WALKING IN CIRCLES: POST ELECTION POLITICAL IMPASSE IN SOMALILAND CONTINUES





Following the November 2017 elections, political parties in Somaliland continue to be engaged in a protracted political headlock, which locals have dubbed "walking in circles." After numerous and unsuccessful efforts at local negotiations and mediation, the European Union Ambassador to Somalia, Mr. Nicolas Berlanga, brokered a political settlement between the three political parties on the 27th of February 2020 in Hargeisa for the second time in less than a year. As a result, a seven-point agreement was signed by the leaders of the three political parties.

This marks the third time that external intervention was required to resolve an internal political crisis. Two of these occasions were during President Bihi's term, and were only months apart. ISIR Analytics presents the following Infographic which captures the chronology of events to remind our audience how political events unfolded since the last agreement was signed in July 2019.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

JULY 6, 2019

The HoR convened and in a crucial session 20 MPs forwarded a motion for the amendments of Electoral Law No.20/2001 in regard to increasing NEC members from 7 to 9.

JULY 6, 2019

MPs representing Eastern and Western regions walked away from the parliament session accusing the agreement falls short of addressing all concerns of their constituencies pertaining to seat allocations.

AUG 18, 2019

WADDANI party pulls out of the 26 July agreement in protest to the motion denial

OCT 15, 2019

The President passes on the list of lineup of the upcoming NEC to parliament for approval.

NOV 10, 2019

HoR subcommittee of internal and security affairs meets with 6 NEC members excluding the WADANNI party nominated member

NOV 12, 2019

WADDANI party Secretary general and UCID V.P candidate (2017) jointly refuse to cooperate with the appointed NEC members

Nov 17, 2019

Alleging 'Illegal Demonstrations, government arrests opposition party Sec. Gen and spokesperson

AUG 17,2019-

The motion is denied with claims of coinciding with the prioritization order set for the house

SEPT 8, 2019

Opposition political parties issue a joint statement withdrawing the motion to amend electoral law "in an effort to speed up preparations for the much delayed elections

OCT 15, 2019

WADDANI party formally write to HoR speaker complaining of the selection of two members

NOV 12, 2019

Parliament approves the newly nominated NEC members except for the nominee from WADDANI party

NOV 17, 2019

WADDANI party Chairman calls for a gathering at the party's headquarters office in Hargeisa to deliver important information'

NOV 20, 2019

Self appointed group of business leaders and religious scholars volunteers to mediate between the government and the political parties.

NOV 24, 2019

Guurti votes to extend the HoRs' and Guurti's terms of office by two and three years respectively

NOV 25, 2019

The 6 NEC appointees are sworn in and take office 5 days later, with Abdirashid Mohamoud Ali (Aka Riyo-Raac) as the chair person

NOV 26, 2019

Opposition party officials are released from jail without charges

NOV 27, 2019-

IGAD, UN, EU USA and other International partners jointly express concerns over the term extension by Guurti

DEC 17, 2019

The mediation committee calls for the dismissal of the new NEC members and the reinstatement of the previous office holders

DEC 18, 2019

Political parties unanimously agree with the view but government expresses reservations concerning legal implications

DEC 18-19 2019

Ambassadors mainly from EU countries meet with President Bihi, the opposition parties and mediation committee separately to press for elections to be held within 2020

DEC 23, 2019

President Bihi holds consultative meetings with both opposition parties' leaders

DEC 26, 2019

The V.P and opposition parties' leaders jointly announce that the president would implement the recommendations by the mediation committee by 10th Jan

JAN 13, 2020

President Bihi and KULMIYE party leadership met opposition leaders after which UCID and WADDANI accused government of negating recommendations and asked the new NEC members to resign.

JAN 14, 2020

Government responded opposition parties' accusations in a press release issued by the Ministry of Information. Calls upon the opposition parties and other stakeholders to respect the laws prevailing in the country and to work with existing and mandated electoral institutions

FEB 3, 2020

Commissioner Hassan Duale of UCID party resigns

FEB 18, 2020

The president addresses the nation revealing intentions to open the political space

FEB 22, 2020

Opposition parties dispute the legality of opening up the political space and call for early presidential elections instead.

FEB 27, 2020

European Union Envoy Nicholas Berlanga brokers a seven-point agreement between the three parties for the second time

Major highlights of the deal:

- The agreement reached sets sights on municipal and parliamentary elections to be held within 2020
- The newly signed agreement calls a hybrid body of national electoral commission that combine seven former commissioners and the current seven commissioners
- Whilst the current commission will remain as a mandatory body, the former commissioners will take a technical role to manage day to day election operations along with three assistant internationals representing donor countries.

Conclusion

Considering the above timeline of events in Somaliland it is apparent that for 24 months, political parties focused on one topic –National Electoral Commission. It may be time to question the leaders' capacity to resolve more complex disputes in future.

It is worth noting that major stumbling blocks to holding parliamentary elections go beyond NEC. Seat allocation and Quota for minority groups is yet to be agreed on.

Clan elders and community leaders from Awdal and Sool regions have repeatedly pronounced their intention to boycott any forthcoming election if their concerns are not addressed.

It is also certain that the Guurti were not signatory to the agreement reached so they may stand firm and insist that the term extensions still holds.

Coming from that backdrop, political changes in the way of possible elections in the near future seem improbable.

The question is "have Somaliland political parties resolved the political stagnation and reached an amicable solution, or they are just entering a new cycle of political joggling?"