

# Somalia's Administration in the post Farmajo Era: Need for a Fresh Strategy



**POLICY BRIEF**

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## Key Briefing Points:

- The May 15th elections in Somalia were held after a 16-month-long political bickering period, during which time the country had been pushed to the edge.
- Notably, a whole set of the same old challenges still demand the new administration's attention - top among those will be; restoring public trust that has been shattered and polarised along clan lines prior to elections, fostering healthier relations with the federal member states, and recalibrating Somalia's foreign diplomatic relations.
- Effective negotiations with Somaliland must be considered among the major priorities for the new administration.
- Improving the overall internal security in a meaningful way and finding new and effective ways of dealing with Al-shabab. Military action alone against the religious insurgency is unlikely to be sufficient. Moreover, completing the formation of Somalia's military, ahead of the planned AU withdrawal in two years' time, must be a major priority.

## Background:

On May 15th, 2022, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was elected and immediately sworn in as the 10th president of the Federal Government of Somalia. This was the second time Mr. Hassan was elected for the same office - his first term ended in 2017 after an unsuccessful re-election bid. His election was therefore historic and first of its kind in Somalia's history since independence. The exercise also ended over 16 months of a protracted electoral impasse which threatened the already fragile state. Mr. Mohamud beat 32 competitors that included the immediate former president, Mohamed Abdullahi Farmajo.

Somalia's indirect presidential election process draws a total of 329 electors from both the senate and the lower house. Historically, incumbent presidents do not get re-elected – multiple candidates who fail to progress through the electoral rounds rally behind one of the remaining candidates in a bid to oust the sitting president. This practice has been repeated in every election cycle, including the most recent one. This time however, the MPs did coin a new term, 'Wa-shamsi', to describe the old practice of a protest vote in support of anyone who secures enough support in the first and second rounds against the incumbent. "Wa-shamsi" is an old-fashioned punishment system in Somalia's traditional madrasas, where a given Qur'anic teacher invites all students to collectively pinch a mischievous pupil.

As a result of that 'wa-shamsi', President Hassan emerged victorious in the third round and got 214 votes against Somalia's Farmajo, who secured 110 votes. That was the end of the lengthy process, and Farmajo immediately conceded defeat as he oversaw peaceful transfer of power to his successor.

Now that the most difficult and most hazardous election impasse has passed, this policy brief sought to shed light on the impediments facing the new administration. Analysis and recommendations are based on in-depth individual interviews conducted with targeted stakeholders in Somalia's political theatre, representatives of policy thinktanks, and other keen observers in and outside the country. Focus Group Discussions were also conducted, involving selected members of the civil society. Secondary data was obtained through desk reviews of the most up-to-date literature drawn from credible sources. When weighing challenges and opportunities in the face of the new administration the policy brief is also cognizant of Somalia's socio-cultural underpinnings, political grandstanding, and crosscutting issues like drought, the protracted insecurity, and other salient enablers which have both a direct and indirect impact on the political and social environment.

## Somalia's Political underpinnings in the recent past:

In August 2012, the Federal Government of Somalia developed a provisional constitution which streamlined public structuralism and set the war-torn country on a trajectory to formal institutionalization. Somalia has ended a long-standing transitional status, and different external partners – Western nations, Arabian countries, Turkey among others, provided various forms of support such as; financial aid, humanitarian aid, and security-related support, albeit largely uncoordinated. To streamline foreign aid processes, the government developed a framework through which support for the government of Somalia was to be channelled. This included the Somalia's Partnership Forum (PFM), which was meant to; promote democracy in Somalia, strengthen the country's governance institutions, stabilize the country from the terror-riddled theocracy, address the humanitarian crisis, provide a semblance of governance, and contribute to stabilization, peace and security.

Electoral democracy was pursued in order to inculcate social inclusivity and allow the people, albeit indirectly, to have a say on who governs them. It was also meant to provide framework towards a universal suffrage, which has not materialized and is unlikely to be achieved in the near future.

Farmajo's administration had made two firm commitments– holding a one person one vote election by the end of his term, and creating the Somali armed forces to take over national security from AMISOM troops, but neither objective was achieved. In recent elections, the country has again witnessed a peaceful transfer of power. The latest practise of the so called 'indirect elections' was however unlike any other. The entire process was marred by political bickering and executive grandstanding. Then president Farmajo attempted to extend his term by two years which was fiercely contested by the council of the presidential candidates union that nearly tore the country apart .

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<sup>1</sup>May 2022: Crisis Group): A Welcome Chance for a Reset in Somalia; Omar Mahmood:  
<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/welcome-chance-reset-somalia>

## Challenges the new administration must confront:

The new president and his administration certainly have an exceptionally long catalogue of challenges at hand, both old and new, which even a properly functioning state would struggle to deal with. This, however, does not mean in any way that progress cannot be made. Mistrust between the Federal Government of Somalia and the Federal Member States, insecurity caused by the Al shabaab, drought, completion of the constitutional review etc. The state of affairs between Mogadishu and the Federal Member States is a major area which requires remedy and reconciliation. Addressing their concerns as a whole and presenting the Federal Government as a non-hostile entity will require good effort and energy from the new administration.

One way to deal with this will be completing the long-dragging constitutional review and clearly outlining rights and responsibilities of regional administrations and their relations with the centre. Most Somalis do not support federalism and expressed opposing viewpoints about this particular case. Some consider the Federal Member States as a parallel actor designed to stand as a counterweight to the central government. On the other hand, proponents of the federal project argue that the notion of federalism was essentially a response to the Somali people's concern in the aftermath of Siyad Barre's authoritarian regime, as it makes it mandatory for the central government to reconcile and cooperate with federal member states

- rather than being combative towards it. The new administration will need to address issues around federalism which many consider as a reality on the ground, as well as managing the trust deficit among Somalis by initiating an institutionalized bottom-up reconciliation process.



President Hassan Sh Mohamud chairs the first meeting with the leaders of the national consultative council.

<sup>2</sup><https://fews.net/sites/default/files/Joint%20Statement%20Horn%20of%20Africa%209%20June%202022.pdf>

## Drought effects – return of the old enemy:

On the other hand, the new administration faces, on top of all ills, an old but now renewed natural hazard. There exists a major challenge of dealing with a failing economy amidst debilitating droughts. President Hassan's Appointment of a special envoy for drought emergencies, to coordinate relief and mobilise resources before even a new government is formed, is a clear indication of the urgency of the matter. According to the WFP's most recent assessment, the whole region is now facing the worst drought recorded in the past four decades. This means, among other things, that the severity of the current drought will be more acute than the last major drought of 2011. In the face of major global crises, notably the ongoing conflict raging in Europe and the rising prices of food and essential commodities, plus internal insecurity and restriction of movement, the mission to deal with drought will be much tougher than ever. This calls for the prompt facilitation of aid and effective mobilization of resources from international partners as well as the Somali people to minimise and avert the looming risk of famine.

## The security approach:

When asked about what key priorities of the new administration should be, one of the key informants said,

“The government should have three priorities: security, security and security. Obviously, no administration can have a single policy agenda, nevertheless, that three-in-one response sums up the whole thing. Provision of security is the very basic element that defines what the most essential role of the state should be all about.

Absence of that role therefore, whether partially or wholly, targets the foundational pillar of the state, and poses a critical question on the legitimacy of any government”.

This means that the new administration must adopt new approaches with regard to security. Settling the question of Al-Shabab and accelerating efforts to rebuild an effective national armed forces should be a priority. There has been a serious lack of concrete plans and ideas to affect the achievement of those objectives.

On the issue of Al Shabaab, many security experts are of the view that the government should include negotiations with the Violent Extremist Group. While it is unclear whether the group is open to this, the government should expedite the establishment of a national armed forces capable of doing with the security issues affecting the country.

## Managing Diplomacy:

On the diplomatic front, the new administration will have multiple challenges to address. Somalia's diplomacy has taken a backseat since independence, and national interest is often overlooked during diplomatic processes. In the past few years, Somalia's foreign policy was sharply focused on the region of Horn of Africa and the Gulf countries. Kenya and Djibouti were not in good terms with the previous administration while some western countries became disenchanted, mainly due to the long dragging of elections. That is the diplomatic reality which the new administration has inherited. “**Somalia at peace with itself and with others**”, is the political slogan of the new president for the next four years which needs to be turned into a meaningful national and strategic policy.

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<sup>3</sup>EU is the single largest donor who funds AMISOM (now ATMIS), the largest peacekeeping mission in Africa.

## The Somalia – Somaliland Dialogue

The case of Kenya may present unique challenges to the new administration. As a neighbouring country who hosts nearly three hundred thousand Somali refugees and has peacekeeping troops in Somalia, the long-standing maritime dispute is likely to remain a stumbling block against any improvement of relations. The recent and final ICJ ruling on the case was largely in favour of Somalia, and Kenya has rejected to abide by the verdict. Therefore, without reaching a deal with Kenya which can lead to full implementation of the ICJ ruling, the new administration will have no chance to improve relations with the neighbouring country. While the maritime dispute is now finally decided, the two countries have much broader mutual interests to maintain friendly relations. Aside from the maritime dispute, President Hassan Sh. Mohamoud could aim to build improved relations with Kenya and the wider region.

Somalia is too fragile to adopt unilateralism in its diplomatic overtures. It must balance its own internal strategic interest with those of its neighbours and beyond. For instance, Western nations are interested in contributing to the state building process, and the country must develop its strategy to accommodate them. Likewise, the Gulf states and eastern powers also have their respective diplomatic missions in the country who are prepared to engage with Somalia and they can be useful in multiple areas. Notwithstanding, the new administration must come up with the ingenuity and intuition to engage with everyone, at the expense of no one. Engagement with other nations on mutual interest is acceptable under specific standards of foreign policy norms. However, Somalia must not endanger its nascent democracy, nationalism, and fragile political activities for short term gains, as was frequently observed in the past.

The Federal Government of Somalia has been in formal talks with the Government of Somaliland for over a decade. Despite the several rounds of talks that were in London in 2012, Istanbul in 2015, and the June 2020 consultative meeting in Djibouti, there has been no meaningful consensus arising from the Somalia/Somaliland dialogue process. The new Administration in Mogadishu needs new strategy that is built on lessons learned from the past 10 years.

ISIR's open-source analysis and recommendations highlighted several challenges which have presented stumbling blocks toward reaching a breakthrough. From the beginning, the process lacked a formal structural setting as both international and regional actors did not provide clear cut objectives and milestones through which progress can be measured. Secondly, the parties were not thoroughly prepared. On many occasions, both sides sent unprepared ad-hoc negotiating teams to participate the talks. Thirdly, the process lacked domestic ownership since the dialogue concept was first initiated by the international community. Success of any future talks should involve key stakeholders who collectively own the process, to ensure commitment to achieving objectives.

To advance the negotiations out of the current impasse, the new administration should consider the resumption of the negotiations among its top priorities and take bold steps in charting a way forward towards ending the three-decade long stalemate. To revive the dialogue and obtain tangible results, new ideas have to be incorporated into the process in order to enable it to achieve meaningful results. Trust-building between the negotiating parties and the involvement of international mediators is seen as a necessary step to propel a successful dialogue.



## Accelerate Financial Sector Reform:

Economically, a lot has changed since President Hassan's last term in office, and the new administration must take note. The previous administration led some of the reforms in the economic sector and made headways. Part of the strategies implemented included; the strengthening of fiscal policies, the negotiation of fiduciary arrangements to strengthen revenue generation, and the restructuring of long-standing foreign debt, where some of it has even been written off. Also, the IMF and the World Bank have re-established their relationship with Somalia.

The IMF is currently working with the Central Bank of Somalia to strengthen its fiscal and monetary policies. Banking regulations have been set up and the Central Bank is in the processes of establishing an interbank rule to foster an enabling environment for public financial management (PFM). Re-institutionalization of that scale cannot be executed overnight.

The new administration needs to further improve existing achievements by enhancing efficient financial management practices including the micro and macroeconomic environment which ought to be consistently strengthened to make it effective. Efficient and properly regulated financial sectors do not improve the economy alone, but it also improves security. Introduction of the single-account policy for businesses and individual traders as part of the PFM would greatly improve inland tax revenues. The new administration is aware of the endemic corruption in Somalia and how the vice has impacted negatively on the government's reputation and social services across board. Confronting these challenges and uprooting deeply entrenched corruption tentacles is something the new administration must prioritize.

## Policy Considerations (Recommendations):

- Negotiations with Somaliland would require a better way forward, key among them is institutionalizing the process. External players to act both as guarantors and mediators must be engaged even before any negotiations restart. A single negotiating team throughout the process must be formed, and the Somali people must be updated on any notable progress or challenges.
- Addressing salient security concerns must form the basis for the current administration's policy plans. Different multi-pronged strategies should be adopted by the federal government and her supporters including considering the prospects of direct and indirect engagement with the insurgency and setting up joint programmes between the federal government and Federal member states to build synergies in enhancing security.
- At all levels, the new administration must underscore the need to enhance the creation of livelihood through long-term sustainable economic reforms and short-term engagement with development actors to forestall humanitarian crisis while at the same time creating opportunities for social inclusion in economic planning.
- State building approaches must be inclusive at all levels and the new administration must consider political actors as co-players in the strategic goal of building Somalia. Working closely at all levels of government will diffuse tensions, accelerate decision-making processes and build social capital across all political players.
- The international community must continue to support the state building in Somalia under a clear administrative framework that contributes towards strengthening inclusive public governance. On its part the FGS must reset its diplomatic infrastructures to align with its strategic interest

<sup>4</sup>World bank (27th Feb, 2020): <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/02/27/somalia-to-reestablish-financial-relations-with-the-world-bank-group-after-thirty-years>



