



Sustaining Peace in Galkayo:

Preventing Escalation and Strengthening Cooperation

Key Messages

- ▶ Galkayo remains one of Somalia's most strategically important peacebuilding successes, but recent military deployments and political tensions have increased the risk of renewed instability if not managed through dialogue.
- ▶ The current tensions are driven by overlapping political and security disputes involving Puntland, the Federal Government, and federal-aligned security forces, creating risks that extend beyond local dynamics.
- ▶ Sustained security cooperation between Puntland and Galmudug has been a key factor in maintaining stability in Galkayo and should remain the foundation for preventing future escalation.
- ▶ Any return to violence would threaten civilian safety, disrupt trade and livelihoods, weaken humanitarian access, and reverse more than a decade of peacebuilding progress.
- ▶ Instability in Galkayo could undermine broader regional security by weakening joint counterterrorism efforts against ISIS and Al-Shabaab and diverting attention from ongoing security operations.
- ▶ The security of Galkayo is closely linked to Puntland's economic future, including strategic investments such as the Garacad Corridor and regional trade routes connecting central Somalia and eastern Ethiopia.
- ▶ Existing local peace mechanisms—including joint security coordination, community dialogue, and the Joint Police Patrolling Unit—provide practical foundations for managing tensions before they escalate into conflict.
- ▶ Preserving peace in Galkayo requires sustained political dialogue, coordinated security cooperation, and continued commitment from Puntland, Galmudug, the Federal Government, and local peace actors to safeguard long-term stability.

Background

Galkayo is a town in the Mudug region of central Somalia. It is a border town divided into northern and southern sections under the 1993 Mudug Peace Agreement. The city's division dates back to the collapse of the Somali military government led by General Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991, which plunged the country into clan-based conflict. Today, North Galkayo is administered by Puntland, established in 1998, while South Galkayo is administered by Galmudug, established in 2006. During the civil war, Galkayo became one of Somalia's major conflict hotspots, witnessing intense fighting between the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) and the Somali National Democratic Union (SNDU) on one side, and the United Somali Congress (USC) on the other. On 4 June 1993, SSDF leader Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, SNDU leader Ali Ismail Abdi-Giir, and USC Chairman General Mohamed Farah Aideed signed the Mudug Peace Agreement, ending major hostilities in the region and establishing a framework for coexistence that has continued to shape Galkayo's political and administrative landscape.

Following the Mudug Peace Agreement, Galkayo experienced nearly two decades of relative stability, with no major armed confrontations until November 2015, when fighting erupted between Puntland and Galmudug forces. The conflict, which continued until December 2015, left at least 20 people dead and more than 120 others injured. It also displaced over 90,000 residents (Heritage Institute, 2016). This highlights the city's continued vulnerability to renewed violence despite years of relative peace.

Similarly, less than a year later, Puntland and Galmudug were again engaged in deadly fighting in Galkayo in October 2016 over a disputed border area. The violence erupted on the outskirts of the city at the site of a livestock market under construction by the Puntland administration. Humanitarian agencies estimated that nearly 90,000 people were displaced by the conflict, while dozens of people, mainly from the warring parties, were killed (ReliefWeb, 2016). In December 2017, the leaders of Puntland and Galmudug reached a peace agreement facilitated by the Federal Government of Somalia and international partners (Goobjoog, 2017).

The agreement established a ceasefire, promoted cooperation between the two administrations, facilitated the reopening of roads and commercial activities, and created mechanisms for dialogue and joint security coordination.

In the years that followed, Puntland and Galmudug continued to strengthen cooperation to maintain stability in the Mudug region, particularly in Galkayo. Successive leaders from both administrations reaffirmed their commitment to implementing previously signed agreements through regular dialogue and confidence-building measures. In 2020, Puntland and Galmudug reached a new agreement to cooperate on security, institution-building, and economic development (Puntland Post, 2020). One of the most notable outcomes of this cooperation has been joint counterterrorism efforts, which have enabled the security authorities of both administrations to coordinate operations against common security threats.

Against this backdrop, this policy brief examines recent security developments in Galkayo, assesses the potential risks associated with renewed tensions, and analyzes their implications for peace, civilian protection, and regional stability. It also identifies the key drivers of the current security dynamics and proposes evidence-based policy options to prevent further escalation, strengthen dialogue and security coordination, and preserve the hard-won stability achieved in Galkayo over the past decade.

Methodology

This policy brief is based on qualitative desk research drawing on both secondary and primary data. Secondary sources include government statements, media reports, policy papers, academic literature, and reports from international organizations. The analysis also reviews previous peace agreements, security cooperation frameworks, and historical conflict data relating to Galkayo and the wider Mudug region. In addition, the brief incorporates primary data collected through key informant interviews (KIIs) with individuals knowledgeable about the political, security, and peacebuilding dynamics in Galkayo.

Recent Security Developments in Galkayo

In late August, the Puntland administration deployed additional forces to Galkayo (Horseed Media, 2026). The deployment of troops to Galkayo by Puntland has increased concerns about the potential for renewed tensions in the city and the wider region. Beyond the deployment, Puntland accused the Galmudug administration of collaborating with Somalia's Federal Government by allowing military supplies and militia to pass through airports and territory under Galmudug's control, allegedly to support actions against the people of Puntland (Hiiraan Online, 2026). In response, the Galmudug administration denied the allegations, rejecting claims that weapons used in attacks in Puntland had been transported through airports in Galmudug (Goobjoog, 2026).

These developments come amid strained relations between the Puntland administration and the Federal Government of Somalia. Galkayo hosts security forces aligned with the Federal Government, including personnel originally drawn from Puntland, particularly members of the Puntland Security Force (PSF), a unit recognized for its counterterrorism operations. Relations between the PSF and the Puntland administration have remained tense since the Bosaso clashes in late 2021 (Reuters, 2021). The city is also home to other security forces recruited from Puntland clans whose salaries are paid by the Federal Government. Although the presence of these forces is closely linked to Puntland's internal political dynamics, any armed confrontation in Galkayo could extend beyond the city and increase the risk of broader instability.

On 21 July, Puntland forces clashed with PSF forces in the Madar-Jiif area, between the town of Laag and the port city of Bosaso (Radio Dalsan, 2026). On 25 July, Puntland's presidency declared that no force known as the PSF legally exists within its defense structure, a position disputed by clan elders in the Galkayo/Mudug area (WardheerNews, 2026).

The episode is best understood as an internal Puntland command dispute, rooted in the same November 2021 rift referenced above, rather than a Puntland-Galmudug quarrel; it is also unfolding alongside a separate standoff between Puntland and the Federal Government over Somalia's electoral model, including the unilateral deployment of federal forces to Bosaso, Garowe, and Galkayo (Critical Threats Project, 2026).

On the Galmudug side, the renewed tensions in Galkayo come at a time of political transition, as President Ahmed Abdi Karie ("Qoorqoor") is expected to leave office at the end of his term. During his tenure, Puntland and Galmudug maintained close cooperation on security matters in Galkayo and across the wider Mudug region, contributing to improved security coordination, greater trust between the two administrations, and the peaceful coexistence of communities on both sides of the city. Amid the recent tensions, Liban Ahmed Hassan, a leading candidate in the upcoming Galmudug presidential election, reaffirmed the importance of maintaining peaceful relations with Puntland, stating that a future Galmudug administration under his leadership would not allow its territory to be used for activities that threaten the security or stability of neighboring Puntland (Hiiraan Online, 2026). His remarks underscore the continued importance of inter-administrative cooperation and dialogue in preserving stability in Galkayo.

Qoorqoor's departure is not as straightforward as it may appear, however. Reporting suggests that President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud pressed for his ally Liban Ahmed Hassan, the ruling Justice and Solidarity Party's nominated candidate, to succeed him, a process that reportedly divided the Federal Government's own leadership and raises questions about how inclusively Galmudug's transition is being managed (Garowe Online, 2026; Dawan Africa, 2026). The durability of Hassan's assurances to Puntland may depend partly on whether that transition is seen locally as legitimate.

Historically, periods of political tension between Puntland and Somalia's Federal Government have often been reflected most visibly in Galkayo.

Several factors explain this pattern, including the city's divided administration between Puntland and Galmudug, its strategic location linking northern and central Somalia, and its history of recurring inter-administrative conflict. A further factor, which has become increasingly significant in recent years, is the presence of Federal Government security forces recruited largely from Puntland, including members of the Puntland Security Force (PSF) and other units whose salaries are paid by the Federal Government (Hiiraan Online, 2026).

However, in recent years, the two administrations have maintained close and sustained cooperation on security in Galkayo city and the wider Mudug region. This collaboration has played a significant role in promoting stability and peaceful coexistence between the two communities (Hiiraan Online, 2026). The two administrations have also worked jointly to resolve inter-clan conflicts involving communities from both sides that have occurred in parts of the Mudug region (Puntland Mirror, 2024).

One of the most notable initiatives that have contributed to stability in Galkayo is the establishment of the Joint Police Patrolling Unit (JPPU) under the Gaalkayo Ceasefire Agreement signed between Puntland and Galmudug in January 2017 (Reliefweb, 2018). Jointly established by the two administrations, the unit comprises police officers and security personnel from both sides who conduct coordinated patrols and oversee the implementation of the ceasefire. Its primary mandate is to maintain peace and security, prevent the recurrence of inter-clan violence, uphold the rule of law, and address security incidents and disputes arising along the administrative boundary that runs through the city. The JPPU is supported by the Gaalkayo Joint Peace Committee, local authorities, community elders, women, and youth representatives from both North and South Galkayo. These stakeholders work closely with the JPPU to strengthen community policing, improve security coordination, prevent and mediate local conflicts, and promote dialogue and reconciliation. Their collaborative efforts have been instrumental in fostering trust between communities and sustaining peace and stability across the city.

Potential Risks and Implications

The recent security developments in Galkayo risk undermining the peacebuilding efforts and inter-administrative cooperation that have been painstakingly built over the past decade. Although no armed confrontation has occurred so far, continued military deployments and heightened political tensions increase the risk of miscalculation, particularly in a city with a long history of conflict. Any outbreak of violence at this stage could reverse years of progress in peacebuilding, disrupt the fragile stability achieved through sustained cooperation, and plunge the city back into a cycle of conflict that could take years to resolve.

This risk is compounded by a broader feature of Somalia's federal system: command of armed units often functions as a bargaining chip between clan factions, federal authorities, and regional administrations rather than as a settled institutional arrangement (Majid & Abidrahman, 2026). Viewed this way, the PSF dispute is not a contained technical matter; it is one instance of a wider pattern in which disputes over the legitimacy of security forces routinely spill across administrative boundaries.

Any renewed conflict in Galkayo would pose significant risks to civilian security and socio-economic activity. Previous episodes of violence in the city resulted in large-scale displacement, disrupted trade, and restricted access to essential services. As a strategic commercial hub linking Puntland, Galmudug, southern Somalia, and eastern Ethiopia, Galkayo plays a critical role in facilitating the movement of people, goods, and livestock. Prolonged instability could disrupt regional trade routes, undermine local livelihoods, constrain humanitarian access, and negatively affect cross-border commerce that depends on the city's strategic location.

Beyond its immediate humanitarian and economic consequences, any escalation of conflict in Mudug would also threaten the viability of Garacad Port, one of Somalia's most significant privately financed infrastructure investments and a cornerstone of Puntland's long-term economic development strategy.

Developed through substantial private sector investment, the port is expected to handle up to 3.5 million tonnes of cargo annually, strengthen trade with Ethiopia through the Garacad–Galkayo–Galdogob corridor, and improve regional connectivity (National Economic Council, 2024). The port is also expected to stimulate private investment, generate employment, reduce transport costs, and reinforce Puntland’s and Somalia’s ambitions to become a regional trade and blue economy hub. The port anchors a wider \$216 million investment in the Garacad-Galkayo-Galdogob corridor (Horn Review, 2025), underscoring how directly Puntland’s economic strategy runs through the same corridor whose security is now in question.

From a security perspective, renewed tensions in Galkayo could have significant implications for security cooperation between Puntland and Galmudug. Over the past several years, the two administrations have developed mechanisms for information sharing, joint security coordination, and counterterrorism operations that have contributed to improved stability in Galkayo and the wider Mudug region. Any renewed conflict in the city could weaken these mechanisms, reducing the effectiveness of efforts to counter threats posed by ISIS and Al-Shabaab and creating opportunities for armed groups to exploit political and security divisions. The implications would extend beyond Galkayo. A deterioration in cooperation could undermine the momentum of Puntland’s ongoing operations against ISIS in the Cal Miskaad Mountains and affect coordination with Galmudug as it continues military operations against Al-Shabaab, which still controls parts of Galmudug. Preserving security cooperation between the two administrations is therefore essential not only for maintaining stability in Galkayo but also for sustaining broader counterterrorism efforts in central and northeastern Somalia. Puntland’s own forces have, over the past year, pushed ISIS-Somalia fighters into their last redoubts in the Cal Miskaad Mountains (Garowe Online, 2025); diverting resources from that campaign to manage the PSF dispute would carry its own strategic cost (ACLED, 2026).

Conclusion

The recent security developments in Galkayo underscore the fragility of stability in one of Somalia’s most strategically important cities. Although no armed confrontation has occurred to date, continued military deployments, competing political narratives in the media, and deteriorating relations between the Puntland administration and the Federal Government of Somalia could increase the risk of renewed tensions or a return to conflict. Such an outcome would undermine more than a decade of peacebuilding efforts in a city divided between Puntland and Galmudug.

The consequences of renewed conflict would extend well beyond Galkayo. Escalation could threaten civilian security, disrupt regional trade and livelihoods, weaken counterterrorism cooperation, and jeopardize investment and commercial links connecting Puntland with central Somalia and eastern Ethiopia. Given Galkayo’s strategic role as a regional commercial hub and a focal point for security cooperation, maintaining stability is both a regional and national priority.

Preventing escalation will require sustained political dialogue, restraint by all parties, continued implementation of existing peace agreements, and strengthened cooperation between the neighboring Federal Member States of Puntland and Galmudug on security and conflict prevention. The experience of Galkayo over the past decade demonstrates that sustained dialogue, local ownership of peace processes, and inter-administrative security cooperation can effectively reduce conflict and promote peaceful coexistence. These lessons provide a practical model for conflict prevention and peacebuilding in other parts of Somalia.

Policy Recommendations

- ▶ **Strengthen security cooperation between Puntland and Galmudug:** Puntland and Galmudug should sustain and deepen their cooperation on security, counterterrorism, and social cohesion while safeguarding the peacebuilding gains achieved in Galkayo over the past decade. Existing mechanisms for information sharing and joint security coordination should be maintained and strengthened.
- ▶ **Prioritize dialogue and de-escalation:** Both administrations should exercise restraint and avoid actions or public statements that could heighten tensions or undermine the confidence built through years of cooperation. Regular political and security dialogue should be maintained to address emerging concerns before they escalate into conflict.
- ▶ **Resolve security-related disputes through peaceful means:** The Puntland administration should pursue dialogue with Puntland-origin security forces stationed in Galkayo, including the Puntland Security Force (PSF) and other federal-aligned forces, to reduce the risk of confrontation and preserve stability in the city.
- ▶ **Strengthen preventive security coordination:** The Galmudug administration should continue cooperating with Puntland to prevent its territory from being used for activities that could threaten the security of Galkayo or neighboring Puntland, while maintaining existing coordination mechanisms.
- ▶ **Support national efforts to preserve stability:** The Federal Government of Somalia should play a constructive role in supporting peace and stability in Galkayo by facilitating dialogue, encouraging cooperation among relevant actors, and ensuring that political disagreements, particularly its disputes with Puntland over the electoral model and the deployment of federal forces, do not evolve into security crises.
- ▶ **Enhance the role of local peace actors:** Traditional elders, civil society organizations, women's groups, and youth representatives should continue to support mediation, reconciliation, and community dialogue to strengthen peaceful coexistence and public confidence in the peace process.
- ▶ **Sustain international support for peacebuilding:** Development partners should continue supporting locally led peacebuilding initiatives through confidence-building measures, community reconciliation, local conflict resolution, and programs that strengthen cooperation among government institutions, traditional leaders, civil society organizations, women, and youth.

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