

Mustafe G. Guufe, Abdirahman Tigey, and Aziiza Mohamed

Environmental Pressure and Clan Competition in Puntland

Internal cohesion, public authority, and strategic autonomy

Puntland's domestic strength depends on preserving a common political order under pressure. Environmental stress, settlement expansion, and changing pastoral livelihoods can turn competition over water and grazing into competing claims over territory and authority. When these claims become militarized, they threaten the internal foundations of self-government.

The Strategic Middle Path places autonomy, stability, and non-domination at the center of Puntland's statecraft. Domestic policy provides their internal foundation: the capacity to govern competition without allowing it to become permanent armed rivalry. Security, fiscal autonomy, and external partnership depend on that capacity. A polity divided into competing coercive systems cannot reliably preserve its freedom of action.

A borehole's strategic significance lies in what develops around it. Water attracts settlement, commerce, roads, and population concentration. In shared or disputed grazing areas, access to water can become a claim to territorial control. Neighbors may fear exclusion, while developers may see opposition as a denial of livelihoods and opportunity. Without credible rules, development itself can generate insecurity.

Environmental pressure sharpens this competition. As water and pasture become less reliable, dependable access becomes more valuable. Permanent settlements can restrict seasonal movement and harden flexible grazing arrangements into territorial claims. Where institutions cannot manage these changes, communities may turn to armed protection.

This creates a security dilemma: each community sees its own weapons as defensive and its neighbors' weapons as threatening. Business and diaspora financing can sustain mobilization, allowing temporary disputes to produce lasting systems of armed authority. Water becomes territorial leverage, settlement becomes a claim to control, and heavy weapons become instruments of political bargaining.

The deeper danger is the normalization of fragmentation. Local agreements may stop violence while leaving rival coercive systems intact. These systems can constrain public decisions, disrupt revenue and investment, and create openings for external influence. Puntland may retain formal institutions while losing effective authority within its territory. Internal cohesion is therefore a condition of strategic autonomy.

Puntland's response should begin with a governing principle: development must strengthen the common political order. Investment in water, settlements, and infrastructure should expand opportunity without conferring territorial authority on its sponsors. Rules established through consultation should protect shared access and pastoral movement before construction creates arrangements that are difficult to reverse.

Negotiation must distinguish legitimate needs for water, livelihoods, and protection from demands for exclusive control. Addressing these interests separately creates room for shared access and credible guarantees. Communities should be able to secure their livelihoods without making territorial victory the condition of their security.

Public authority earns legitimacy through impartial protection and fair decisions. Mediation, customary legitimacy, and enforceable public rules should reinforce one another. Early intervention must be a standing responsibility: verifying claims, addressing fears of exclusion, and preserving room for compromise before public accusations make restraint politically costly. Communities need dependable ways to raise grievances before resorting to armed mobilization.

Settlements must also outlast their negotiators. Clear terms, assigned responsibilities, and procedures for addressing breaches should survive changes in political and community leadership. Leadership strengthens institutions when it turns personal influence into arrangements that function without repeated exceptional intervention. A successful settlement makes the next dispute governable.

Under the Defense Codex, force serves the preservation of a common political order. Independently controlled heavy weapons must not become a permanent means of securing political influence. Reductions in communal armament must proceed alongside credible protection and accountable public command. Disarmament that leaves communities exposed can deepen insecurity. The objective is a public security system they can trust without maintaining rival armed forces.

Fiscal policy must make shared governance materially credible. Public expenditure should support essential infrastructure, services, and administrative capacity. Business contributions, diaspora support, aid, and investment should complement this work through transparent arrangements consistent with public rules. Community initiative can expand opportunity; financing rival coercive networks undermines it. Resources and partnerships must strengthen Puntland's institutions and strategic priorities.

Sequencing is essential. Common rules, protection, and legitimacy must develop together. State expansion without impartiality risks domination; disarmament without protection risks vulnerability; development without agreed access risks exclusion. Progress should be judged by whether agreements endure, access remains dependable, and disputes are resolved without armed leverage.

Autonomy protects public decision-making from capture. Stability keeps competition within institutions capable of sustaining coexistence. Non-domination protects communities from arbitrary control by armed groups or public officials. Transparent decisions, accessible review, and accountability for selective enforcement give these principles practical meaning. Peaceful challenges to public decisions must remain a legitimate part of the political order.

Domestic policy completes the Strategic Middle Path by securing the internal conditions of self-government. Puntland needs institutions that accommodate development, govern competition, and protect communities while preserving peaceful disagreement and equal standing. Its freedom of action rests on authority strong enough to preserve cohesion, restrained enough to command trust, and durable enough to outlast individual leaders.

Co-authored by Mustafe G. Guufe, Abdirahman Tigey, and Aziiza Mohamed