

Armed Conflict

**16**

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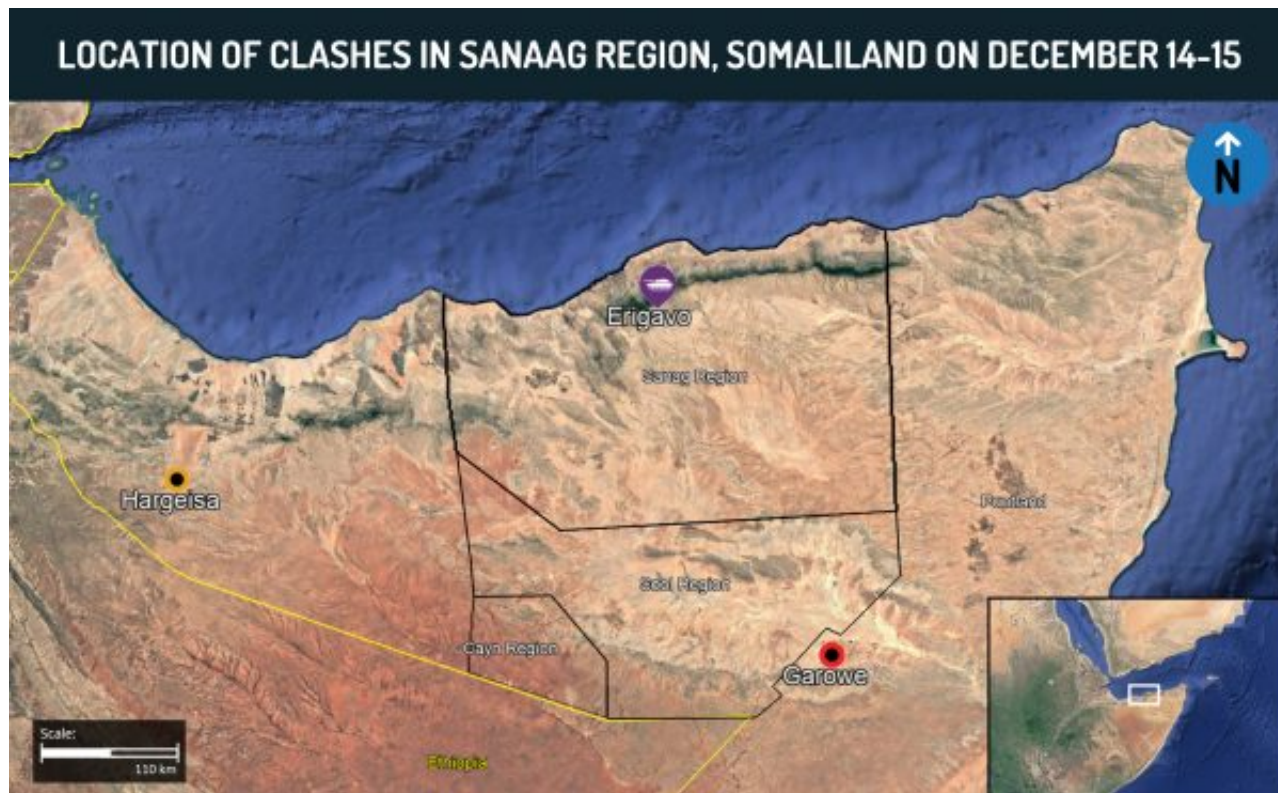
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Somaliland Alert: Clashes between Somaliland security forces, SSC-Khatumo fighters reported in Erigavo, Sanaag Region on December 14-15

Current Situation

- Reports indicate that clashes between Somaliland security forces and gunmen affiliated with the Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn (SSC-Khatumo) administration took place around Erigavo, Sanaag Region, Somaliland between December 14-15. Some sources suggest that the fighting subsided since, although this could not be confirmed.
- Sources suggest that fighting started approximately 10-15 km south of Erigavo on December 14 and that at least 15 people were killed, including civilians and forces from both belligerents.
- SSC-Khatumo fighters allegedly withdrew from the city, with Somaliland security forces allegedly arresting 20 of them. Contradicting pro-SSC-Khatumo sources claim that SSC-Khatumo fighters captured several areas in Erigavo, particularly in the town's eastern parts.
- In an official statement released during the evening hours (local time) on December 15, the SSC-Khatumo administrations condemned Somaliland's "aggressive attack" against local communities in Erigavo.
- The SSC-Khatumo further accused newly-elected Somaliland President Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, known as Irro, of having escalated tensions after he allegedly stated that he would "use force" to secure Somaliland's colonial borders.
- The federal government condemned the violence and urged the belligerents as well as local community leaders to seek peaceful ways to work together for stability.

- Irro was sworn in as Somaliland’s president on December 12 and appointed his cabinet on December 14. Irro reportedly expressed during these events the willingness of his administration to engage in dialogue with all parties to resolve territorial disputes.



Source: [Hiiran](#)

Assessments & Forecast

1. These developments mark a renewed escalation amid persistent tensions between the Somaliland administration and the federally-backed SSC-Khatumo movement over the administration of the Sool, Sanaag, and Cayn regions, which the SSC-Khatumo aims to merge into an autonomous state under federal control. This is a significant instance of relatively large-scale clashes and comes after similar clashes deteriorated into a wider armed conflict in Las Anod, Sool Region in [February-March 2023](#), which led to hundreds of casualties and concluded with the SSC-Khatumo securing control of the city. Sporadic incidents have been recorded since then, including on August 27 when SSC-Khatumo forces raided a Somaliland military base outside Erigavo.
2. Although the trigger for these latest clashes remains unclear, the details available suggest that the SSC-Khatumo may have initiated the clashes. This comes as Erigavo, the capital of the Sanaag Region is under Somaliland’s control, which presents a potential motivation after securing control of Las Anod, the capital of the Sool Region in early 2023. In this context, the SSC-Khatumo statement accusing Somaliland forces of targeting Erigavo’s community likely aims at portraying Somaliland as responsible for the escalation while presenting the SSC-Khatumo as locals’ protectors. Meanwhile, the fact that the violence apparently subsided within two days suggests that the SSC-Khatumo possibly did not intend to capture the city but instead was just seeking to destabilize the Somaliland forces’ control and create panic and confusion. This is particularly notable given the timing of the clashes, just days after Irro took office as Somaliland’s president.
3. In this context, the SSC-Khatumo possibly aimed at launching a symbolic attack to deliver a message to Irro and reassert its intention to eventually expand territorial control. This notably comes as Irro and his cabinet entered office in recent days, repeating messages displaying a

willingness to enter dialogue to resolve territorial disputes, and in light of this, the SSC-Khatumo's communique accusing Irro of intending to use force is inaccurate and raises doubts over the movement's true goals. It is possible that despite Irro's conciliatory statements, the SSC-Khatumo views him in a bad light and as not representing a true change from the policies of former Somaliland President Muse Bihi. This may also be related to the fact that Irro's Waddani party forged a political alliance with the Kaah party, which has partial support in SSC regions, ahead of the [November 13](#) presidential elections. This possibly led the SSC-Khatumo to doubt Irro's true willingness to reach a compromise as they viewed his alliance with Kaah as aimed at revamping Hargeisa's influence in the SSC regions.

4. **FORECAST:** Irro will possibly deploy enhanced efforts attempting to launch conflict resolution strategies with the SSC-Khatumo leadership over the coming days in a bid to appease tensions, prevent further violence, at least in the short-to-medium term, and portray his good intentions both domestically and internationally. That said, the Somaliland administration will continue to reject the SSC-Khatumo's demands to establish their own autonomous state under the Somali federation, distancing the possibility of a lasting solution to the persistent tensions. Regardless of such efforts, and as the SSC-Khatumo's territorial aspirations are not met, there remains a potential for violence to reignite at short notice. This could also lead to more prolonged clashes, which could present a more significant challenge to Somaliland's control in Erigavo.

Recommendations

1. Those operating or residing in Somalia on December 16 are advised to avoid all travel to Erigavo and the wider Sanaag Region in Somaliland over the coming days given the heightened risk of armed conflict.
2. We advise against all travel to Somalia with the exception of the Somaliland region and the Puntland cities of Bosaso, Garowe, and Galkayo North due to the threat of militancy, inter-clan violence, and crime.
3. Exercise vigilance and adhere to stringent security precautions in Hargeisa and Berbera, while avoiding nonessential travel to the outlying areas of Somaliland due to the risks of crime.