

Somalia: Sliding Back to “Political Conflict” Conflict by Design

Somalia is a country of cultural unanimity with political disunity. While the former attribute is an organic phenomenon, the latter is often the product of faulty leadership. A report at a Joint meeting of the Royal African Society on May 1, 1958 assesses the Somalis this way:

The division and the fact that the tribes are divided among themselves and ridden by suspicion of one another the Somalis clearly form a distinct and compact racial group. They speak the same language, they have the same religion and customs and at heart they feel themselves to be one people.

Just as today, Somalis were internally divided then. The Italian Administrator, signor Anzilotti, told the Legislative Assembly on October 16th 1957 that “if the Somalis were not prepared to co-operate, Italy would tell the United Nations that she was ready to give up the mandate.” The conflict then was between Mogadishu’s vision pertaining to pending post-colonial state and the Digil Mirfle’s propensity for more autonomy.

Today, the AU and the UN are in the same predicament about Somalia’s unending business as they were in 1957 and 1958. In other words, it is always difficult to bring the humpty-dumpty Somali clans and their leaders together, when one side wants to impose its will on the other side.

Despite all the enviable national attributes, Somali leaders never miss an opportunity to overlook them and consistently employ policies of division and confrontation. This time around, President Hassan Sh. Mohamud is astonishingly putting policies of confrontation ahead of accommodation.

Mogadishu elites are bent today on eroding whatever unity is left off of the post-1990 civil war. Whether we are reaching a new tipping point once again over Jubbaland is only a question of when unless Mogadishu changes course. Otherwise, there is likelihood that Jubbaland may jump-off ship to chart its own political course. Puntland may follow suite as Somaliland already did.

The unabated insistence of Mogadishu elites to impose a draconian “my way or the highway,” policy, or a non-negotiable political reengineering, as disguised as the nebulous highly political terminologies of “dowladda ha looga dambeeyo” or the “federal government” has the final say, is certainly producing, as predicted by many analysts, most notably by Dr. Weinstein, devastating “politics of conflict” in the region.

To be sure, there is no constitutional mandate that authorizes the Mogadishu administration to form any of the content and/or form of a pending or an already existing state in the Somali Federal System. The people without any outside manipulation have the say to form their own government. As America’s forefathers would say, it is the yeoman that is the ultimate arbiter of the nature of their local governance.

Weight of History as the Root Cause of Federalism

Somalia has not had a meaningful government for almost a quarter of a century (from 1990 to 2013). There are many socioeconomic factors that led to the demise of the once cohesive Somali state. However, the main and most immediate factor for the state to fail was the massive “clan cleansing” campaign which the militia of the now defunct United Somali Congress (USC) orchestrated inside Mogadishu under the

leadership of the late General Farah Aidid (Lidwien Kapteijns, 2013).



Aidid

The repercussion of the wanton killings of innocent civilians inside Mogadishu resulted in the now famous Darood exodus, , the aftermath of which not only eroded national cohesion but caused the center of governance to collapse in the eventful year of 1991. Prof. Lidwien Kapteijns calls these events major historical “shifts.”

Once the exodus people reached their home base (outlying regions, especially Jubbaland and Puntland), they recreated permanent, if not complete, civic culture independent of the vagaries of Mogadishu. The Shabelle (Marka and the likes), Bay, and Bakol regions could not likewise recreate their own civic and political culture, only because they have been subjected to what British sociologists called “internal colonialism” by armed groups descending from Galmudug area.



Garowe



Marka

A not-so-unimportant cause for the dismemberment of Somalia was also the unwise move by the same armed group (USC) who unilaterally established a Mogadishu-centered government without the consent of others. This latter issue became a rallying alibi for Somalilanders to embark on a secessionist path and a political course that is currently proving very difficult to reverse.

The political conflict which Somalis have experienced in the last quarter century is replete with bitter memories of mistrust and sectarian politics that laid dormant in the nation's collective memory.

Folk songs of sectarianism and politics of cacophony have recently once again filled the airwaves and the internet media.

One such striking and exclusionist sentiment is captured by a 1950s or 1960s song, now revived in many versions. In one of the songs I listened, a Guurow style singer chastises Daroods as outsiders. Otherwise a benign social commentary, the armed USC that captured Mogadishu city in the closing days of 1990 exploited the narrative as a political and virulent collective punishment tool of "clan cleansing."

The current founders of the regional states of Puntland and Jubbalnd in particular and their supporters are people who are deeply impacted by the trauma and mayhem levied by the USC-instigated “communal war.”

Mogadishu’s Recalcitrant Attitude

At minimum, the weight of this history should have advised Mogadishu in its approaches to dealing with the regions and their people. As evident as this simple proposition is, unfortunately the current government in Mogadishu deliberately brushed aside pains of recent collective punishment suffered by people from the regions. Neither does the recent lazy comment by the President on May 18, 2013 regarding “Somaliland wasting its time by not joining the rest of the country” helps.

Many of us have repeatedly called for a meaningful national reconciliation and the establishment of “truth commission,” which could have served as a clear message from Mogadishu to address some of the festering background issues. In other words, healing comes then follows mutual trust being established among the people of the nation.

Is rebuilding the Somali state, therefore, viable without a genuine national reconciliation and a national truth commission?



Mohamud



Ahmed

Although difficult to give a simple answer to this complex question, however, it is inexorable to state that a viable and productive national state in Somalia may not be realized in the near future without comprehensive national dialogue by Somalis for Somalis, and without letting local regions form their own administrations. It is precisely by not addressing this issue that Somalia wasted a quarter of a century by repeating the same faulty formula as only a mad man would do.

President Hassan, off all previous leaders, showed no interest in either the weight of past history or any form of national reconciliation. A non-policy policy of “forget and forgive” is all that he can offer, while undermining sincere efforts by the people of Jubbaland.

His call on May 28, 2013 for Jubbaland residents to come to Mogadishu and deliberate with him should first come as sincere gesture to the existing Jubbaland administration, not in the manipulative way he had so offered.

Self-Derailment in the Making

President Hassan’s recalcitrant attitude towards the people of Jubbaland came at a recent exclusive Mogadishu-based business group meeting. In that meeting, he confirmed his determination to having his way on the issue of Jubbaland. With that commitment, the President officially initiated a deliberate motion of sliding Somali back to where it came from.

A series of less thought-out and emotive political actions by Mogadishu elites are bringing the Jubaland issue closer to the tipping point.



Panoramic view of Kismayo Port



Hiraale

- Mogadishu deliberately sought to divide the brotherly people of Gedo and Jubbaland by establishing a parallel governor for Garbahaaray.
- Mogadishu tried to undermine the popularly established Jubbaland government, President Hassan named an entire absentee administration inside Mogadishu to “show” the world that the community of Jubbaland is divided.
- Only few days after Ahmed Madobe was elected as a consensus president by about 500 delegates who deliberated for about eight months, the administration of Hassan Sh. Mohamud decided to finance Colonel Barre Hiirale. In early May, Mogadishu reportedly gave him about \$250,000, \$50,000 of which was used to rent one small boat for transportation, as part of his effort to create crisis in Kismayo. As soon as Ahmed Madobe was elected, colonel Hiraale declared a farce presidential title onto himself.
- On early May, , with unprecedented audacity to undermine the gains so far registered by the Jubbaland people and elsewhere, President Hassan single handedly nominated paper administrators to the region while completely oblivious to the grassroots process that had been underway in this region.

- He sent a 16-member Parliamentary delegation, again a farce fact-finding mission, to derail and divide in futility the clan leaders in Kismayo.
- On May 20, The IGAD leaders release its long awaited assessment of the conflict between Mogadishu and Jubbaland with the following two key issues: (1) The need for a national reconciliation to be held between the two sides; and (2) To refer back the complaint of Kenyan presence in Somalia by Mogadishu to the UN Security Council. The first case is meant to give a diplomatic face saving to Mogadishu, while the second issue was a political slap on the face of the President Hassan in that he was told to stop his polarizing rhetoric, and that it is the UN that has mandate on the presence of Kenyan troops inside Jubbaland.
- On May 28, 2013, stern accusation by Puntland's president against Mogadishu's deliberate tempering with the June 12, 2012 official version of the Provisional constitution is released.

President Hassan's actions are needless to say in total contravention to the spirit and intent of the Provisional Constitution of the Somali Federal Government, in that Article 49, Section 6 calls for regions to establish their governments.

With an open conflict over Jubbaland looming large and Mogadishu failing in its regional diplomacy, it has only one alternative: to go to war, or to work with the newly elected President of Jubbaland and his administration. Politics offers more with cooperation rather than coercion, and I hope that would be the preferred route Mogadishu decides to travel.

A final note: I tip my hat off for President Ahmed Madobe for staying cool and calm when Mogadishu tried to provoke him by sending to Kismayo a flurry of sabotaging actors (Barre Hiirale, partisan parliamentarians, and absentee administrators...). With all this, and with his base urging him to take draconian measures, President Ahmed kept his cool and remained calm, put the security of the city of Kismayo on his top priority, and placed his faith in the hands of his people, while conducting diplomacy. This is a test that President Ahmed passed with flying colors. At least for now, he is credited with averting an open conflict with Mogadishu elites.