SOMALIA

WHAT HAPPENED IN MARCH?
President Mohamud officially launched the second phase of the government offensive against Al-Shabaab, concentrating on the southern states of Jubaland and South West, where the group’s strongholds are located; militants continued to resist, notably in recovered areas in central regions.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?
The offensive against Al-Shabaab is at a critical juncture. To consolidate gains in central Somalia as it goes on the offensive elsewhere, Mogadishu will have to put in place holding forces, work toward communal reconciliation and step up service delivery.

FEBRUARY TRENDS
The government and clan militia offensive against Al-Shabaab faced resistance in centrally located Hirshabelle and Galmudug states, as a new front opened further south in Jubaland state. Meanwhile, political elites in South West state agreed on a plan to de-escalate tensions.

TRENDS TIMELINE

WHAT TO WATCH
The government will likely find military operations in Al-Shabaab’s southern heartlands more challenging than its push in central Somalia. Clan militias are set to play a much lesser role in the offensive, and political fissures, both between the federal and state levels, and within member states, could undermine efforts.

Perhaps even more arduous for Mogadishu in coming months will be holding territory and ensuring stabilisation in the regions it has recovered.

Drought continued to drive hunger, displacement
A UN and Somali government report released 20 March estimated that 135 people die each day in Somalia due to the ongoing drought, projecting a total of 18,100 to 34,000 drought-related deaths in the first six months of 2023.

As southern Somalia bears the brunt of the drought, its residents are particularly hard hit by Al-Shabaab’s burdensome taxation of their crops and tiny harvests. This is one reason farmers in Jubaland’s Lower Juba region continue to flee Al-Shabaab-controlled territory.