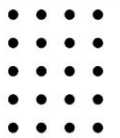




= PEACE FOR ALL =



BRIEFING IN LASANOD CONFLICT:

Who is fighting against whom?

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Summary:

Lasanod, the administrative capital of Sool region is historically, politically and geographically is within the Somaliland borders. After the collapse of the former Somali Republic, and the creation of Puntland administration of Somalia, people living in the region have been divided into several groups. In several years of political uncertainty, Somaliland managed to fully take over the region after clashes with forces loyal to Puntland regional administration. Despite, being the centre of tension, the region has been developing since then with massive infrastructure and other developmental programs ongoing.

Since the past month, tensions between the government of Somaliland and externally compromised traditional elders had increased. For almost two weeks, the tensions turned in to armed conflict. In this briefing, we will give historical background information and other significant highlights on socio-political situation in the region.

This briefing will give a solid understanding to those who are not familiar with the situation and will examine the conflict background, key players, narratives related to the issue and who is fighting with whom.

Introduction

Upon the partition of Africa, Somaliland has been under British Protectorate and named; British Somaliland Protectorate. After decades of independence struggle, Somaliland became the first Somali territory in the Horn of Africa to be independent on June 26th, 1960. Due to the independence agreement, the border of the new republic remained as demarcated by the colonial powers. Like other African countries, unionist freedom movements that have been struggling to gain all Somali ethnic communities in the Horn of Africa under one republic, had united with Somalo Italiano (Italian Somalia) which got independence from the Italy on 1st July, 1960¹. Though it was officially not ratified by both Parliaments of the newly established Republic, they still went ahead with the unity and formed the ‘Somali Republic’ having the dream to invite the other Somali regions, including Djibouti, Somali region of Ethiopia and Kenya’s North-Eastern district later. Unfortunately, the amalgamation resulted disaster, extra-judicial killings and indiscriminate bombardments by Somalia’s military regime.

Three decades later, Somaliland people had suffered all abovementioned problems and fought back with the military government. The unification with Somalia has been dissolved on 18th may, 1991 when the traditional elders, politicians and other Somaliland intellectuals gathered in Burao and declared the ‘Burao Declaration’ which stated the withdrawal of unity with Somalia and forming the ‘Republic of Somaliland’¹. These elders and intellectuals came from all over former Somaliland British Protectorate territory and were from every region of today’s Somaliland.

Six (6) out of seventeenth (17) signatories of Somaliland’s declaration of ‘Burao Declaration were from these regions.

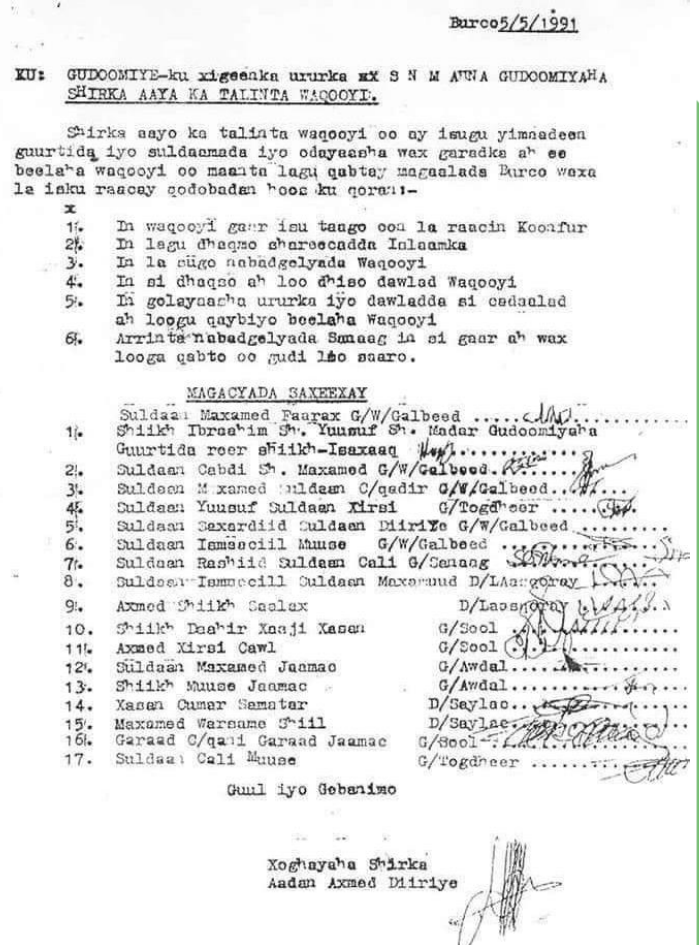


Figure 1: Burao Declaration

New Chapter:

Following the full control of Somaliland in 2007, Lasanod has been experiencing significant infrastructural development, widespread education outreach programs, governance decentralization programs among other humanitarian projects¹. For democratic practices, the people of Lasanod and most of Sool region participated and contributed to democratization activities including voters’ registration and one-person-one vote elections. Like other cities

¹ Hassan, M. (2011). Somali History:1960–1991 Islam, the Clan and the State in The Somali Context. Hargeisa: SagalJet.



in the country, the city elected their local government council members².

Despite, the stability and sustained peace in Somaliland, like other countries in the world, the Republic of Somaliland has been a victim of terrorist's operations, radical ideologies and other violent extremisms threats. One of the first terrorist presence in Somaliland was noticed on October 6, 2003 when Annalena Tonelli, 60 years old Italian aid worker was shot twice in the head by a gunman at around in Borama, capital of Awdal region. On 21st October on the same year, a British couple were found murdered in Sheikh School, in Sahil region. Richard Eyeington, 63, and his wife Enid, 61, were shot dead in their house on the school compound in Sheikh³. On 29th October, 2008 three parallel attacks used with lorries loaded with explosives were targeted on Somaliland's Presidential Palace, Ethiopia's Consulate-General and United Nations Development Programs (UNDP)'s head office in Hargeisa. Almost 30 people, including government officials, security officials, diplomats among others were killed. Since then, the Republic of Somaliland has been fighting against the terrorists and their ideologies in different capacities⁴.

Notwithstanding these efforts, the terrorist groups have been secretly active in the country through their sleeping cells, particularly in Sool region where the recent armed conflict erupted.

Jigjiga Declaration:

Despite the friendly and people-to-people relations between Somaliland and Ethiopia,

there has been clan meetings and conferences in Ethiopia's regional Somali Administration, Jigjiga city. Anti-Somaliland intellectuals and traditional elders gathered in these clan conferences in Jigjiga from 10th to 15th December, 2022. After long discussion, anti-Somaliland declaration is issued in Jigjiga, Ethiopia⁵.

Five provisions of this declaration out of the seven (7) articles were calling for war against Somaliland. Article one of this declaration stated the conference had established 'A temporary leadership committee' for the people living in Sool, Sanaag and Buhotle regions. Articles three and four of the declaration have clearly called a war against Somaliland government to oust from the region by using armed forces and militias. In article five, they called Somalia government to intervene the issue and have direct relation with the 'temporary committee' and assist them to oust Somaliland government from the region. The declaration has also called for financial assistance from their supporters and other sources to help the armed struggle against Somaliland. This declaration had attracted more clan-driven, anti-peace and finally extremists' contribution⁶.

Somali regional government of Ethiopia had declined that they were aware of what was going on in Jigjiga, Somalilanders blamed Somali regional government of Ethiopia hosting anti-Somaliland peace and democracy groups in Jigjiga, to destabilise and declare war against another Somali inhabited region⁷.

² Ministry of Planning. (2020). Somaliland in figures. Hargeisa: MoPND, 2020.

³ Hassan, O. (2003). Italian Aid Worker Is Killed in Somalia. Associated Press. [online]. (Last updated October 6, 2003). Available at <https://apnews.com/article/e860cd190f9f6c5c1b0c9caf522cb4b2>

⁴ CNN. (2008). Al Qaeda blamed for Somali bombing wave. [online]. (Last updated October 29, 2008). Available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/africa/10/29/somalia.blast/index.html>

⁵ Kalshaale. (2022). IGJIGA: War-murtiyeed kasoo baxay Shirkii Siyaasiinta iyo Isimada Dhaqanka SSC (Khaatumo). [online]. (Last updated December 16, 2022). Available at <https://kalshaale.ca/?p=62271>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ SahanTV. (2022). Madaxweynaha DDS oo Ka Digay Shirar Jigjiga Ka Socda oo Somaliland lagu Wiiqayo. [YouTube video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOK6LtAkt68> [Accessed 10 February 2023].



Assassinations in Lasanod

Somaliland's presence in Lasanod has not been all fruitful, it has witnessed few armed attacks from Somalia's Puntland Administration who claims the region. As the result, it has been facing pre-planned killings targeted the elites of the region, government officials and other pro-Somaliland activists and politicians. These killings have continued for a decade (2009-2023), and almost forty (40) politicians, intellectuals, Somaliland supporters and government officials have been killed. The government of Somaliland declared these assassinations were carried out by terrorists and argued that no government would kill their own officials and supporters. Most of the accused perpetrators were brought to the justice.

Below is the list of the victims released by the government:

REPORT on Lasanod killings

No.	Name of the victim	His/her role	Date killed	Committed by
1.	Osman Yusuf Nur	Commander, 12 th Division of Army in Lasanod	2009	Terrorists
2.	Moallim Farah	Operations Official in Somaliland Police in Sool	2010	Terrorists
3.	Saleban Jama Isse	Head of Regional Court of Appeal, Sool region.	2011	Terrorists
4.	Ahmed Saleban Gelle Abgal	Head of Regional Court, Sool region.	2011	Terrorists
5.	Abdirashid Ahmed Faje	Officer at Ministry of Finance	2011	Terrorists
6.	Dahabo Elmi Warsame	Staff, Criminal Investigation Dept.	2011	Terrorists
7.	Abdirahman Saleban Nune	Assistant, Criminal Investigation Dept.	2012	Terrorists
8.	Ahmed Mohamoud Dhunkalah	Head of Regional prosecutor, Sool region.	2012	Terrorists
9.	Ibrahim Ahmed Muse	Head of Regional Court of Appeal, Sool region.	2013	Terrorists
10.	Abdikani Jama Salah	Secretary at regional Police Division, Sool region.	2014	Terrorists
11.	Mohamed Ibrahim Samatar	Judge at Sool regional court.	2014	Terrorists
12.	Mohamoud Mohamed Hersi	Head of Sool regional Intelligence Bureau	2014	Terrorists
13.	Mohamed Hersi Yusuf Fandhe	Accountant, Dahabshil regional office in Lasanod.	2016	Terrorists
14.	Abdinasir Omer Shaur	Businessman	2017	Terrorists
15.	Ahmed Abdi Timir	Businessman	2018	Terrorists
16.	Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud	Head of Sool regional court	2020	Terrorists
17.	Abdikani Guhad	Head of Sool regional Intelligence Bureau	2020	Terrorists
18.	Dr. Mohamoud Barkhadle Abdi	Chairperson, the Ruling Party of Kulmiye, Sool region.	2020	Terrorists
19.	Abdillahi Salad Abokor	Judge, Sool regional court	2020	Terrorists
20.	Mohamed Abdillahi Farah	Regional Coordinator, National Tender Commission.	2022	Terrorists
21.	Abdirahman Mohamoud Abdillahi	Somaliland activist	2022	Terrorists

22.	Jama Abdirahman Gelqad	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
23.	Said Barre Adan	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
24.	Mohamed Ahmed Farah	Chairperson, UCID opposition party, Sool region.	2022	Terrorists
25.	Yusuf Jama Farah	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
26.	Mohamed Ali Yusuf	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
27.	Abdi Mahad Ali	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
28.	Salad Farah Adan	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
29.	Abdirisak Ahmed Elmi Adofe	Lasanod local government councilor	2022	Terrorists
30.	Abdillahi Mohamed Shide laba-go'le	Chairman, National Electoral Commission, Sool region.	2022	Terrorists
31.	Abdirahman Ali Male	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
32.	Omar Mohamoud Omer	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
33.	Adan Hussein Farah	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
34.	Dahir Abshir Bulale	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
35.	Dirie Adan Mohamed	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
36.	Salah Adan Jama	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
37.	Mubarak Abdi Mohamed	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
38.	Ahmed Adan Salah	Somaliland Activist	2022	Terrorists
39.	Abdifatah Abdillahi Abdi 'Hadrawi'	Official and former regional MP candidate, Waddani Opposition Party.		Terrorists

Table1: The list of assassinated victims in Sool. Source: Government

The last assassinated victim was Abdifatah Abdillahi Abdi (Hadrawi), a young politician and former candidate in Somaliland's Parliamentary elections in 2021. He was killed on 27th December, 2023 in Lasanod which triggered anger among Lasanod residents and violent protests broke out as government and other business buildings were destroyed. When the law enforcement agencies intervened, things got worse and several people are killed while others were wounded within the first three days of the unrest⁸. In a press conference, the President of Somaliland Muse Bihi Abdi expressed sorrow for the killing of the politician and the death of protesters. He called for calmness and joint collaboration on finding the perpetrators.

On the other hand, in a press conference on 3rd January, 2023, the President of

Somaliland Muse Bihi Abdi along with high government officials from the Executive and Houses of Parliament had briefed the public about the incident and presented their condolences tribute to the families of the victims, underlining that terrorists are behind these assassinations. He stated that 32 perpetrators out of 40 were arrested for these killings. In addition, 23 perpetrators were brought to the justice and judged for the killings by the courts. Eight (8) of these perpetrator's cases are still in the judicial processes and procedures. Two other defendants were freed for insufficient evidence challenges and lack of substantial evidence against them. The other seven (7) are fugitives. However, 24 out of 39 victims were government officials and national politicians. The president has highlighted that government of Somaliland has no intention to kill its own officials and he

⁸ Somalilandchronicle. (2023). President Bihi Addresses the Las Anod Crisis and Warns Somalia that Somaliland will Defend itself if Attacked. [online]. (Last updated January 3, 2023). Available at <https://somalilandchronicle.com/2023/01/03/president-bihi-addresses-the-las-anod-crisis-and-warns-somalia-that-somaliland-will-defend-itself-if-attacked/>

mentioned all this information that the government is killing their people were propaganda orchestrated by international terrorist networks. The president called the traditional elders of the region and any other part that could play a positive role in stabilizing the region to contribute to the peace and stability.

On 5th January, 2023, the government released all the prisoners that have been arrested during the protest following a meeting between traditional leaders' delegates and the President in Hargeisa⁹.

Call For Conference

Days after the violent protest in Lasanod city, Garad Jama Garad Ismail, a prominent traditional leader in the region has publicly called all the traditional elders for a conference in Lasanod city. In his speech, Garad Jama Garad Ismail did not specify the invitees except the other traditional leaders. The 'open invitation' had attracted external actors and those who had been waging violent conflict and war against the government of Somaliland. In response to the Garad Jama Garad Ismail's call for gathering, heavily armed traditional elders from neighbouring Somalia and Ethiopia crossed the border into Somaliland. Not only that, officials and parliamentarians from Somalia had benefited from the invitation and moved to Lasanod. The guards of these invitees were armed with both heavy artilleries and small arms including AK47, PKM among others. The blue flag of Somalia was also waved by some protestors. Almost thirty-three (33) traditional and religious leaders of the region among other anti-Somaliland selective members were nominated as

'Preparation committee' for the conference¹⁰.

The government of Somaliland had to intervene these movements but after long discussions among the top leadership of the government, and to avoid any armed clashes they agreed to let the invitees attend the conference along with their armed militias. A government ministerial-level delegation led by the Interior Minister Mohamed Kahin Ahmed including the ministers of Information Saleban Yusuf Ali Kore, Defence Abdikani Mohamoud Atteye and Livestock and fisheries Saed Sulub Mohamed travelled to Lasanod for participating the stabilization efforts. The situation was under control then as there were no violent conflicts happening prior to the traditional leaders' conference. The Commander of Somaliland National Army Brigadier General Nuh Ismail Tani and other military officials were also in the city. The government had ordered the national army to protect the elders and all the conference attendees¹¹.

Garad Jama Garad Ali, a traditional leader who once the United States Government listed as terrorist under Executive order 13224, was one of the signatories of Jigjiga Declaration. Since the declaration issued, he has been calling for armed conflict against Somaliland and its troops on regular basis. He came to Lasanod on 23rd January, 2023 to attend the traditional conference and was heavily armed when he arrived. Garad Jama Ali and other figures that were attending the conference did not stop to spread the hatred speeches calling for war against Somaliland government and other Somaliland clansmen other than 'Dhulbahante' clan. He continued calling

⁹ Galaydh Media. (2023). Maxaabiistii mudaharaadka laascaanood oo la sii daayay. [YouTube video]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eHIN-UZtHk> [Accessed 10 February 2023].

¹⁰ SomaliNews. (2023). Garaad Jaamac Garaad Cali oo dab kusiishiday Xiisada Laascaanood. [online]. (Last updated January 23, 2023). Available at <https://wardoon.net/so/daawo-garaad-jaamac-garaad-cali-oo-dab-kusiishiday-xiisada-laascaanood/>

¹¹ lleysNews. (2023). "Garadaadii Laascaanood soo galaayey qaar baa Hotel-kii aanu degneen rasaas ooda kaga qaadey..." [Facebook]. Written February, 2 2023. Available from: https://www.facebook.com/ilaysnewspage/videos/596539602308557/?extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-IOS_GK0T-GK1C&mibextid=2Rb1fB&ref=sharing [Accessed 8 February 2023].



for Somalia’s government intervention. In press conference on the same day he arrived in Lasanod, Garad Jama Ali has explicitly declared that he already knows the outcome of the conference and that it will not be good for Somaliland government. This has triggered more radical and extremist figures to speak loudly on the Mosques and other public platforms and join the call for ‘War against Somaliland and all other clans’. One prominent elder explicitly called for indiscriminately slaughtering of all Isaaq clan including children and women, this was recorded on a video and spread on Social Media¹².

The conference officially began on 28th January, 2023. Initially, the conference was supposed to last for three days. Garad Jama Garad Ismail who invited the attendees has launched and called to calmly discuss the situation in the region stating that the conference will not be welcomed to anyone whose intention is conflict. The other traditional leaders have also spoke about the conference and its objectives¹³.

On 30th January, 2023, the President of Somaliland Musa Bihi Abdi has once again spoke about the situation in Lasanod and his expectations from the conference.

“The meetings of traditional elders are always guided by peace and unity. Its aim is always to prevent Fitna, and it will not be different this time. The intellectuals and god-fearing people that have come together will only bring out good for the Republic of Somaliland. The last thing I expect is for any disaster to come out of it.” (President Bihi, 2022)

The president has also stated that his government is ready for discussions and to deal with any problems, concerns and opinions related with the situation in Sool region. “..So, let's discuss with them together and bring the situation back to calmness”.

The ministerial delegation in the region have, on their part, called for peace and stability. They also underlined how they are ready to meet with the elders and other members attending the conference for further peaceful discussions.

From Discussions to A Deadly Conflict

After days of discussions, the conference attendees had different thoughts and ideas on how the communique of the conference will be articulated. Obviously, some of them want to call Somaliland government to leave the regions, while others want to propose discussions and peaceful negotiations. The government of Somaliland claimed that it has facilitated all the available peaceful means in order to settle the pressing issues with the traditional elders. Those means include face to face talks with the government officials in order to avoid misunderstandings that can result armed conflict and unnecessary bloodshed.

Early morning on 6th February, 2023, towards the end of the conference and the day the final declaration was expected, heavy gunfire was heard in the city. The government of Somaliland stated in a press release that their military bases were attacked by ‘armed terrorists’ mobilized by some of the traditional leaders in the town. In addition, the statement highlighted that the Somaliland government have been warning against ‘those armed terrorist

¹² Gaylan Media. (2023). Tagida Garaad Jaamac ee Laascaanood, maxay ka dhigan tahay. [Facebook]. Written January, 23 2023. Available from: https://www.facebook.com/GaylanMedia/videos/558976802777708/?extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-IOS_GK0T-GK1C&mibextid=2Rb1fB&ref=sharing [Accessed 8 February 2023].

¹³ SAABTV. (2023). Shirweynaha Aaya-Ka-Tashiga Beelaha gobolka Sool oo magaaada Laascaanood Ka Furmay. [Facebook]. Written January, 28 2023. Available from: https://www.facebook.com/saabtv/videos/560577429463739/?extid=CL-UNK-UNK-UNK-IOS_GK0T-GK1C&mibextid=2Rb1fB&ref=sharing [Accessed 8 February 2023].





groups which have now been smuggled into the town by the traditional leaders'. High level government delegates, including Ministers had also been attacked by the armed groups led by well-known terrorist figures recently smuggled by some anarchist elders whose motive was, according to the government, to give safe heavens to the wanted terrorists. They also stated they assured that the military had their utmost efforts to avoid any civilian casualties since those attacked the military bases want to have a shelter in populous areas in the city. The traditional elders, on the other hand, have also stated that their homes were attacked by the government.

President Bihi has declared that the government of Somaliland is fighting against international terrorists who have been involved the assassinations and killings in Lasanod and Sool region.

“The people of Sool are one of the pioneers of Somaliland and have a huge mark in its history. This leaves us wondering what is causing all the problems happening there now. I want to make it clear here and tell the world that the problem that exists today in Lasanod is caused by international terrorists. The people protesting today are not against the Republic of Somaliland and have no ill will towards their own people. Their ears have been filled with the lies and propaganda created by international terrorists.”
President Bihi.

Somaliland National Army confirmed that terrorist-affiliated members are fighting against the government of Somaliland and this has been known for quite some time. Some of these figures are leading members of Al-Shabaab who have previously served as members of ISIS in Somalia. Abdi Hussein Ali Kamiin known as Abdi-

Madobe (Abdi-black) is a member of Al-Shabaab and fought in Galgala mountains against Somalia forces. He moved to Buhotle, a border city between the Republic of Somaliland and Ethiopia, whereby the regional intelligence community have been aware of his movements. He secretly trained around 300 fighters in Buhotle and now joined the conflict in Lasanod. Jama Abdi Ismail known as Kutiye is another member who has been charged for terrorism in Somaliland back in 2009 and was recently released from the prison after his 20 years jail term finished. He was charged in participation of the killings of British couple in Sheikh and Italian aid worker in Borama back in 2003. These members along with other fighters are actively involved and fighting against Somaliland army in Lasanod. Despite the regionally-wanted terrorist figures on their side, the elders in Lasanod have claimed that the local people are fighting against the government. This is not surprising to anyone who is familiar with the situation because who figures are from the same clan that resides in Sool region and they found their perfect cover to disguise as such and milk the situation for their own purpose.

Though the elders have confirmed several times that they want the government to leave the region, but the National Army has opposite information;

“Armed Alshabaab members have taken over Lasanod from the Elders and traditional leaders and started destroying houses to label it on the National Army. The terrorists are peace spoilers and don't want to see a peaceful Lasanod.” - General Abdirahman Abdillahi Hadsan, Somaliland National Army spokesman.

According to the photos and other evidence broadcasted through online media outlets, members of US, Turkiye and Eritrea trained





Somalia forces have participated in the conflict aligning with clan militia and members of armed terrorists against Somaliland army. The government of Somaliland vowed to present the evidences of these forces' participation to the conflict. They stated the government has captured military artilleries and members of fighters from foreign trained Somalia forces.

One-sided ceasefire

Days after the armed conflict erupted, the Somaliland government declared unconditional ceasefire to spare the civilian lives and the city. The next day, the war has resumed after the armed militias attacked the military bases – both sides accused each other for restarting the war. The international partners have welcomed the ceasefire by the government and called for peace talks and restraining the war and armed clashes by both parties.

Conclusion:

The current armed conflict in Lasanod started as violent demonstrations, then turned into politically motivated traditional leaders conference and ended up in armed confrontations between Somaliland Army and unidentified armed groups disguised as local armed militias. According to local analysts, the conflict is no longer under the traditional leaders control and have been hijacked by other armed groups, some of them are known terrorists who sought a long-awaited opportunity to set up operations in Somaliland.

Speeding up peaceful talks between Somaliland government and traditional leaders in Lasanod could prevent a total control of the local armed militias by the terror groups which can in the future cross to other neighbouring countries in the region. As Alshabaab fighters recently crossed into Ethiopia from Beletweine of Somalia, this is can also be a dangerous second front for the terror group as Buhotle lies at the border and terror network can easily find its way from Yemen to Galgala mountains all the way to Ethiopia through Sool region.

As experience taught us from other countries, terrorism has stronger roots when mixed with local grievances, especially when those grievances turn into armed conflict. Preventing this, the traditional leaders in Sool region have to bring back their control over the situation and turn the situation into calmness so that peaceful negotiations can start and life returns to Lasanod city.

The approval of FY2023 US National Defence Authorization Act (NDAA) has also something to do with the recent escalation as some anti-Somaliland elements try to prevent any US cooperation with Somaliland as it is a threat to their agenda.

