution should be amended. The federal parliament should find ways to synchronize Galmudug's legal status or standing with the relevant clauses of the provisional constitution. The constitution should also give the Federal Government the authority to administer Gaalkacyo city. Both administrations, Puntland and Galmudug, should also have to consent to such arrangement. There also needs to be a functioning, credible national government in Mogadishu, which has not happened as yet.

Option Two: Divide Mudug Into Two Regions

The second option is the division of Mudug into two regions. Each region will have two districts under its territory. In this option, Gaalkacyo would be divided into two districts with a clear demarcation. This arrangement has three advantages. First, the aspirations of Galmudug are met, removing constitutional challenges for its administration. Second, Puntland's concern of Galmudug diffusion to its territory is solved. Finally, dividing the city into two distinct parts may bring the resource contest in the city to an end.

To make this option practical, the Boundaries and Federation Commission (BFC) would need to conduct a geographical study and delimitation on Mudug region. Furthermore, the constitution should be amended, and the new arrangement should be constitutionally legitimized. The major challenge to the implementation of this option will, however, be the demands of other Somali regions, which may also want to be divided into two or more. Authorities should, however, consider all the potential consequences (both positive and negative) of this option.

Option Three: Puntland and Galmudug Negotiated Agreement

The third option is a genuine discussion among Puntland and Galmudug administrations and communities. There could be two outcomes of such a discussion. The first is to put the city under one administration, Puntland or Galmudug, ensuring that all Gaalkacyo residents get access to all public services and proportionally share developmental projects. The second result of such negotiations could be the formation of a joint administration. This was a preferred option for Galmudug interviewees but the least favored solution for those from Puntland.

In this option, a joint representative administration would be formed in the city. However, changing the two community's negative perceptions, integration of communities and the political will of the two administrations to share the city's administration would be prerequisites for the adoption of this option.

Conclusion

Gaalkacyo is the only divided city with two different administrations in Somalia. A peaceful solution to the Gaalkacyo conflict could contribute to a peaceful Somalia. Therefore, the careful study, analysis and peaceful resolution of this conflict should not be underestimated. If the conflict in Gaalkacyo continues while Somalia is experiencing a new governance model, this may set a bad precedent and other conflicts could be unfortunately Gaalkacyo-lized. Finding a solution to the Gaalkacyo crisis should be a top priority for Somalia's upcoming federal leadership and the leadership of the two administrations.

An impartial government and an effective parliament, which can accelerate the necessary constitutional review process, will make Gaalkacyo's solution more realistic and achievable. The future of Gaalkacyo can only be solved through constitutional arrangements and genuine political will. All key political stakeholders should weigh in and consent to the options for Gaalkacyo's future. Community leaders should also work hard to integrate the community and advance dialogue and peaceful messages.

Policy Considerations

- A community-led joint commission should be formed to start comprehensive discussions and negotiations to find a lasting solution to the conflict. Highly respected and credible traditional elders and religious scholars from neighboring regions should support and take an active role in the Gaalkacyo peace process.
- Galmudug and Puntland leaders should realize that Gaalkacyo residents' best interests are served if they show good leadership and discharge their national, citizenry-oriented leadership obligations.
- The two administrations should recognize that cooperation and coordination in the security, political and developmental sectors could make their administrations better and stronger. In order to reduce tension and hostilities, political leaders on both sides should also avoid accusations, counter-accusations and other negative propaganda that can create tensions and hostilities.
- Finding a lasting solution to the Gaalkacyo crisis should be a top priority for the incoming federal government.
- Somalia's new federal parliament, both the upper and lower houses, should initiate and advance a constitutional discussion of the Gaalkacyo conflict and the implications of the options presented.
- Media outlets – local radios and websites – should be responsible in their coverage of the Gaalkacyo conflict and should avoid fanning the flames of war. The media should take a peacemaking role instead and develop programs and messages that enhance dialogue and positive images.
- The UN, in consultation with the Somali Federal Government, should take a leading role in monitoring and the investigation of violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed in Gaalkacyo.
- The international community should support the Federal Government, Puntland, and Galmudug in their efforts to resolve the repeated conflicts in Gaalkacyo.

