



Somalia's Federalism Under Siege: The UN and Its International Partners' Complicity

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The recent statement from the United Nations Transition Mission in Somalia (UNTMIS) calling for "de-escalation" in the ongoing dispute between Somalia's Federal Government (FGS) and Jubaland State exposes a deeper issue: the growing bias of the UN and its international partners toward President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and Mogadishu's central authority. This troubling alignment not only threatens the foundation of Somalia's federalism but also perpetuates political instability. The UN and its international partners must recalibrate their roles and missions to restore neutrality, credibility, and genuine partnership with the Somali people.

A Legacy of Failure by the UN and Its Partners

The UN, working alongside its international partners, has presided over some of Somalia's most divisive and destabilizing periods, consistently failing to support the principles of federalism that are enshrined in the country's provisional constitution. The UN, through its leadership of UNTMIS, has enabled Mogadishu's centralization of power, while donor countries such as the U.S., EU, and regional powers like Türkiye have financed and politically supported initiatives that marginalize Federal Member States (FMS). This collective alignment with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's administration undermines Somalia's constitutional framework.



President Hassan Sheikh and acting UN Representative for Somalia, Amb James Swan

For example, the UN and its partners failed to address Mogadishu's unilateral decision to amend the provisional constitution and electoral laws earlier this year—an act widely seen as illegal, undemocratic, and unconstitutional, designed to marginalize FMSs and opposition. Similarly, when Jubaland and Puntland repeatedly raised concerns over illegal changes to the provisional constitution, the UN and its partners downplayed their grievances, framing them as obstacles to national unity rather than legitimate stakeholders in Somalia's federal project.

This is not neutrality; it is complicity. By failing to confront President Mohamud's authoritarian tendencies, the UN and its partners have emboldened him to consolidate power while trampling on the very framework of Somalia's constitution and federalism.

This collective failure undermines not only the country's political system but also the credibility, role, and mission of these global actors as trusted partners to the Somali people.

A Distorted Narrative to Protect Self-Interests

The UN and its international partners have increasingly portrayed a distorted narrative of progress in Somalia. They paint a rosy picture of "inclusive elections" and "state-building" while remaining silent on blatant violations and President Mohamud's authoritarian tendencies. This carefully curated narrative serves a self-preserving purpose: safeguarding the multi-billion-dollar investments made by the UN and its partners in Somalia.

For instance, Puntland, Jubaland, and Khatumo have repeatedly raised concerns about exclusion from key decision-making forums like the National Consultative Council (NCC). Instead of addressing these grievances, the UN and its partners framed dissenting FMS leaders as obstructive, further alienating key stakeholders.

Financially, the combined operations of the UN and its partners in Somalia are estimated to cost more than \$4 – 4.5 billion per year, yet tangible progress remains elusive. A significant portion of these funds supports state-building initiatives that have failed to deliver measurable outcomes. For example:

- International partners have funded programs that disproportionately favor Mogadishu's government, sidelining FMS voices.
- Donor-driven projects often lack accountability, with corruption allegations undermining their impact on ordinary Somali citizens.

By avoiding direct confrontation with President Mohamud, the UN and its partners ensure their funding pipelines remain intact. Programs under the guise of 'peacebuilding' and 'capacity-building' prioritize appeasing Mogadishu's central government, securing donor contributions while neglecting genuine reconciliation.

The Somali people, meanwhile, see little benefit from these operations. Instead of addressing the core challenges—corruption, regional marginalization, and constitutional overreach—the UN and its partners appear more invested in projecting an image of progress to donors. This comes at a high cost: the erosion of Somalia's federal structure and the trust of its people.

Consequences of Complicity

The failure of the UN and its international partners to address President Mohamud's unconstitutional and undemocratic overreach does more than undermine federalism—it destabilizes Somalia. Federal Member States like Puntland, Jubaland, Galmudug, Khatumo, Hirshabelle, and Southwest, which are critical to the country's stability, feel increasingly alienated by the central government's power grabs. This deepening mistrust fuels political disputes, hinders reconciliation, and risks Somalia's return to perpetual conflict, with consequences for both regional and global security.

The UN and its partners have repeatedly ignored the grievances of Federal Member States. Instead, their statements cast FMSs as obstacles to progress while portraying Mogadishu's government as a partner for peace. This distorted narrative undermines any chance of genuine dialogue and sets the stage for further instability.

The risks extend beyond Somalia. Instability in Somalia threatens the region, fueling cross-border conflicts, migration crises, and enabling extremist groups like Al-Shabaab and the Islamic State in Somalia (IS) to exploit the governance vacuum. The failure of the UN and its partners to act decisively is not just a betrayal of Somali sovereignty but a threat to global security.

A Call for Reform and Accountability

Somalia's path to stability requires decisive action. Somali political leaders must take the lead in holding the UN and international partners accountable, starting with:

1. **Creating a Neutral Oversight Mechanism:** Establish a joint committee with representatives from Federal Member States, independent observers, and donor nations to ensure neutrality and accountability in all UN-led programs.
2. **A Realignment of Priorities:** Shift the focus of the UN and its partners to addressing core issues like constitutional manipulation, corruption, and regional marginalization.
3. **Demand Greater Oversight of Funding:** Call on donor nations to ensure transparency and accountability in their funding processes. Programs that perpetuate inefficiency or enable President Mohamud's abuses must be defunded.
4. **Explicit Support for Federalism:** Somali political leaders must demand that international partners, including the UN, explicitly commit to supporting federalism and Somalia's federal structure.

Somalia Deserves Better

The Somali people have endured decades of instability and conflict, and they deserve international partners who genuinely respect their sovereignty and aspirations. The current trajectory of the UN and its international partners undermines these principles and threatens to destabilize the country further. This is a critical moment for Somalia, and the actions—or inactions—of these global actors will have lasting consequences.

The UN and its partners must demonstrate impartiality, transparency, and respect for federalism and the rule of law. Reforming their leadership, priorities, and funding mechanisms is essential to restoring trust and ensuring a stable future for Somalia.

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