



Crisis in Awdal: Violence, Poverty, and Border Restrictions

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INTRODUCTION

The persistent escalation of military violence by the Hargeisa administration -the SNM remnants and their supporters- is very likely to deeply entrench in a proliferation of vicious regional conflict. The mission of Awdal State movement (ASM) is to end this authoritarian regime and its oppressive system.

Awdal State Movement (ASM) was created to promote the idea of uniting its communities for one cause; that Awdal must govern its region independent of SNM authorities, without negotiation. The fundamental political strategy is enshrined on the mission of how to better help the communities in Awdal to cultivate and create their own leadership and self-

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governance. ASM aims to change all the vicious and bloody schemes of the clan ruling in Hargeisa and their supporters from Awdal. ASM will put an end to this thin layer of control over Awdal that is nothing more than a style of neocolonialism- self-organized tribal group, which is an advanced detachment of the former colonizer- and now actively engaging subtle subjugation of socio-economic order, and adulteration of the cultural heritage of the State of Awdal and its people. However, such layer of control is uneven and is rather sitting insecurely on top of an explosion- an extremely resilient order they cannot sustain controlling it any longer.

The people of Awdal will not rest until they achieve a lasting victory and form their federal Somalia member State. ASM administration is intended to create a new socio-economic order and political strategy that will end the clan monopoly in the region. ASM would establish a government that represents the people, protects the peace, and is unwilling to be the party of the secessionist group.

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The contention is that the problems Awdal is facing are much bigger and deeper than just changing a political party every few years, so long such an oppressive system exists in the region. It will take organized efforts from the Awdal community to defend itself and dislodge this strangling power and free themselves.

ASM argues that it was the invasion by SNM and the continued attacks by the self-styled regional authorities in Hargeisa that caused the leadership breakdown and the lack of economic development in the region. The regional authority in Hargeisa has employed tenants of their own armed military, comprised of unofficial tribal militia orchestrated by president Bixi and his tribal cohorts. Such power is financed by the authorities of SNM and the president of Djibouti to destroy the daily livelihood of the Awdal community, making it difficult to re-organize and build their leadership and self-governance. We, ASM, reject and condemn this egregious and heinous repugnant act supported by some international governments and organizations. The best way to tackle such tactics is to repair the community relationships to circumvent the drawbacks of divide and conquer tactics. We are calling for an Autonomous Awdal State that remains as member of the Somali federal government.

Background:

Awdal is a resourceful region with a long coastal ocean and with the distribution of terrestrial ecological systems of grassland, savanna, tropical dry forests, and mountainous regions with rich minerals and precious rocks waiting to be mined. A region blessed with supreme landscape of agricultural lands, wetlands, and with vast waterways has been reduced to being one of the poorest regions in the whole of the Horn of Africa. According to recent reports from the region, "The mountainous zone consists of a string of mountains, known as Golis range, extends from east to west across the region and is about 700 –1000 meters above sea level. The zone is characterized by topographical features such as deep Gorges, valleys, and dry water courses, with and without springs, that all end up into coastal zone. During the rainy season, the water courses carrying rainwater run-offs from mountains go into the sea. The run-offs washed down good soil from mountain tops and, in the process, cause environmental degradation and deterioration of roads passing across the mountains into coastal towns; they also leave behind deep sandy soils in coastal plains that make road transportation a big challenge. The last and the third topographical feature of the region, next to the Mountainous Zone in the south, is the Ogo Plateau zone. It is about 1100–1300 meters above sea level. Most of the major towns and villages including the regional capital, Borama city, occur in this zone and has high population density in the region."

The people of Awdal know their history and the significance of Awdal to the rest of the world. The Awdal region is a global strategic region which has defense, economic, and strategic significance. The global trade 'Choke Point' is the nine-nautical miles between the port of Zeila, Somalia, and Aden, Yemen. Most of the worldwide oil goes through this narrow segment, and anyone who controls the 'Choke Point' has a tremendous influence on global trade. The people of Awdal is currently under occupation of this one-clan entity calling itself Somaliland.

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The Attack of SNM militia to Northern Somalia Population.

In the 1990s, Somalia fell into the hands of unruly warlords, who put every region and its environs in hell. These warlords were the first symptoms of the disease that eventually ravaged the whole Somalia.



SNM men and their trained cohorts.

The UN, US, and other international communities, who lacked the understanding of Somali clan-politics, have empowered the warlords by legitimizing their control of their selective regions in the country at large. The SNM administration in Hargeisa, northern Somalia, has created a terror in the northern region of Somalia. What is more shocking today, more than three decades, is to see men employing the same tactics to remain in power forever. The men who started this ravaging violence back in 1979 between rural communities in northern Somalia are continuing relentless hostilities towards the people of SSC and Awdal to kill, imprison and torture-that is their style of governing. Until these men and their entire system forced out of politics, peace will never return to the region as they will never relinquish power in peaceful manner.

The regime has already taken over the area, plundered its economy, and repeatedly appointed non-elected local governors to Awdal Region; only for the purpose of executing its conspiracy to displace Awdal inhabitants. The nature of the violence that Somaliland is carrying out inside the region is a total war, an all-out effort to kill and subdue civilians, especially the youth.

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It is designed to disfranchise and displace people from their homes. Case in point is what is happening today in SSC regions and its surroundings. The truth of the matter is that these men have had the opportunity to lead their people but could not govern and they failed miserably.

Today, Awdal is the bottom compared to the other regions in northern Somalia. People live with daily dose of violence, trauma, abject poverty and with the fear of being killed by militia or snapped off from your bed while asleep in the middle of the night by secret security forces from Hargeis any second, it is incomprehensible to see these organized attacks orchestrated by these men-anarchists who have enriched themselves by stealing public funds to continue. Tragically these men who believe in and feed of modern era of anarchism shattered the livelihood of the people in Awdal. Their leadership is associated with corruption, land misappropriations of territorial integrity, activities kin to terrorism, piracy, spectacular series of assassinations of intellectuals and innocent people in Laascaanood and Awdal. These men should have been brought to the International Criminal Court for their crimes against the people residing in these regions. The crisis these men created are unforgettable. Such massive struggle of life and death that Awdal society has been subjected to, tend to create an image of the enemy as the “Other”, a brute whose tribalized character symbolized not only opposed interests but absolute evil. History will not be kind to these men.

Today, the generalized nature of the present-day regional crisis has the potential of surpassing the 1991 SNM attack on Awdal, both in quantity and quality. Maintaining the status quo has become unbearable and has increased tension in the region. Currently, SNM and its trained cohorts have become the politically dominant actors in the region with only one agenda—ignoring the rule of law and coercing the people to succumb to oppression. Today, the Hargeisa administration is busy dividing the people of Awdal into small groups to impose its ill-fated tactics through bribery and malfeasance. Awdalites understand Hargeisa administration is trying to subdue people’s voices and lie to the rest of the world about a pseudo-election to cover up a plan where they legitimize areas of Awdal region for SNM clan members and promote an illusory solo clan interest.

We remain very much concerned that if this election is held, it will lead to a civil war that will spread throughout the Region because it benefits one clan and reduces the importance of the other groups in northern Somalia. It will further increase the fresh tension and rapidly deepening and broadening clan civil wars between the oppressed and the oppressor. This war sentiment has already reached one of its peaks in the Region and heroic uprising. Bloodily conflict is on the horizon if secessionists pursue their solo clan election campaign. Somaliland is people's (Awdal) oppressor. The act of oppressing the voices of potential community future leaders and influential youth activists, who could revolt against Somaliland tyranny, is one of the oldest and most maddening tricks common with oppressive regimes.

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Inability to End Wars:

For more than 32 years, SNM continued to escalate violence in northern Somalia and refused peace with the rest of Somalis. Today, the same men, who started this ravaging violence back in 1979 between rural communities in northern Somalia, are continuing to escalate fresh wars in the region pitting against tribes to attack each other, an old tactic. They failed to govern and bring peace to the region. One wonders, then, why are they still in power.

The question why some civil wars never end and why do some agreements fail while others succeed, has been hypothesized and analyzed in many studies, especially in many African civil wars. Ending civil wars is never an easy task. Hampson's "Nurturing Peace" studies and others analyzed the success and failure of civil war agreements (1,2,3). Experts and researchers in the field, who analyzed multiple studies on conflict resolutions in civil wars and failed peace agreements, have identified several key reasons as to why short-term implementation of negotiated peace usually fails. According to these analyses, assumptions made about negotiated agreements didn't hold and couldn't be validated. Due to the lack of large studies on civil wars and settlements were still new during 1980s and 90s, the focus was just to bring warring factions together and ask them to sign a peace agreement. Mediators assumed that, once signed, the contract between insurgents and the state would be honored. It has been observed that the warring factions lacked credibility to commit to disarmament and reintegration of fighters in both sides. Secondly, there has been a problem with the strategy designed to reach a lasting peace agreement. When peace implementers were challenged, the missions failed. Three factors have been identified to have caused difficult environment:

- 1) Spoilers—leaders/factions hostile to a peace agreement and willing to use violence to undermine it. Case in point is what is happening now in northern Somalia. The SNM administration refused to yield to the UN Security Council's asking Hargeisa's militia to withdraw from the city of LasAnod.
- 2) Neighboring states- hostile to peace agreement; Djibouti, a neighboring country of Somalia has participated in the war in LasAnod and fueled this hostile environment, and;
- 3) Spoils--- valuable commodities competed for. Those who are selling weapons to both sides have an interest in the continuation of the conflicts, no matter who suffered. As such, the narrative that all conflict resolutions are in linear fashion has been found to be a faulty assumption. Such peace agreements have usually focus on signing short-term agreements, just to stop violence. There rather be commitments to long-term resolutions. The focus should be on getting a desired outcome, whereby the fighting parties with the implementation process to reach some measured success in ending the violence. But in the end, in the absence of strong commitments to the creation of accountability and human rights protections under democratic systems, civil wars cannot be ended. SNM is not willing to accept returning to the table and agree to be part of Somalia. Thus, war and destruction of human lives continue.

They are self-styled actors with no desire to negotiate a peace deal. Sadly, some international agencies and Somali intellectuals have become intimately involved with corruption, promoting their self-interests, or even monitoring the process. It's contagious!

The Economic Situation of the Region: 1996 -2023.

Some economists in the region summarized the overview of the economic situation of Awdal today as follows: Just a snapshot!

Customs and Other Taxation: Average taxation collected per year is about \$15 million out of which less than \$15,000 comes to the region as development funds.

That is less than 1% of the taxes collected from the region. The rest of the funds is transferred to Hargeisa and spent on developing other places, such as Gabiley, Maroodijeex, Sahil, Togdheer and in between.

The Budget of Somaliland: estimated \$80 million, out of which the Awdal region gets less 150,000; you do the math.

International donations (aid): estimated to be \$300 million. If divided between 5 regions, Awdal would have received its share of \$60 million. But, NO! Awdal gets less than 8% of International Aid. The rest of the money is spent on other areas between Gabiley and Maroodijeex, Togdheer, Sahil and in between. In addition, the only operating airport in Borama (in the whole Awdal region) has been closed for political reasons, as part of the strategy of SNM administration to cripple the region financially.

As cited in the salient points in the above paragraph, there are no decent roads connecting Borama city to rural areas and the rest of the region. The region's main coastal ports have been put out of operation. No ports for boats to load and unload goods. This is not an accident, but rather by design that the SNM administration in their plan to dwarf the region and bring it to its knees, denying any economic and social developments in the region- something the region is capable of. Due to mismanagement of resources, rampant corruption, and the lack of developmental projects, the State remains in stranglehold and is unable to have access to its resources.

Poverty and Insecurity:

Civil Unrest:

Food insecurity is particularly severe in places that are being ravaged or have recently been ravaged by civil wars and border conflicts. For more than three decades of wars in the northern region of Somalia, this continued civil unrest is also at the heart of a current food security crisis. It is estimated that more than hundreds of thousands of people in the area face a food security crisis every year, with more than 100,000 children in a critical and dire situation. The region is also dealing with its share of environmental degradation and the impacts of climate changes as the rest of Horn of Africa gets the brunt of climate changes.

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Few years ago, very severe cyclones (tropical storm Sagar) had hit the coastal area of Northern Somalia and has wiped out vast landscape in the coastal regions. More than 1,700 families were displaced. Close to 700,000 people needed humanitarian assistance. People lost everything, completely wiped-out farms, towns/villages, and livestock. Flash flooding destroyed major infrastructure including roads and telecommunications.

Many people lost their lives, resulting in a destitute situation and displaced homelessness. No international aid has reached these communities since this disaster. A deeper examination into the food security crises points to the larger issues of the absence of sovereignty, lack of regional institutions capable of addressing the situation, and the unwillingness of the current regime to appeal to international agencies and ask for humanitarian aid.

Even the one million dollars donated by the Federal government in Mogadishu disappeared into the pockets of the administration in Hargeisa. No one asks why.

Despite the Hargeisa administration getting the support from international donors and the administration receiving humanitarian assistance, Hargeisa ignores responding to the dire situation of the people Awdal. Such extreme poverty remains a major concern in the region. Such grinding poverty and human sufferings, to some extent, are caused by food shortage because of unpredictably short rainy seasons, or the lack of adequate rains for long periods of the year. These erratic rainy seasons are attributed to having resulted in widespread crop failures, draughts, and famine in which millions in the region die every year. This also causes the death of millions of livestock and thousands of people lose their other properties. Furthermore, thousands of people die from preventable diseases and from starvation. There is a Lack of accessible and avoidable education for thousands of school-age kids, high school graduates as well as college graduates seeking an opportunity for higher education. Such absence of job opportunity creates a major insecurity for youth in the region. Still, Bixi has enough money to buy more weapons and continue war in SSC regions and Awdal regions.

The Roads Sector in Awdal:

Recent reports also published the following: “Roads are very crucial for the movement of people and goods. Because of the topographical features of the region, road transport is an impediment to the development of the region. The topographical features of the region make road transport very discouraging: sandy coastal plains and a range of mountains. Coastal plains are very sandy and a lot of dry rivers from mountains zone pass through coastal plains and have been depositing sand for centuries.

The distance of coastal plains from east to west is estimated at 200 km and the distance between the mountainous zone and coastal zone is estimated at 70 km. It takes about 3 to 4 hours for a truck to travel from Lughaya to Zeila which is about 150 km apart due to sandy plains and sandy dry riverbeds. During the rainy seasons transport movement stops for days. Besides, the distance between Zeila and Borama is about 250 km, and it takes about 8 hours for a truck to travel between the two towns due to the poor condition of the road.”

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In addition, though coastal and mountainous zones are indeed economically very potential, they are, unfortunately, the least developed so far. Absence of serviceable inter-regional roads networks and feeders' roads are the main challenges to the development of fisheries, agriculture, and mining sectors. According to the Chinese proverb, poverty can be easily reduced through building roads: **“if you want fight poverty, build a road.”** When roads are opened to impoverished isolated communities, life could dramatically improve.

Formation of Autonomous Awdal Region:

Finally, if the people of Awdal want to get justice and live in peace with themselves and with others, they ought to initiate genuine struggle for forming their Autonomous Member State. ASM calls upon all its people in Awdal to unite under the leadership of ASM. It is sufficient to state that the central political view of ASM is reflected on the existing multifaceted issues that Awdal community in Northern Somalia is facing.

Notwithstanding these huge and seemingly insurmountable challenges that needed critical analysis and understanding them in depth, ASM members are convinced that the main cause of the Awdal-malaise is not a lack of participation in regional politics. Rather, Gadabursi-problem is a failure of leadership; repeatedly joining a segregating political system that serves non-inclusive tribal-political parties; a system that destroys their State (Awdal) politically, economically, and developmental aspirations for their future. ASM argues that it was the invasion by SNM and the continued attacks by the self-styled regional authorities in Hargeisa that caused the leadership breakdown. Many Awdal intellectuals have been assassinated or politically alienated from politics. This made it difficult for Awdal to re-organize and build their leadership and self-governance. This practice posed a substantially high risk for civilians, mostly from the Awdal communities. There are a plethora of reports citing how the activities of such pro-government militias result in a higher level of human rights violations, including killings, torture, disappearances of people, and illegal land-grabbing. Thousands of Awdal people have been forced out of their lands, villages, and even denied the right to vote.

Somaliland's authority is structured as a clan militia vowed to control the region and promote their affairs both politically and economically. Such practices have been increasing their potency of power exercise, carried out as it suited the militia policy of looting and political affairs of the regional authorities to enrich and strengthen their power-grip in the region. Such policy is particularly directed towards the Gadabursi communities, who are the majority residents in Awdal region, to deny them access to their own resources, capacity building, and to create their own leadership. Lack of opportunity for more than three decades prevented generations of families from lifting themselves out of poverty. Such clan political domination has been planned by SNM as instruments of conflict perpetuation. This is their agenda of financing their civil militia leaders (SNM) in their quest to plunder public funds and create constant fear in Awdal. With this terror being established in the region, the SNM propagates clan cleavages and made it prominent.

It was this inward turn towards clan rivalry that created the clan security dilemma in the region, with serious consequences especially for the Awdalites, who are faced with organized militias financed by Djibouti and Hargeisa; a plan agreed upon to crush the livelihood of Awdalites, displacing them and forcing them to leave their lands in the hands of these clan militias. Consequently, the community is dealing with such increased suffering and violence, as well as greater instability, displacement, marginalization, and lack of leadership and structured vision.

And as such, it is ASM's contention that the problems Awdal is facing is much bigger and deeper than just changing a political party, so long such oppressive system exists in the region. It will take organized efforts from the Awdal community to defend itself and dislodge such strangling power and free themselves.

- a) That the militia in the region should be removed immediately;
- b) That people should be resettled back into their lands, villages and homes, particularly the **six villages** that are kept hostage by these militia;
- c) That the Awdal community should have the right to elect their own governors, mayors, judges, establish courts, and administrators, etc;
- d) That Awdal people collect their own taxes to develop and address the needs of their communities;
- e) That Awdalites should be allowed to fully participate in their own decision-making processes in rebuilding their state, their ports, airports, roads, and other infrastructures using their own taxes and resources that are now going to finance SNM administrations.

Setting up ASM Administration in Autonomous Awdal State Region:

The people of Awdal want to rebuild their shattered State by forming a government that is different from the Hargeisa's clan regime. The time for a new initiative of self-governing has arrived. Local decision-making is the common thread that links people's aspirations across time, geography, and political ideology. The people of Awdal have the right to govern their Region, and the only way they can progress, and achieve peace, is to build their own administration. They should recall their members in Hargeisa, who have been there for more than three decades, doing nothing. The youth and likeminded administrators of ASM, and those who support Autonomous Awdal Region, must unite, consult, and create a justice-based administration for Awdal. The people of Awdal should elect their governor, their police commission, their judges, and all government branches at the regional and state level. Moving from a clan domination of self-proclaimed secessionists to a free and structured regional autonomy, it is essential that the trilevel regional system, both state and local governments, to be able to perform a wide array of crucial governance roles. They will be frontline providers of some of the most critical services the public relies on every day. These services must address and immediately confront the most vexing challenges facing the state today.

Regional state system and local governments will provide the foundational legal authority for these essential responsibilities, reflecting the vitality of local democracy and justice. What we need, though, is to set up a regional autonomous member system, draft its constitution, and adapt its charter by bringing the community together to carry out such decisions. Then, the Regional State shall provide for the establishment of a general-purpose system of governance that give the people with local self-government structure under its constitutional terms.

When the regional government is formed, it will be able to bring economic growth and prosperity to the entire Awdal region. Therefore, it is rational for the provincial government to allocate the proper amount of authority to local governments to enable them to operate most effectively. The regional government will observe delegated power to local governments to oversee zoning, planning, parts of taxation, and other areas where government services for the people are most effective. If local governments wish to exercise authority outside what has been delegated, they may approach the regional government and make their case. This model enables people to elect a provincial government, governor, local assembly, district, and village leaders. The people of Awdal must convene in a social contract consultative meeting to discuss the issue and terminate their relationship with the SNM administration effectively. The districts should have broad authority to govern and are subject to equally general regional oversight government. These regional self-determination policy approaches are a hopeful vision for the future of the Region.

This new approach requires re-definition of Awdal political community and the specification of the mechanism whereby this new political community becomes capable of arriving at those crucial decisions which require a unitary will. The aim, rather, is to highlight the notion that the State must serve the good of all, and hence that the people making up the polity individually owed a political obligation ultimately to no-one but themselves in their communal capacity and responsibility. Autonomous Awdal region must seek for uniting forces of economic integration, industrial modernization, and technological innovation that so far operated to reinforce national political systems in most of developed world. We will invest on the seaports and ask the federal government of Somalia to help revive the historical city of Zeila and its port. We are willing to engage those who are interested in helping to rebuild the neglected seaports, and we will protect the seashore from nuclear and chemical waste rampantly disposed to the ocean. We will eliminate the illegal fishing to safeguard the people's future food supplies. Autonomous Awdal region must practice good governance, in that, public institutions conduct of public affairs must be measured, manage public resources, human rights violation, and fight corruption in their governing institutions, following the rule of law.

Ending Border-crossing Restrictions and Trade Barriers:

Colonial borders in Africa (4) were big illegal mistakes designed with no regard for the African nomadic culture, ethnicity, religion, and livelihood: how they traded and intermingled, and how they traveled across the vast African lands. Such irresponsible and ill-advised, imaginary lines have impacted the communities in negative way. In that infamous Berlin Conference (1884-85), The Europeans have set forth to colonize Africa and partitioned into borders before they seen it,

nor set foot on Africa. That was all about having their [European] influences on the people of continent...colonization. In the Horn of Africa,

For instance, they split Somalis into French Somaliland, British Somalia, Italian Somalia, Ethiopian Somalia, and the Somali region of northern Kenya. Such colonial borders have massive effects on Somali people who share a common culture, a similar way of life, and the same religion, but live as separate citizens of Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Kenya. Similarly, the Afar people of Ethiopia were split amongst Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, and the Anyuaa and Nuer were split between Ethiopia and South Sudan. These imaginary boundaries became challenging barriers to the people and limited the free movement across borders of these communities. It created trade blockade and social inconveniences, such as border checkpoints, unnecessary interrogations, jails and unwarranted tortures and punishments for doing what they have been doing for decades- traveling across borders in their own lands. Such cruel foreign-designed boundaries have forced the communities to change their lifestyle and structural systems of governance and coexistence with their neighbors. Scholars of social science studies cited that the issue of irredenta, secession, and territorial disputes, as in the case of Western Sahara Azawad and Somaliland, and explained as useless and illegitimacy of claims compared to the cost (5.)

The region (Awdal) has a long border with the Ethiopian government and there is unlimited potential for opening multiple trade routes that can be established between Geestiir and Wajale. Such trade routes will ease border conflicts and increase trade and business traveling between Awdal and neighboring countries. This will eliminate a wide range of human rights violation, such as head-taxation carried out by the current authority in Lawyacadde. This will also ease the delivery of international assistance to targeted populations who live in far- to- reach places. This region has the resources and human capacity to do it if it finds the right leadership to guide it through.

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