

Sool, Sanaag and Cayn Leadership: Some challenges and opportunities

By Liban Ahmad

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In October 2009 traditional and political leaders, members of the civil society from Sool, Sanaag and Cayn (SSC hereafter) regions of northern Somalia met in Nairobi. As *wardheerNews.com* reported, 42 delegates from SSC Diaspora and elders attended the conference. The traditional leaders who attended the conference are based in Somalia. Conference participants discussed, among other issues, the role of SSC political leaders in Puntland and Transitional Federal Government; they were criticized for not taking the interests of the people they represent seriously. Parliamentary members of Puntland are appointed on the recommendation of the traditional leaders. So why the conference participants failed to reflect on the role of the traditional leaders is not known. However, the participants agreed that the traditional leaders had a role in appointing politicians at the Puntland level and sometimes at the TFG level. The role of traditional leaders should not be conflated into that of the politicians, the conference participants suggested. Will such a new role deny traditional leaders the prerogative to appoint political representatives from SSC? A workshop for and by traditional leaders to discuss their role in the issues the conference sought to address would have been an opportunity to reflect on the failures of the traditional leadership and its impact on the SSC people .

The new political structure on which conference participants agreed is called *Hoggaanka Badbaadada iyo Midaynta* ((HBM here after); Salvation and Unification Leadership). The conference organizers emphasized that the new leadership structure has not cut ties with other Puntland clans but that Puntland government “failed the SSC people. “**Puntland** had three successive administrations. Which administration had let down the SSC people, the conference participants did not point out. Puntland’s shortcomings affected nearly all people in one way or another. Each Puntland administration failed to

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resist temptations of clanism and wasting of public resources. These failures point to a collective responsibility.

Pro-Puntland traditional leaders have been influential in making the outcome of Nairobi conference less critical of the Puntland administration. They have succeeded in convincing politicians and traditional leaders to remain part and parcel of Puntland. However, any links with pro-Puntland Sool politicians may draw the anger of those who think that Puntland botched running Sool. They will have to work hard and take into consideration the criticisms leveled against Puntland traditional leaders and politicians for not addressing factors that led to low cohesion and confidence in the new Puntland administration.

The SSC traditional leaders and politicians who were for setting up a separate SSC administration that comes neither under Somaliland nor Puntland have made concessions. In return they were successful in appointing former Puntland vice presidential candidate, Saleban Ahmed Isse, as the leader of HBM and Ali Hassan Sabarey, as the deputy leader. Although many influential politicians and traditional leaders are unhappy with the way Puntland dealt with the Las Anod occupation by Somaliland forces, they regard calls to withdraw confidence from Puntland administration and structure as a betrayal. This approach is a tacit admission that Puntland failures are shared by all Puntlanders.

Somaliland and Puntland responses

In an interview with the BBC Somali Service Garad Jama Garad Ali called for Somaliland to withdraw their troops from Las Anod, and other parts of Sool that its forces had occupied. Failure to do so, the Garad said, would lead to armed confrontations. The Garad's remarks put the spotlight on Somaliland's contradictory policy of empowering Sool politicians who have not done anything about the reconciliation calls made by Saleban Mohamud Adam, the leader of Somaliland Council of Elders (*Guurti*) in 2008.

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The response from Puntland and Somaliland administrations to the BBC Somali Service interview with Garad Jama Garad Ali , one of the main architects of the conference, show that both administrations will work together to undermine the outcome of Nairobi conference. Somaliland chose Bashe Mohamed, deputy speaker of Somaliland parliament who was verbally assaulted in Hargeisa while co-chairing a meeting in the parliament chambers. The man who used the threatening language has not so far been brought to book. Several years ago when Ahmed Mohamed Adan (aka Qaybe) was the Speaker of Somaliland Parliament, Ali Mohamed (aka Ali Sandulle), the Somaliland appointed governor of Sool region, was expelled from Somaliland parliament after he used unsuitable language towards the former speaker. Bashe said: "Somaliland forces based in Sool are Dhulbahante." He corroborated allegations that Somaliland forces in Sool are modeled after sub-clan based groupings in many parts of Somalia, thereby, giving local political actors leverage to exploit the Somaliland-Puntland territorial dispute for political and economic ends. He made Somaliland government open to accusation of divide and rule. Bashe is a member of the Somaliland opposition party, *Kulmie* but comes from Las Anod.

The Somaliland Deputy speaker of Parliament's response to Garad Jama 's is more measured than Habsade's remarks when, in 2007, he told the BBC Somali Service :“The [Boocame] meeting is not inclusive, and the outcome will not affect the people in Sool, Sanaag and Cayn. Politicians are not in the meeting. The role of traditional leaders is to chair meetings but not to make decisions.” Ahmed Hassan Asowe , the Somaliland Minister for Justice, who is a member of the ruling UDUB party and hails from SSC regions, told the Voice of America Somali Service that the political reality in Somalia causes people in Sool, Sanaag and Cayn to support various administrations. Mr Asowe is based in Hargeisa and knows full well that in Somaliland people are jailed for supporting the idea of union with Somalia. A good example is the deportation of Jama Mohamed Qalib and the many other prominent politicians and elders who faced hardship including jail terms in Hargeysa and other cities for simply uttering their

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support for a united Somalia. Similarly no one can operate freely in Puntland if they believe in the secession of Somaliland.

There are no influential Sool traditional leaders supporting Somaliland; only politicians with no support base in their constituencies they claim to represent. The Somaliland policy of spurning pro-union Sool traditional leaders while supporting traditional leaders associated with the clans traditionally supported the Somali National movement is noteworthy. This policy has undermined the standing of pro-Somaliland Sool politicians.



SSC leader: challenges and opportunities

The Puntland Minister of Fisheries Mr. Mohamed Farah Adam told the BBC Somali Service that “Puntland government is against” the outcome of Nairobi conference. The procedure of appointing political representatives in Puntland favours elders over politicians because it is the *Isimmo* (council of elders) who elect members of the parliament who in turn choose by ballot the president and vice president of Puntland. A meeting by group of politicians and traditional leaders from Sool and Sanaag and Cayn without the input of Puntland is unpalatable to the new administration that came into power in January 2009. Politicians and traditional leaders from SSC failed to avert the power struggle that led to the sacking of former Puntland Interior Minister Mr. Ahmed Abdi Habsade who, along with his supporters, joined Somaliland in 2007. Pro-Puntland Sool politicians are appointed on the recommendation of elders. This type of political arrangement continues to undermine good governance in Puntland. Puntland was barely five years old when participants of Puntland Development and Research Centre governance workshop noted “the primary cause of the administration’s ineffectiveness derives from the fact that loyalty to the clan interest overrides the public responsibility of the politicians and functionaries. The gravest blunder committed constituted the fact that the managers of

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state organs had been selected on clan quota-allocation- MPs, Ministerial and Judicial posts and recruitment of police officers and civil servants- instead of on formal qualifications, merit and competence. This system impacted dramatically in the functioning of political, legislative and executive organs and the democratic way of governance.”



President Farole: Against SSC

The responses from Puntland and Somaliland to the SSC conference differ in tone: two years ago Somaliland was aggressive towards leaders but now Puntland is because the new administration is keen to be seen as keen on taking security and economic problems seriously. Both administrations need strong traditional and political leadership from the SSC communities.

Will Somaliland work towards addressing the ‘dubious’ representation and start unconditional talks with new SSC leadership or will it allow to be influenced by pro-Somaliland Sool politicians against the role of traditional leaders? Somaliland is facing governance crisis that pro-Somaliland SSC politicians exploit to remain politically influential. In a 2009 Human Rights Watch on Somaliland “Hostages to peace” Human Rights Watch made the following observation: “Somaliland’s House of Representatives is under opposition control but the [Dahir Riyale Kahin’s] presidency largely ignores the institution and brushes aside its attempts to exercise oversight of government finances as provided for by the constitution. The Supreme Court has the power to overturn unconstitutional government actions but the court is beholden to the executive—activists who attempted to challenge the legality of the Security Committees were simply thrown out of court and arrested. Neither that case nor any other constitutional challenge to government action has ever been heard by the court.”

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President Riyale: confused SSC policy

Challenges facing SSC leadership

The SSC leadership faces some challenges. To strengthen its status as the sole representative of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn 'Dhulbahante' constituencies, the leadership will gain a lot from consulting all stake holders in the SSC politics. The leadership will have to ask the question: do SSC constituencies need unification more than they need reconciliation? The Puntland-Somaliland territorial dispute is based on Somaliland's unilateral decision to secede and redraw the map and Puntland's insistence on Sool, Sanaag and Cayn without consulting the people without whose support Somaliland will contribute to building a politically unsustainable polity. Acknowledging the peace and institution-building in parts of what was British Somaliland deserves the acknowledgement of the SSC. Puntland-Somaliland territorial dispute is a political issue not a military issue.

The new Puntland leadership regards as Somaliland as a political ally against centralism. President Abdirahman Farole of Puntland reiterated the need to divide development among the Transitional Federal Government, Puntland and Somaliland. This stance has angered many pro-Puntland Sool people but they forget that it is Sool political leaders who are behind the Puntland-Somaliland stand-off since 2004 war between Puntland and Somaliland. Traditional leaders failed to rein Sool politicians who had a role in deploying Somaliland forces in parts of Sool and eventually

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facilitating the fall of Las Anod after Puntland government used most of its resources to prop up the TFG then led by Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed while neglecting the stand-off between Somaliland and Puntland forces near Adhi-Addeeye (2004-2007). Puntland administration is under pressure to deliver but the Farole administration has given the impression that it is against a unified leadership given the response of Puntland's Minister of Fisheries.

Will Puntland stay the course on at least some of its anti-SSC leadership stance or will it change and welcome the SSC leadership without alienating those who see it as duplication? If the recent Puntland history is any guide, Puntland government may fail to view bringing together pro-Puntland Sool politicians and other traditional leaders for fear of giving in to the SSC leadership led by a man who lost to the current vice president of Puntland in the last election of January 2009.

Somaliland faces a more serious test. Will it continue to prop up politicians who have no links with the traditional leadership of SSC constituencies knowing full well that such a policy backfires? SSC leadership can benefit from talking to both pro-Somaliland and pro-Puntland politicians unconditionally. Somalia's recent history shows that those who wanted to make a change at the clan level—and even at the national level-- made those they wanted to change look better in hindsight because change seekers never talked to those they had wanted to change.

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