

Somalia – Clashes in South West State

March 31, 2026



Summary

On March 30, Somali federal and South West State (SWS) forces entered open conflict, resulting in the capture of Baidoa, the largest city in SWS, and the resignation of the SWS president following several days of increasing tensions and military build-up. This fighting suggests the potential of a longer conflict, presenting opportunities for Islamist militias across Somalia. The situation is volatile, leaving travellers exposed to logistical disruptions and threats from armed actors, as well as opportunistic crime.

Recent events and developments

On March 30, Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) forces captured Baidoa, the largest city of Somalia's South West State (SWS), after heavy fighting was reported broke out between FGS and SWS forces. This prompted the resignation of SWS president Abdiyaziz Hassan Mohamed Laftagareen. SWS forces and officials had previously claimed to have repelled the assault on the city and to have captured several FGS and FGS-aligned fighters. The number of casualties on either side remains unclear at the time of writing. Ethiopian forces are present in Baidoa and major SWS towns as part of the African Union Support and Stabilisation Mission in Somalia (AUSSOM). Tensions escalated in the days preceding the clashes. On March 29, the FGS accused the SWS president and the parliamentary speaker of maintaining ties with the Islamist militant group Al-Shabaab. The latter responded by accusing the federal president of the same. On March 28, SWS held regional elections, which the FGS deemed illegal. The vote resulted in the re-election of the regional president Laftagareen for a further five-year term. While the FGS rejected these elections, several prominent political figures, including two former presidents of Somalia, expressed support for the election and Laftagareen's victory, demonstrating stark divisions in Somalia's political leadership. On the same day, an FGS military convoy departed Buur Hakaba, around 60km southeast of Baidoa, and started advancing towards Baidoa with reported Turkish air support. At the same time, SWS forces established defensive positions in and around the city. On March 23, SWS officials accused the FGS of escalating tensions between the two parties with the deployment of federal forces to the state. Additionally, SWS suspended their ties with the federal government, joining the states of Puntland and Jubaland and alleging FGS forces were supporting regional opposition groups instead of focusing on the fight against Al-Shabaab. Baidoa hosts over 400,000 internally displaced persons due to prior and ongoing conflict in the region, while over 45,000 people have fled Baidoa towards various neighbouring locations between March 19 and March 20.

Impact assessment

The security situation in South West State (SWS) rapidly deteriorated as of March 30, leading to significant security implications and issues for corporate operations, travel, and staff safety. While FGS authorities have framed this operation as restoring order, further conflict throughout SWS, especially along major roads and in urban areas including Wajid and Hudur, remains likely. In these areas, threats to travellers and staff include the risks of being caught in crossfire, as well as military checkpoints and roads blocked due to civilians fleeing the fought-over areas, complicating travel or evacuation efforts. The African Union peacekeeping forces present throughout SWS are unlikely to intervene due to their focused counter-insurgency and capacity-building mandate. Throughout Somalia, the conflict between FGS and SWS will likely divert FGS resources away from existing counter-insurgency and counterterrorist operations. A deterioration in relations between the Somali government and peacekeeping forces is likely to further weaken coordinated security efforts. There will likely be increased militant activity by groups such as Al-Shabaab or Islamic State Somalia, raising the risk of improvised explosive device attacks against local and international forces, kidnapping, extortion, illegal checkpoints, or blocked roads. Instability is likely to enable opportunistic criminal activity, including robbery and vehicle theft. With the previous movement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the current armed clashes, there will likely be significant further movement of civilians fleeing the conflict in SWS, particularly along the Baidoa-Mogadishu axis. Coupled with the reported diarrhoea cases among IDPs by international humanitarian organisations, this has the potential of placing significant additional strain on an already precarious medical and humanitarian infrastructure in the area and presents a public health risk affecting travellers and staff. This situation is ongoing and evolving in real time, meaning that circumstances relating to the clashes, transportation routes, or medical and humanitarian infrastructure can change significantly in a short time, complicating both routine and contingency planning.

Advice from Forth Global

- Avoid non-essential travel in South West State, in particular Baidoa and the surrounding cities of Wajid and Hudur.
- Monitor local media, embassy alerts, and official advisories for updates on the clashes or evacuation efforts. Expect military activity and movements, as well as evacuation orders and travel restrictions on short notice.
- Keep a go-bag with essential documents, a charged power bank, emergency contacts, and medical supplies including anti-diarrhoeal medication.
- Always plan for extra time and for alternative routes when travelling across affected and surrounding areas.
- Keep in close contact with local partners or accommodation providers for situational updates.

Customised advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

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