

# President Hassan – Swallowing Poison and hoping others to perish

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## Introduction

From the start of his second term, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud disappointed the public by quickly shattering their hopes that he would build on the progress made by his predecessor, President Mohamed Farmajo. President Hassan's first term was marred by unprecedented corruption, leading to his defeat in disgrace. During his time in opposition, he made numerous statements that appealed to the masses, creating the impression that he had turned away from his corrupt, clan-centered mindset.

Thanks to publicly available records on open sources and the internet, where his speeches while in opposition remain accessible to the public. However, unlike his predecessors, he now delivers political addresses every Friday at the Presidential Mosque, often contradicting what he once stood for. Social media regularly highlights these inconsistencies, comparing his current speeches to those he made while in opposition. As a result, trust in President Hassan has eroded, with many viewing him as a pathological liar. Critics say, "His ears don't hear what his mouth is saying."



While in opposition, President Hassan frequently among many, and often falsely, criticized President Farmajo for not adhering to the Provisional Federal Constitution, for encroaching on the autonomy of the Federal Member States (FMS), and for allowing the Eritrea-trained Somali army to be destroyed during the Tigrian war. He also condemned Farmajo's management of the Turkish-trained army, dismissing it as a collection of militias rather than a true national force. Additionally, he accused Farmajo of failing to consult with the public and the federal states.

President Hassan also condemned any political group alignment with Ethiopia or other foreign powers as a consequence of weak leadership—criticisms he now seems to ignore in his own administration.

In his most recent, 13 Sep, 2024, Friday speech at the mosque, President Hassan made a shocking declaration, stating that anyone in Mogadishu found with weapons in their home would be prosecuted, regardless of their status—whether a former president, prime minister, high-ranking military officer, or businessperson.

He added that security forces would conduct raids on any suspected houses in the early morning hours, and if necessary, would be prepared to use lethal force. This aggressive stance mirrors the tactics of Al-Shabaab terrorists. Ironically, during his time in the opposition, President Hassan—along with the other opposition members—had large troops and weapons to defend themselves against Al-Shabaab, and if need be, to initiate urban warfare.

In response, opposition leader and former President Sheikh Sharif Ahmed's office issued a strong rebuttal, condemning President Hassan's actions as acts of intimidation. Sheikh Sharif and other opposition members vowed to retain their weapons, asserting they are prepared to defend themselves against both Al-Shabaab and President Hassan's clan-based militias. Reports indicate that tensions in Mogadishu are rising, with rumors circulating that opposition leaders have called in their clans' militias. Currently, there is a visible show of force, as heavily armed four-wheel trucks are stationed around the homes of Sheikh Sharif and other opposition figures, marking a significant escalation in the security situation. Defensive measures are being put into place, evoking memories of President Hassan's actions in 2021, which led to the displacement of around 270,000 Mogadishu residents.

Puntland State leader, Mr. Said Abdullahi Deni, announced on recently that Puntland is ready to address the prolonged political discord with the Federal Government of Somalia, which has persisted for several months. Speaking at the Puntland Development and Research Center (PDRC) conference for peace, President Deni cautioned that failure to pursue political dialogue could lead to further fragmentation, with other regions potentially following Somaliland's path to declaring independence. He underscored the urgency of the situation, stating that Puntland is prepared to take the lead in efforts to reunify Somalia.

Deni's remarks come in the wake of previous reconciliation efforts by former Presidents Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and Mohamed Abdillahi Farmajo, which were met with resistance by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. As Puntland extends this new offer of dialogue, it remains to be seen whether President Hassan will accept it with grace or once again refuse to engage in meaningful negotiations.

Mr. Mohamed Ware, former President of Hirshabelle and current Deputy of IGAD, during question and answer session at Puntland Development and Research Center (PDRC) conference voiced his concerns in a personal capacity about the precarious path Somalia is currently treading. He warned that Somalia, as we know it, could potentially vanish from the map if the situation

continues unchecked. Mr. Ware emphasized the significance blunder of inviting Egyptian forces into Somalia, after their absence from Somali affairs for nearly four decades. This, he argued, could turn Somalia into a battleground between Egypt and Ethiopia, whose geopolitical tensions over the Nile River have already been simmering. Mr. Ware also highlighted the deep disconnect between Somalia's Federal Member States and the Federal Government, attributing it to a lack of proper consultation.

It's not a secret that the defense agreement between Somalia and Egypt, signed in August, was never brought before Parliament for scrutiny and approval. This has sparked concern, particularly among MPs from Southwest State and other regions, who view this as another example of President Hassan's increasingly autocratic governance. The lack of transparency and disregard for parliamentary oversight only intensifies fears of a one-man rule under President Hassan, exacerbating the already fragile relationship between the federal government and its member states.

### **Breakdown of Relations Between the Federal Government and Federal Member States**

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's practice of appointing civil servants, military officials, and politicians primarily from his own clan, along with awarding government contracts to his clan members, exemplifies clan-based favoritism. In Somalia, where clan identity plays a pivotal role in social and political life, such actions can deepen existing divisions and further destabilize an already fragile political system.

By centralizing power within his clan, President Hassan undermines Somalia's efforts to build an inclusive governance framework. This kind of patronage breeds resentment among other clans and regional leaders, intensifying political fragmentation. In a country already marked by regionalism and clan rivalries, such favoritism pushes Federal Member States to feel that their interests are being ignored or sidelined in favor of the president's own clan.

These actions eat away at trust in national institutions, giving the impression that appointments and decision-making are based on clan loyalty rather than merit or national interest. This weakens the credibility of the government, both domestically and internationally, as it appears to prioritize personal or clan gains over the broader needs of Somalia. Such governance undermines efforts to rebuild national unity, making it difficult to address critical issues such as security, development, and foreign relations in an inclusive manner.

As a result, the Federal Government is increasingly distanced from the regions, fueling a lack of cooperation between Federal Member States and the central authority. By concentrating power within one clan at the expense of others, Somalia's political challenges are deepened, complicating efforts to foster national cohesion and stability.

## **Delay of Presidential Elections in Federal Member States**

A significant aspect of President Hassan Sheikh's consolidation of power is the unconstitutional postponement of presidential elections in most Federal Member States (FMS), with the exception of Puntland State, which successfully conducted its elections on schedule. By delaying these crucial elections, President Hassan appears to be intentionally undermining the autonomy of the FMS and expanding his influence within the federal system.

This tactic has further diminished trust between the Federal Government and regional states, resulting in a governance paralysis in various parts of Somalia. In regions such as Hirshabelle and Galmudug, this has exacerbated ongoing internal conflicts and contributed to the absence of effective governance.

## **Centralization of Power and Its Consequences**

The current political instability in Somalia seems largely driven by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's centralization of power. Within the first year of his second term, he took drastic measures—abolishing independent commissions, nullifying the parliamentary constitution, and unilaterally introducing a presidential constitution without any consultation. These actions reflect a clear pattern of consolidating authority and have triggered significant backlash, particularly from the Federal Member States (FMS), many of which now operate with little or no cooperation with the Federal Government.

By dismantling independent institutions and bypassing the constitutional processes that would habitually allow for checks and balances, President Hassan has effectively sidelined the democratic safeguards meant to prevent the concentration of power in one branch of government. The presidential constitution he introduced significantly boosts the power of the executive branch, stripping the legislature and judiciary of their critical roles in governance. This shift has sparked outrage, particularly among the FMS, who see their autonomy increasingly undermined.

The centralization of power under the executive has strained relations between the Federal Government and the FMS. Puntland FMS was the first to sever ties with the Federal Government, citing frustration over the lack of consultation on key national matters, including the introduction of the new constitution and the politicization of international aid. Other states, like South West State, Jubaland, and Hirshabelle, are also becoming increasingly disillusioned, with many speculating that they too may distance themselves from the Federal Government.

Moreover, the breakdown of cooperation between the FMS and the central government has left regions to fend for themselves, complicating efforts to address the country's ongoing challenges, including security, governance, and development. With an increasingly weak and centralized Federal Government, regional states are asserting greater autonomy, while armed groups like Al-Shabaab exploit the disarray.

The ramifications of this centralized approach extend beyond Somalia's borders. International partners and donors, who had placed hope in the federal system as a pathway to stabilizing the country, are now witnessing a return to authoritarian tendencies. This could jeopardize foreign aid, worsen political instability, and hinder efforts to rebuild the nation's democratic institutions.

In essence, President Hassan's consolidation of power has triggered a political crisis that threatens not just Somalia's federal framework, but the very unity of the nation. As Federal Member States grow more defiant, Somalia risks further fragmentation, with the central government losing credibility and influence both at home and abroad.

## **Implications for National Unity and Stability**

These moves have not only weakened the Federal Government's standing but also deepened fragmentation across the country. Many regional leaders now view the Federal Government's actions as hostile, fueling calls for greater regional autonomy. For states like Puntland, which has historically maintained a degree of independence, the Federal Government's actions may lead to further entrenchment of its **autonomous status**. Overall, President Hassan Sheikh's approach is seen as pushing the country toward greater disunity, weakening its ability to confront national issues like **Al-Shabaab insurgency** and manage **foreign alliances** effectively.

At present, most of Somalia's Federal Member States have no functional relationship with the Federal Government, reflecting a deepening crisis of governance and authority. This disconnect further weakens the central government's ability to manage foreign relations, defense strategies, and security concerns effectively.

1. **Somaliland:** Though Somaliland declared itself independent in 1991, its relationship with the Federal Government remains contentious. Somaliland operates as a de facto independent state, refusing to engage with the Federal Government or participate in national-level decision-making.
2. **South West State and Jubaland State:** These states have significant security cooperation with Ethiopia and are resistant to Federal Government policies, particularly under President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. The Ethiopian military presence in these regions is supported by local leaders, further undermining the Federal Government's attempts to assert authority.
3. **Puntland State:** Puntland has severed ties with the Federal Government over issues like the politicization of international aid and the introduction of a new constitution that lacks consultation and consensus. Puntland has long maintained a degree of autonomy and is resistant to centralized governance that it sees as encroaching on its States interests.
4. **Hirshabelle State:** The region is about to split into **two separate entities**, **Hiiraan State** and Hirshabelle State, reflecting deep divisions within the state. This has created a governance vacuum, where there is effectively no functioning government to manage security or engage with the Federal Government.

5. **Galmudug State:** Galmudug is facing an **interclan conflict** that shows no signs of resolution. This ongoing war has made the region largely **ungovernable**, further contributing to the fragmented political landscape in Somalia.

## **Consequences of Political Fragmentation on National Defense and Foreign Involvement**

This political fragmentation has significant consequences for Somalia's ability to manage foreign military involvement and defense agreements, particularly in light of the **Somali-Egyptian defense deal** and the **Ethiopian military presence**. Without a cohesive national framework, the Federal Government is effectively sidelined in many key areas of national security, leaving regional leaders to pursue their own security arrangements, often in partnership with foreign powers like Ethiopia.

The Federal Government's inability to foster meaningful relationships with most Federal Member States leaves it largely powerless to influence decisions related to security, defense, and counterterrorism within the FM States. This is evident in the fact that Ethiopia continues to operate largely independent of the central government, with the blessing of regional leaders in Jubaland and South West State. The recent Egyptian arms deliveries further complicate the situation, as the Federal Government's decisions are being made without consultation or consideration of the regional dynamics, which could lead to further alienation of regional states.

### **Autonomy of Regional States**

The regional states, especially those with strong relationships with Ethiopia like South West State and Jubaland, are likely to continue pursuing independent security arrangements. Their cooperation with Ethiopian forces highlights a growing regional autonomy, where the Federal Government is seen as irrelevant or even counterproductive. The Ethiopian presence, particularly in border regions like Jubaland and SWS, is framed as essential to maintaining stability and preventing Al-Shabaab from gaining a foothold. This makes the central government's influence in these areas negligible, as local leaders view Ethiopian forces as more reliable partners than Mogadishu.

Somalia's fractured political landscape has led to a situation where different regional states may form alliances with different foreign powers, based on their own security needs and strategic interests. The Somali-Egyptian defense agreement is an example of the Federal Government entering into a foreign partnership that is not supported by all regions, especially those allied with Ethiopia. This divergence in foreign alliances further weakens the ability of the central government to maintain a coherent national defense strategy. It also risks turning Somalia into a battleground for competing foreign interests, where regional states align with either Egypt or Ethiopia depending on their political and security priorities.



## **Ethiopian Response and Regional Tensions**

With the Somali Federal Government's diminished influence, Ethiopia will likely continue to assert its role in Jubaland and South West State, where it already has strong support. The Somali-Egyptian defense agreement, seen as an attempt by Egypt to gain strategic influence in Somalia, is likely to push Ethiopia to entrench its military presence further in these regions. The **Nile dispute** between Egypt and Ethiopia adds a geopolitical dimension to this rivalry, where both countries might use Somalia as a proxy battleground to advance their strategic interests.

Ethiopia can argue that Somalia's fragmentation and lack of a functioning central government justifies its continued presence, as it ensures stability in key border regions. Ethiopian forces in Somalia are also viewed by local populations as a bulwark against Al-Shabaab, making Ethiopia's presence difficult for the Federal Government to challenge.

This leaves the Federal Government isolated, unable to exert influence over the regions that are now de facto aligned with foreign powers like Ethiopia.

## **Recruitment of Al-Shabaab and Rise of Extremism**

The involvement of Egypt, particularly given its controversial role in Gaza, could potentially strengthen Al-Shabaab's recruitment efforts. The group has long framed its insurgency as a fight against foreign occupation and Western-backed governments, and Egypt's military involvement in Somalia might give them further propaganda material. Al-Shabaab could exploit the narrative that Somalia is aligning with a government seen as complicit in the genocide of Muslims in Gaza, thereby bolstering its recruitment and increasing support among disenfranchised populations who feel alienated by these foreign alliances.

Similar to six previous defense agreements Somalia entered with other countries, the Somali-Egyptian agreement was not brought before Parliament for scrutiny. This lack of transparency raises alarms about the nature of the agreement and its long-term implications for Somalia's sovereignty and regional stability. The secrecy surrounding the deal fuels suspicions that the agreement is not just a bilateral defense pact but part of a larger geopolitical strategy.

The Egyptian presence, therefore, risks not only increasing tensions with Ethiopia but also radicalizing parts of the Somali population. Al-Shabaab could tap into these sentiments by presenting itself as a defender of Islam and Somali sovereignty, positioning the Egyptian-Somali defense agreement as evidence of a larger conspiracy by Western powers and their regional allies. This could provide a propaganda boost for the group, allowing it to recruit more fighters by framing its insurgency as a religious and nationalist struggle against an illegitimate, foreign-influenced government.

## **The Ethiopian Argument**

Ethiopia's argument for maintaining its military presence in Somalia is rooted in its national security concerns, especially regarding Al-Shabaab. The militant group poses a significant threat, not just to Somalia but also to Ethiopia's borders. Ethiopia's forces, particularly in Jubaland and Southwest State, serve as a defensive buffer to prevent terrorist infiltration. Their strategic positioning, including control of infrastructure like airports in Gedo, ensures that Al-Shabaab cannot gain a foothold near Ethiopian territory.

Ethiopian troops' presence in Somalia, backed by local support and justified by the need to protect their borders from Al-Shabaab, enables them to operate with little or no oversight from the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS). This arrangement not only reinforces Ethiopia's role as a key counterterrorism partner but also highlights the FGS's diminishing influence over regional affairs. For leaders like President Laftagareen of Southwest State and the Deputy President of Jubaland, Ethiopian involvement is seen as essential for maintaining security, especially in areas where the FGS is unable to assert effective control.

As a result, Ethiopia's military presence bolsters regional autonomy, with Jubaland and South West State increasingly relying on Ethiopian forces for stability. This further marginalizes the FGS, whose lack of control over these regions undermines its credibility and ability to govern the country cohesively.

Furthermore, Ethiopia's vested interest in a stable Somalia is driven by the fact that instability in Somalia often has a spillover effect, threatening Ethiopian security. This logic helps Ethiopia justify its long-standing involvement, particularly as its forces are seen locally as essential to curbing Al-Shabaab's activities.

## **Legal Justification through AU Framework**

The African Union (AU) could view Ethiopia's continued military presence in Somalia through the lens of regional security and the principle of **subsidiarity**, which allows neighboring states to take action in response to shared security threats when the affected state is unable to handle the situation alone. This is particularly relevant given the threat posed by Al-Shabaab, which not only destabilizes Somalia but also poses a direct danger to Ethiopia and other neighboring states.

The African Union's Peace and Security Council (**PSC**) operates under a mandate to address threats to peace and security across the continent. The AU has previously endorsed interventions in Somalia, particularly through the African Union Mission in Somalia (**AMISOM**), and later the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (**ATMIS**), which aims to support Somali security forces in taking over security responsibilities.

In the context of Ethiopia's presence, the AU could frame its continued involvement as aligned with the broader objectives of stabilizing Somalia and containing Al-Shabaab. If Somalia's Federal Government (FGS) is unable to effectively control its borders, particularly those shared with



Ethiopia, the AU might see Ethiopian military engagement as a **necessary regional security measure**. Ethiopia's justification, that it must prevent Al-Shabaab from infiltrating its borders, could be acknowledged by the AU as a **preventive security strategy** in line with regional peacekeeping norms.

## **AU's Position on Sovereignty and Intervention**

While the AU is generally committed to respecting the sovereignty of member states, it has provisions for intervention when a state is unable to maintain order and protect its citizens from threats like terrorism. The AU's **Constitutive Act (Article 4)** allows for intervention in cases of war crimes, genocide, and instability that threaten peace and security. Ethiopia's role in Somalia could be seen as fitting within this framework, where the **weakness of the Somali state** justifies Ethiopia's intervention to ensure its own security, while also contributing to the stabilization of Somalia.

## **Ethiopian Position and AU Endorsement**

Ethiopia's argument for remaining in Somalia would rest on the premise that the **Somali government cannot yet secure its borders** against Al-Shabaab. By citing its fear of terrorist infiltration, Ethiopia can claim that its presence is crucial for its own defense. The AU might support this reasoning, on the condition that Ethiopia's military actions remain focused on **counterterrorism efforts** and do not overstep into activities that infringe on Somalia's sovereignty beyond what is necessary for regional stability.

Ethiopia could further argue that it will remain in Somalia only until the **Somali government demonstrates its capacity to manage its borders independently**. The AU might see this position as legally sound, as it aligns with the principle of non-intervention except in cases where state weakness threatens regional peace. Ethiopia's continued presence could thus be framed as part of a **transitional arrangement**, with the understanding that once the Somali government is able to secure its borders and counter Al-Shabaab effectively, Ethiopia will gradually withdraw.

## **AU's Monitoring Role**

The AU would likely emphasize the need for **multilateral oversight** to ensure Ethiopia's presence remains temporary and focused on counterterrorism. The AU, potentially in coordination with **AUSS** or through direct involvement of its **Peace and Security Council**, would want to ensure that Ethiopia's military operations do not overextend or undermine Somali sovereignty in the long run. The **legal and political legitimacy** of Ethiopia's presence would depend on clear timelines or conditions for withdrawal, contingent upon improvements in Somalia's security apparatus.

## The African Union's Position

The African Union (AU) will face significant challenges in navigating this situation, as the **Somali-Egyptian defense agreement** complicates the already delicate balance of power in Somalia. The AU, which has long supported efforts to stabilize Somalia through multilateral cooperation, might view Egypt's unilateral defense agreement with suspicion, particularly if it exacerbates tensions with Ethiopia, a key regional player.

The AU could also be concerned that the Egyptian involvement, seen as part of a broader **Western and Israeli-backed agenda**, undermines **African-led peace and security initiatives**. This agreement could be interpreted as an **external imposition** that weakens Somali sovereignty and risks turning Somalia into a **geopolitical chessboard**, rather than allowing it to build internal capacity and stability.

The AU may be forced to reconsider the **role of foreign military actors** in Somalia, particularly as these agreements increasingly reflect the conflicting interests of external powers. In light of this, the AU could push for greater **transparency and accountability** from the Somali government, urging it to subject defense agreements to parliamentary scrutiny and ensuring that Somalia's defense policies are aligned with the long-term goal of regional peace.

## Conclusion

In summary, the AU might support Ethiopia's continued military presence in Somalia on legal and security grounds, recognizing that Somalia's weakness makes such involvement necessary to prevent Al-Shabaab's spread. However, the AU would likely advocate for ongoing **monitoring and transparency**, ensuring Ethiopia's involvement remains focused on counterterrorism and respects Somali sovereignty, while also preparing for a **gradual transition** once Somalia can secure its borders independently.

The fractured relationship between Somalia's Federal Government and its Federal Member States has left the country politically fragmented and vulnerable to foreign influence and intervention. The **Somali-Egyptian defense agreement**, entered into without consultation with Parliament or the regions, risks further alienating key Federal Member States like Jubaland and South West State, where Ethiopia's presence is seen as more legitimate. The **lack of a functioning central government**, combined with Ethiopia's and Egypt's competing interests, could turn Somalia into a **geopolitical battleground**, while Al-Shabaab capitalizes on the chaos to recruit more fighters. The **African Union** and the broader international community must be careful to ensure that **Somalia's sovereignty** is respected, and that foreign interventions do not exacerbate the already fragile political situation in the country.

The Somali-Egyptian defense agreement rushed without parliamentary oversight is likely to have far-reaching consequences for Somalia's internal stability and its relationships with neighboring states, particularly Ethiopia.

For Ethiopia, the agreement represents a direct threat to its **border security** and its position in the Nile dispute, leading to a likely increase in Ethiopian military activities in Somalia to **counterbalance Egyptian influence**. The **African Union** will need to navigate these emerging tensions carefully, ensuring that Somalia's defense policies remain focused on **counterterrorism** and **regional stability**, rather than becoming a **battleground for external rivalries**.

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