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## Report

# Somalia: An Unconvincing Progress

*Abdirahman Yusuf Ali \**

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## Abstract

In September 2012, when Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected as the President of the Somali Federal Government (SFG), the expectations were high. (1) Nearly a year and half into his four-year term, President Mohamud's performance has had mixed results. Achievements are substantially fewer than anticipated and the shortcomings are uncomfortably too many. Still, the potential for success is there, that requires a paradigm shift in political orientation and strategic approach.

## Introduction

As a widely respected civil society leader and a founder of a large and successful university, President Mohamud was seen as a different kind of a leader who can herald the country into a new dawn and overcome enormous challenges.

There were reasons to believe that President Mohamud had a better chance at success than his predecessors. His government was the first non-transitional authority in the country since the civil war broke out in 1991. His election took place in the capital Mogadishu—the first in more than 20 years. Domestic support for him was unprecedented. There were supportive demonstrations across the country, and among the large Somali Diaspora in Europe, North America, Middle East and Africa. Signs of recovery were all too evident. (2)

The international community had also put its weight behind him. The regional bloc IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) endorsed him unreservedly. The African Union increased its peacekeeping contingent, known as AMISOM, from little over 17,000 to nearly 24,000. Turkey had committed to a monthly, direct budgetary support for the government. The United States had, for the first time since the civil war, formally recognised the FGS. The UN Security Council had also eased the 23-year-long arms embargo on Somalia, so that the FGS can qualitatively increase the capacity of its security services in its fight against the al-Qaeda-linked al-Shabaab fighters. (3)

A month after his election, President Mohamud appointed another civil society leader as his prime minister. Abdi Farah Shirdon "Saa'id", a businessman, who formed a 10-member cabinet. Ignoring domestic resistance, the President and the PM justified the small cabinet as a strategy to a more effective, responsive and coherent team. Despite sparking political firestorm, the vast majority of the Somali people and the international community were willing to give the new government a chance to succeed.

President Mohamud articulated a broad vision encapsulated in a Six Pillar Policy as the guiding framework for his administration. Establishing functioning institutions was the first pillar, followed by economic recovery, sustainable peace, service delivery, robust international relations and reconciliation. This vision demonstrated a clear sense of purpose and a holistic approach to fixing Somalia's crisis. For the first time since the beginning of the civil war in 1991, Somalia seemed to be on a path towards recovery, reconciliation and most importantly, towards a path that would rebuild the vital national institutions and key state organs.

Nearly a year and half into his four-year term, President Mohamud's performance has had mixed results. Achievements are substantially fewer than anticipated and the shortcomings are uncomfortably too many. Still, the potential for success is there, that requires a paradigm shift in political orientation and strategic approach.

### **Assessing performance**

If we use the Six Pillar Policy as a benchmark against which the government can be evaluated, the achievements are modest. On institutional building, the government has attempted to rejuvenate security entities by appointing new heads. Various initiatives have been taken to address fundamental flaws. It remains a work in progress, but it's fair to say that all security agencies remain chronically weak. Command and control is poor. Salaries are routinely delayed. Equipment is scarce and morale among the security service personnel is frighteningly low.

It is therefore no surprise that al-Shabaab is still capable of penetrating and striking at the heart of the government, as manifested by the deadly attack on the first day of 2014, which targeted Jazeera Hotel, arguably the second most important target in Mogadishu after the Presidential Palace.<sup>(4)</sup> Among the dozen people killed in the attack were two district police commissioners. Last year, the militants were able to carry out attacks inside the parameters of the heavily guarded Presidential Palace in Mogadishu. They also assassinated members of parliament and other government officials. Al-Shabaab's overall capacity to wage asymmetrical warfare is undiminished, despite losing significant territory over the past two years. The group is still controlling large swathes of land in south and central Somalia.

On reconciliation, the government deserves a passing grade. In August, the FGS signed a deal with a Kenyan backed militia over the strategic port town of Kismaayo. Brokered by Ethiopia under the auspices of IGAD, the deal envisages a future federal member state called "Jubbaland". This Addis Agreement, as it came to be known, was a significant milestone in the Somali government's reconciliation portfolio. After initial hesitation, the FGS demonstrated maturity and pragmatic political calculation. In signing the deal, it potentially averted a slow annexation of "Jubbaland" by Kenya. <sup>(5)</sup>

Still another vital element of the Six Pillar Policy remains elusive: sustainable peace. In the last quarter of 2013, clan warfare had flared up in at least three regions: Lower Shabelle, Middle Shabelle and Hiiraan. Dozens have been killed and tens of thousands were displaced. Although the government doesn't seem to have a direct role in the fighting, senior government officials have been implicated. Rival clans are accusing the government of backing one clan over the other.

To their credit, members of the parliament and cabinet have attempted to find a common ground among warring clans. But these efforts have thus far failed to yield positive results. The underlying factors, such as land disputes and deep mistrust among clans, have not been addressed.

President Mohamud's government has registered measurable success in international relations. The lifting of the UN arms embargo, the U.S. recognition and the increase in the number of African Union peacekeepers are all results of a robust diplomatic engagement by the FGS. In the waning days of 2013, Somalia miraculously became one of only handful of states to successfully airlift their citizens from South Sudan, as conflict there deepened. <sup>(6)</sup> Somalia's foreign minister was also among an IGAD mission dispatched to Jubba to find solutions to the crisis in South Sudan.

In terms of service delivery, the FGS has also made some progress. Together with the United Nations, it launched a “Go-To-School” program aimed at sending one million kids to schools across the country. Despite being overly optimistic, the program has succeeded in registering thousands of students into schools and recruiting hundreds of teachers—the first since the civil war. (7)

That said, the overall service delivery of the FGS is not encouraging. Basic health facilities are nonexistent or poorly operated. Vital government functions, such as water and electricity, are monopolized by the private sector at a prohibitive cost. Basic infrastructure remains in shambles, despite recent improvements with the help of Turkey. Access to rudimentary government services is limited. Corruption is still very high. Major contracts are awarded with virtually no competition or oversight.

On economic recovery, the FGS record is uninspiring. The government has not taken measurable actions on this area. Private sector is leading the modest but encouraging economic recovery that’s visible in the capital Mogadishu. Lack of regulation is exposing the private sector to various risks. Although there are no reliable data on economic recovery, anecdotal evidence shows that modest growth is taking place without government support.

### **Infighting**

Whatever progress it made last year, the Somali Federal Government damaged much of it in a nasty infighting within the executive branch. In November, President Mohamud asked Prime Minister Shirdon to resign, blaming him for failing to translate the president’s vision into measurable gains. Unsurprisingly, PM Shirdon refused to resign, and the ensuing battle was taken to the parliament, which has the constitutional prerogative to oust the PM and his cabinet. More than 150 members of parliament supporting the president had tabled a vote of no-confidence against PM Shirdon. Among other things, they accused him of “incompetence” and failure to “discharge constitutional duties.”

On 2nd December, Prime Minister Shirdon lost vote of confidence in parliament. He was ousted along with his cabinet. The sacking of the PM was the easier part. It was a culmination of a tumultuous few weeks of political infighting between the president, his key allies and a majority of the parliament on the one hand, and the prime minister supported by fewer parliamentarians on the other hand. It was 8th time since 2000 that infighting between the two top officeholders paralysed the entire government for weeks. Moreover, the infighting has “disoriented the government from urgent task of state building. (8)”

Performance evaluation was central to the infighting. President Mohamud and his allies deemed PM Shirdon's first year performance lackluster and, consequently, unworthy of continuation. Implicit in this position, however, was an admission of a bad choice for PM in the first place. In effect, President Mohamud was displeased with Shirdon, widely seen as weak and ineffective.

Ten days after Shirdon was ousted, President Mohamud appointed Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed as his new PM. Another economist with considerable international experience, PM Ahmed is now expected to be what his predecessor failed to be: a leader who lifts Somalia out of the abyss and charts a new era, but who faces the same old challenges.

### **Systemic challenges**

The new PM will have to sharply focus his attention to two, mutually reinforcing challenges. First, he and his cabinet must translate President Mohamud's first pillar-institutional building-into reality. Without functioning state institutions, his government's capacity to execute its duties will be prohibitively limited and progress will be painfully slow. (9) More than 20 years of statelessness has rendered Somali institutions either nonexistent or fragile. The machinery of the state does not function because basic institutions lack basic capacity, orientation and, often, required resources.

Priority has to be given to three types of institutions. First, security entities need to be reinvigorated with clear command and control. Institutional responsibilities must also be clarified. Currently, the three main security agencies (police, military and intelligence) at times appear to be doing the same thing. For the past ten years, embryos of these institutions have existed in one form or another. But time has come for their professionalization. Local police stations and neighborhood intelligence units need to be rebuilt.

The second priority for institutional building should be focused on public financial management and revenue collection. Corruption is eating this government alive. No one has ever been held accountable for stealing public funds, despite the fact that Somalia consistently ranks on the top of the Transparency International index. (10) Impunity for corrupt officials is at times worst than theft of public funds. In October, the governor of the Central Bank resigned only seven weeks after she was appointed. She cited endemic corruption as a reason for her abrupt departure. (11)

To the extent that corruption is a profound problem, there has been an equally profound failure in imagination to expand domestic revenue. For years, successive governments have only levied modest taxes on imported goods at two main entry points: the seaport and the airport in Mogadishu. In 2013, the government has collected roughly \$100 million from both sources. That covers roughly 40% of the government's overall annual budget (estimated to be approximately \$240 million in fiscal year 2014). Yet the revenue potential from other forms of taxation is enormous.

The third type of institutional building must be aimed at justice reform. Security institutions can only be effective when they are complimented with a strong and independent justice sector. Much like other state institutions, the judicial branch is very weak. It's viewed as deeply corrupt. The highest bidders often secure favorable judgments. It needs a comprehensive overhaul, starting with the formation of the Judicial Services Commission, as envisaged in the Provisional Constitution.

Together with institutional building, the new government has to focus on strengthening the systems that guide the institutions. There are two main systems that must be fixed urgently. First, the review of the Provisional Constitution must start immediately. This badly crafted document has deep holes and is replete with contradictions. It puts future federal member's states and the central government on a collision course. Similarly, the perennial conflicts between the President and his Prime Minister will only be deepened. (12) Formation of the independent commission to review the Constitution has been delayed by more than a year. The Provisional Constitution is a deal-breaker for this government. Its success—and failure—will in part depend on how it fixes its most important document.

The second system that needs urgent attention is federalism. Somalia adopted a federal system ten years ago, but how wide the system is misunderstood among both policymakers and the public is astonishing. Deep mistrust among clans and external pressure had led to the adoption of a federal system for Somalia. Neither the Provisional Constitution nor subsequent laws explain the type of federalism the country is using. The ambiguity in the Constitution and lack of clarity among the elite is leading to various actors in the country to interpret the Constitution in a way they deem favorable. Most existing and emerging federal member states are seeking the weakest form of federalism, known as confederation. In this model, ultimate power rests with the member states at the expense of the central government, which is only tasked with coordinating federal interests.

Efforts to establish a new federal member state are currently underway in the southwestern town of Baidoa. The federal government is conspicuously absent from this process, which could lead to an autonomous region with little or no ties to the federal government in Mogadishu. A similar process had been underway further southward, in Kismaayo, to form another federal member state, known as “Jubbaland”. Although the SFG has co-opted this process within the framework of the Addis Agreement, the ultimate result could be an autonomous region largely independent from the federal government. In the northeast, Puntland has been practically autonomous from the federal government since its formation in 1998.

If not properly contained and managed, the net result of the various initiatives across the country is a weakened federal government eclipsed by mini-states with strong confederation tendencies and equally strong ties to external actors.

### External challenges

Somalia's neighbors have played a pivotal role in shaping the internal dynamics of the country since the civil war in 1991. Respectively, Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti have historically viewed Somalia as part of their theater of operations. Since 2007 when it contributed the largest contingent within the AMISOM peacekeepers, Uganda, which shares no borders with Somalia, has forcefully joined this club. All four are currently contributing to the AMISOM contingent. And although they often demonstrate a unified front, each has a distinct interest in Somalia.

As the regional powerhouse, Ethiopia has been an arch rival of Somalia since the two countries fought over a border dispute in 1964 and then in 1977. Its strategic objective has been to weaken the Somali state. Once the state collapsed in 1991, Ethiopia's foreign policy toward Somalia has been to prevent a return of a strong central government in Somalia. Therefore, Addis Ababa has supported various armed groups and has been a strong proponent of ‘federal Somalia’. Today, Ethiopia maintains warm relations with rival groups in Somalia, such as Somaliland and Puntland. Another objective of Ethiopia is to reorient Somalia from the Arab League and Islamic Conference into a more African and IGAD identity. To an extent, Ethiopia has succeeded in both objectives.

Kenya is similar to Ethiopia in some respects, and is dissimilar to others. After being somewhat dispassionate about Somalia for nearly 20 years, Kenya began to intervene in Somalia in 2010 after a string of attacks inside Kenya by al-Shabaab. A new strategy to



create a buffer zone inside Somalia was crafted with the view toward protecting Kenya's coastal communities, which is vital to tourism. (13) In September 2012, Kenya unilaterally captured the city of Kismaayo from al-Shabaab. Kenya sought membership of the AMISOM peacekeepers only after it secured a "buffer zone" near its border. Soon after, Kenya lobbied for the formation of the "Jubbaland" state in an attempt to create a friendly Somali region under its protection near its border. After months of conflict, the Jubbaland project didn't go according to plan, and Ethiopia eventually outsmarted Kenya by stealing the thunder from Kenya and settling the Jubbaland disagreement in Addis Ababa. Still, Kenya retains over 4,000 of its troops in and around Kismaayo, and maintains an open corridor all the way to its border.

Djibouti is qualitatively different to both Ethiopia and Kenya. Led by ethnic Somalis, the tiny country of only about half a million people has done what it can to revive the Somali state over the years. It organized two landmark reconciliation conferences that resulted in transitional governments in 2000 and in 2009. Strategically, Djibouti gains from the revival of its bigger and older sister Somalia. In the absence of a strong Somali state in the Horn of Africa, Djibouti is left to the domination of Ethiopia and the bullying of Eritrea.

The role of Uganda in Somalia is unique. Kampala has no obvious interest in Somalia as the two countries share no border, and no historical ties. But as a growing regional power that is increasingly assertive and challenging Ethiopia's domination, it sees Somalia as a perfect theater of operation from which to solidify its position. Uganda has deftly used its peacekeeping role to exert pressure on western countries and to secure concessions. When a United Nations panel accused Uganda of supporting the M23 rebels in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kampala threatened to withdraw its troops from Somalia—and let al-Shabaab take over—if the report was not rescinded. (14) Under U.S. pressure, the Security Council blocked the findings of the report.

## Conclusion

Despite enormous challenges, the Somali Federal Government has made modest progress in its first year. Yet it has fallen significantly short of widespread expectations. In the remaining two and half years, it has plenty of opportunities to correct past mistakes and improve its report card. But that requires paradigm shift in orientation and practice.

Central to SFG's success is a determination to rebuild key state institutions, starting with the security apparatus, the judicial branch and the public finance management. Endemic

corruption is destroying the credibility of this government and eroding its capacity to deliver basic services.

Equally vital is to review and fix the Provisional Constitution and address the question of federalism in Somalia. Ambiguity in both systems is weakening the federal government overtime, and potentially leading to the dismemberment of the country.

Neighboring countries will likely continue to undermine the rebuilding of the state for fear of a strong Somalia. But the SFG must resist those efforts with the limited diplomatic and political tools in its arsenal.

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\***Abdirahman Yusuf Ali** is the director of the Mogadishu-based Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS), Somalia's first think tank.

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