



Somalia's Desperate Hour: The Fight Against President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's Failed Leadership

By Mohamed Fatah

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Since the reelection of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Somalia has plunged further into dysfunction. The federal government has become increasingly ineffective and disconnected from the needs of its people. The administration has turned into a family affair, sidelining broader representation and undermining democratic principles. This centralization of power within the president's inner circle has exacerbated political upheaval, fostering an environment where corruption and nepotism thrive, further alienating the Somali populace.

The security situation has deteriorated significantly, with al-Shabaab regaining strength and conducting more attacks. Recent changes to the Somali provisional constitution have only deepened the crisis, stripped the government of its legitimacy, and ignited widespread discontent. President Mohamud's tenure, marked by these failures, has done more harm than good. With two years remaining, the prospect of further damage looms large. His inability to address critical issues suggests that his continued leadership will further erode the nation's stability and prospects for peace.

Somalia stands at a critical juncture, teetering on the brink of chaos under President Mohamud's leadership. When he returned to office on May 15, 2022, the nation braced for a repeat of his first term's failures, marked by rampant corruption, nepotism, and cronyism. Two years into his second term, these fears have been realized. His government has not only failed to meet expectations but has exacerbated crises, particularly in political stability and security.

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A Troubled First Term

During President Mohamud's first term from 2012 to 2017, his administration was riddled with political and security failures, corruption scandals, and accusations of graft. Key positions within the government and security forces were handed out based on loyalty rather than merit, severely undermining the effectiveness of state institutions. Corruption was rampant, with international aid funds and military assistance often disappearing without a trace. This environment of graft and mismanagement eroded public trust and hindered progress, setting the stage for the many challenges the country faces today.

Some Progress Under Farmaajo-Kheyre

Under the Farmaajo-Kheyre administration, strides were made in governance and security forces development. With training and support from international allies such as Türkiye and the United States, Somali security forces, including the elite **Gorgor, Haramcad, and Danab brigades**, showed notable improvements. This progress marked a turning point since the collapse of Siad Barre's government. Despite these gains, political infighting between President Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo, Prime Minister Hassan Ali Kheyre, and later with Prime Minister Mohamed Hussain Roble created a power vacuum and destabilized the federal government, paving the way for Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's return to power. Additionally, the federal government's efforts to marginalize Puntland and Jubaland weakened them and led to significant political instability, undermining national unity.

President Mohamud's Second Term: A Repeat of Failures

President Mohamud's incompetence, coupled with his premature and ill-advised push to fight al-Shabaab, has severely undermined Somalia's military, police, and security services. Instead of strengthening these critical institutions, President Mohamud and his allies diverted essential support to clan militias (Macawisley), leading to significant security failures in Galmudug and Hirshabelle. By repeating the same mistakes from his first term, President Mohamud has further destabilized Somalia and compromised its security. His current tenure has seen a dramatic decline in the quality and capabilities of these forces, leading to their defeat in several key battles against al-Shabaab.

President Mohamud's military campaign can only be described as a rush to failure. The once-promising national security forces have been reduced to mere shadows of their former selves, gutted by corruption and mismanagement. The military, police, and National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) have all suffered under his leadership, and the outlook is bleak. As long as President Mohamud remains in power, any hope of defeating al-Shabaab is dashed.

Unilateral Constitutional Changes and Political Crisis

In a troubling turn, President Mohamud and his allies have unilaterally changed the Somali provisional constitution without consulting all stakeholders, further deepening the nation's political crisis. This illegal and unconstitutional process has exacerbated tensions, leading Puntland to withdraw confidence from the federal government and parliament. Puntland's decision underscores the profound disunity within Somalia, as Federal Member States (FMSs) increasingly distance themselves from Mogadishu's efforts to centralize power. If the current political crisis continues, the implications for Somalia are dire: ongoing instability, weakened governance, poor security, and the potential for increased violence and fragmentation.

President Mohamud's authoritarian tendencies have only worsened the situation. Instead of strengthening security institutions and building a cohesive strategy to combat terrorism, his administration has exploited these forces for political gain. This politicization has weakened their effectiveness and eroded public trust, making it increasingly difficult to address the threat posed by al-Shabaab. Moreover, President Mohamud's failure to provide adequate resources and support for the security sector has further hindered its ability to confront the insurgency effectively. **Reports of soldiers going unpaid for months and lacking essential equipment and tools have become all too common, demoralizing the ranks and emboldening the enemy.**

Corruption and Nepotism

Accusations of corruption, cronyism, and nepotism against President Mohamud and his government further underscore the extent of the current crisis. Embezzlement of public funds and preferential treatment for political allies have siphoned resources away from critical development projects and deepened public mistrust in the government. He left Villa Somalia in worse shape after his first term, with no functioning government, and in his second term, he is destroying all the gains made in the previous five years. The president's selfish and self-enriching actions at the expense of the nation contribute to Somalia's poor state.

The U.S. government has alleged that resources provided to the Somali government, including food and fuel intended for the elite Danab forces, have been misappropriated and stolen. In response, the Somali government has admitted to the theft. The allegations have further strained relations with the U.S. and raise concerns about corruption within government institutions.

Foreign Policy Missteps and Djibouti's Outsized Influence

President Mohamud's foreign policy has been fraught with miscalculations and missteps that have further compromised Somalia's alliances. His poor management of relations with the United States, United Kingdom, United Nations, African Union, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar has created significant diplomatic rifts. As an extreme micromanager, President Mohamud does not value expert opinions or listen to his ministers, effectively turning Somalia's foreign relations into a family affair. He only takes his family, relatives, and close friends on foreign trips, fostering confusion and mistrust among international partners. Many governments perceive President Mohamud's requests as primarily benefiting him and his allies financially, lacking a clear vision, plan, or strategy to help Somalia. Consequently, these governments are reluctant to support him, viewing his leadership as detrimental to Somalia, their interests, and regional security and stability.

Among the most concerning aspects of President Mohamud's foreign policy is the outsized influence of President Ismail Omar Guelleh of Djibouti, who has become a whisperer in Mohamud's ear, undermining the unity and future of Somalia.

According to credible sources, President Guelleh has been pushing for changes to the Somali constitution to marginalize Puntland, Jubaland, and Southwest, and to establish a two-party system that would sideline many communities. These maneuvers serve Guelleh's interests, as he financially benefits from Somalia's instability. A fragmented and weakened Somalia poses no threat to him, and he prefers it to a stable, unified Somalia.



National Consultative Council meeting, Mogadishu, May 2024

Dubious Plans to Replace Federal Member State Presidents

According to credible sources familiar with discussions in Villa Somalia, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has been in talks about a plan to replace the current presidents of federal member states. This plan includes the political support of President Ismail Omar Guelleh and military backing from President Isaias Afwerki of Eritrea.

President Mohamud's strategy involves ousting President Ahmed Madobe of Jubaland and replacing him with current Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre or Abdullahi Sheikh Ismail (Fartag), the Minister of Internal Security.

Additionally, he plans to replace President Ahmed Abdi Karie (Qoor Qoor) with Mahad Mohamed Salad, the former Director of the National Intelligence and Security Agency, who is favored by the Djibouti president. President Mohamud is also working on removing President Abdiaziz Hassan Mohamed (Laftagareen) and installing former President Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden in his place. Finally, President Mohamud and his allies are vetting several candidates to replace Ali Abdullahi (Guudlaawe).

These sources indicate that the targeted presidents could potentially undermine Mohamud's efforts by holding their presidential elections this year, a strategy similar to that employed by Puntland President Said Abdullahi Deni earlier this year. This preemptive move could disrupt Mohamud's plans and solidify the positions of the current regional leaders, thereby preserving their influence and countering the centralization efforts from Mogadishu. The sources suggest that these regional leaders are keenly aware of Mohamud's intentions and are preparing to act decisively to maintain their power and autonomy.

Opposing One-Man One-Vote Election

Opposing President Mohamud's call to hold a one-man one-vote election in 2026 is critical given the current political and security conditions, which make such an election impossible. It is clear that President Mohamud, aware of his slim chances of winning another election, is using this call as a ploy to extend his stay in power beyond the end of his term. Somalia will hold elections in 2026, and any attempt by President Mohamud to cling to power will be met with severe consequences. According to Western officials, the international community's support is contingent on adhering to democratic principles of election, freedom of speech, and the rule of law, and there will be no backing if he undermines these principles.

Puntland's Role

Puntland's relationship with Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has been marked by significant tension and opposition. The international community values the progress Puntland has made in political, security, and governance areas, viewing it as a model for a federal Somalia. Without Puntland's cooperation, there can be no legitimate government in Somalia. President Said Abdullahi Deni's strong stance against President Mohamud underscores the region's commitment to genuine federalism and transparent governance. President Mohamud should my advice and end political dispute with Puntland by moving away from illegal and unconstitutional changes to the provisional constitution, as he risks

becoming a lame duck for the remaining two years of his term, achieving nothing substantial. Without Puntland's support, the federal government will remain adrift and will not receive essential international resources, including assistance from the World Bank and African Development Bank. This assistance is contingent on a political agreement between the federal government and member states, highlighting the critical need for unity and cooperation.

A Call to Save Somalia

The future of Somalia is in peril. President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's influence and legitimacy do not extend beyond Mogadishu, earning him the derisive title of the “**President of Mogadishu.**” His failure to unite the country and his limited reach have left Somalia more divided and unstable than ever. It is imperative that all political leaders and stakeholders come together to save Somalia before President Mohamud drives the nation off a cliff. The future of a united Somalia hangs in the balance, and the time for decisive action is now. Failure to act risks further entrenching the country's descent into chaos and allowing extremist groups like al-Shabaab to continue their reign of terror.

Countering President Mohamud's Damaging Policies

By illegally changing the constitution without an agreed legal process and framework, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and the corrupt parliament have lost their legitimacy. Here are five additional policy recommendations for political leaders and stakeholders on how to counter him and limit the damage he is inflicting on Somalia:

- **Form a United National Opposition Front:** Political leaders and stakeholders must unite to form a cohesive opposition front. This coalition should work collaboratively to present a unified stance against President Mohamud's administration, advocating for holding presidential elections no later than May 15, 2026, and promoting democratic principles and the rule of law.
- **Mobilize International Support:** Engage with international allies and organizations to highlight the illegitimacy of President Mohamud's actions. Garnering international support can pressure the current administration to adhere to legal and democratic processes.
- **Promote Public Awareness and Civic Engagement:** Educate the public on the implications of unconstitutional actions and encourage civic engagement. Empowering citizens to demand accountability and transparency can create significant pressure for reform.
- **Strengthen Regional Alliances:** Collaborate with regional leaders and administrations to create a balanced power structure that can counter the centralization efforts of President Mohamud. A strong regional alliance can push for equitable governance and resource distribution.

By taking these steps, Somalia's political leaders and stakeholders can counter the damaging policies of President Mohamud, restore the constitution and legitimacy to the government, and steer the nation towards a more stable, secure, and prosperous future.

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