

# Somalia and the New Year's (2012) Prospects

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The 21<sup>st</sup> year of Somalia's chaotic history is drawing to a close with no better prospects of the amelioration of the Somali situation. In fact, the prospects are gloomier than ever before – clan wars, territorial disputes in the wake of the euphoria on the formation of the constituent parts of legitimate federal states and continuation of fratricidal wars. The well-meaning international actors are weary of the prolonged mayhem and the unpredictable destructive psyche of the warlords disguised as civil societies, community elders, and parliamentarians.

It may look a mystery why it takes that long for a nation like Somalia to put its house in order. Somalia is a unique nation whose inhabitants share whatever it takes to qualify as a nation, nonetheless, its problems and the potential solutions look hazy to an outside observer. This can be demystified by the fact that Somalia has become hostage to the combination of indigenous myopic minds and elf-regarding international actors cashing in on the anarchy. In other words, Somalia's stalemate became a milk cow for both venal local actors pursuing their vested interest and greedy international self-seekers, pitting these parochial elements against each other to maintain the political logjam. These evil forces which know the tricks of their trade so well outweigh and overwhelm the well-meaning international actors concerned about the suffering of the Somali nation. These formidable actors include the frontline states whose designs and manipulations against the nation matter much, aid-apportioning NGOs and UN agencies run by corrupt officials who are hell-bent on seeing to it that Somalia status quo remains intact.



The culminating effect of their designs had the history of creating unrepresentative and inapt legislative bodies that produced nothing other than further insurmountable hurdles on any headway in Somali political solution. Most of these hand-picked lawbreaking *legislators* had been former warlords who were partly responsible for whatever went wrong in Somalia and political upstarts to fill in the vacuum. As expected, dissension, clan-based division that had been driving a wedge into the smooth functioning of the other government institutions had been the hallmarks of this group.

The UN appointees for the Somali political office had the history reneging, overstepping their mandate and melting into the corrupt system. The Chief of the United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS), Ambassador Ould Abdulla, made a colossal blunder of conjuring up the idea of doubling the number of the discord-prone MPs established in peace talks to 550 members under the guise of yet political reconciliation in Djibouti conference in July, 2009. Local political analysts interpreted this step as a way of prolonging the political deadlock thereby extending his own mandate, at the expense of the then Somali TFG which stood a good chance to succeed and pacify Somalia.

This faux pas prompted a coup that brought the armed opposition led by the current President, Sheikh Sharif Sh. Ahmed, to power. This new setup had not only been undercut by the same manipulations that undermined its predecessors. It divided the ranks of the ruling former opposition. The situation brought about a great setback that backtracked on whatever progress the previous TFG had made. Any hopes of quick reconciliation dimmed further. The overstuffed *legislative council* proved to be the biggest obstacle that paralyzed any decision-making capacity. After the autonomous federal states which had the chance to put in place their own local administrations and established a semblance of law and order, had boycotted any political process as long as Ould Abdulla had been in charge of UN office. This cost Ould Abdulla his post.

The new UNPOS chief, Ambassador Augustine Mahiga assumed office. He took a leaf out of Ambassador Ould Abdulla's book. He imposed his own totalitarian reign, disenfranchising the inconsequential redundant *lawmakers* and took the wrong path of lobbying for dismemberment of Somalia, mortgaging the Somali integrity and unity. The incursion of the Kenyan troops into the Lower Jubba regions, the invitation of Ethiopian support and involvement in the fight against Al-Shabab and his recent comment, calling on the secession of Somaliland all portrayed his lack of diplomacy and tact in a challenging cumbersome political maze like that of Somalia.

Al-shabab which has been losing grace in eyes of the Somali public because of its deviant practices is now being regarded as the lesser of the evils by the Somali public. The dominant thinking among the Somalis is that the very existence of Somalia is at risk as Mahiga's policies threaten its territorial integrity. In his recent speech in Hargeisa, Somaliland in December, he asserted that Somaliland, a secessionist state, has satisfied all ingredients statehood and deserves to be recognized as a separate country by the international community. This has ended the meager popularity he enjoyed as a neutral non-partisan peace maker. The proposed Road Map adopted by the current TFG and being enforced by Ambassador Mahiga is associated with the hidden designs to dismember the country. It worth mentioning that one of the issues proposed in the Road Map (though dropped later) was seeking concessions on Somalia 's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in which Kenya, whose troops are now fighting inside Somalia has been jockeying to annex a large expanse of the of the Somali EEZ.

## **The Road Map and Transitional Charter**

The Consultative Meeting held in Mogadishu in September, 2011, attended by delegates from TFIs, Puntland State, Galmudug State, Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama, and international organizations adopted a Road Map that had promising benchmarks like security, political rapprochement and good governance. These milestones are easier said than done. The political outreach and good governance which forms the basis for implementation of the Road Map might be tabled for approval, but it might not be practical as the basic pre-requisites like viable federal states which enjoy the mandate and consent of the respective populace are premature and the usual spoilers and warlords acting under the guise of traditional community leaders, executive bodies of bogus federal states and unrepresentative parliament are contending for influence and power to abort the Road Map. It will be a mere script on paper and costly futile exercise. Writing the charter has been the most costly project ever carried by the

international community, reportedly costing an estimated 60 million US dollars. It might be completed

without the approval by the very people whose fate it will determine. It will never be put to debate, because most of the South is under the control of Al-Shabab extremists and the will of the people cannot be freely elicited or determined. As long as public support is not harvested, a society armed to the teeth like that of Somalia will have reservation on any endeavor and will jump to guns with slightest suspicion.

There is a strong opposition in the ranks of the parliament and Mogadishu clan elders against the Road Map as well as its venue for clannish reasons. Their opposition wouldn't have borne weight if Ambassador Mahiga's missteps had not lent it credence.

The touchy issue of streamlining or disbanding the seat-warming, motion-wielding redundant PMs is a serious issue that defies any quick fixing. Neither Mahiga and the TFG seems not to have the creativity to tame the *wild horses*, nor the international community have the will, know-how, patience and perhaps the financial support to address the persisting problem.

## **The New Year's Prognosis**

The New Year may bring in some significant changes that may or may not have drastic impact. Many powerful politicians will fall off their high horses and be buried in the ashes of the blaze they helped to rekindle. If we liken the New Year to the fortune-telling octopus believed to have psychic powers, one of its tentacles clasps round Sharif Hassan's (the House Speaker's) neck and is about to throw him out the Somali political equation. It seems that the tentacled prescient sea animal is temporarily loosening its grip on House Speaker's adversary, President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and hinting at an extension of his mandate for an unspecified term as there is no tangible mechanism to replace him at the end of his term in August, 2012.

Mahiga's term, marred by his missteps in the volatile Somali political arena may succumb to his lack of dexterity. The mere fact that he alluded to the dismemberment of the Somalia through the recognition of Somaliland, bringing in the troops of the frontline states who have a stake in the Somali state of affairs alienated the general Somali public.

Due to these concerns, Ambassador Mahiga is gradually falling from the grace of Somali public and this New Year may usher in his replacement. A new face might have another run in the messy Somali political quagmire.

Both Puntland and Somaliland may slip into chaos. The security situation is deteriorating in both states. Somalilanders are craving for clan-based parties. Allowing open-ended multi-party system in a clannish society is like opening Pandora's Box. Clan-based parties at a time when old wounds and clan grievances are easy to fester seem to portend fresh chaos and anarchy. Puntland is now advertising for multiple parties, too. The public has no much confidence that there could be fair and free elections. Puntland's clamor for multi-party election is seen by many to be a mere political stunt paving the way

for President Farole's of Puntland stay in power. Both these entities should have flirted with democracy with a limited number of parties and limited number of lawmakers. Three political parties would have been an ideal number, circumventing clan ambitions, rivalries and subsequent strife. That's true to whole of Somalia.

The international community is concerned about piracy and the kidnappings in the Indian Ocean. The United Kingdom has already called on a meeting in January, 2012. Its concerns are more on piracy, if it isn't a party to conspiracy against the Somali unity. The UK has its more pressing local issues and pre-occupations. The general world economic slowdown and the crisis in the Euro Zone, resulting unemployment issues will overwhelm any serious foreign policy undertaking.

The mandate of the Somali federal institutions is expected to come to an end in August 2012. The top posts of yet another TFG are to be contested with no sound political agenda other than to climb the ladder to fame and popularity through clan-based support. Prominent personalities eyeing the top post include Mohamed Abdullahi Farmaajo, the former prime minister whose popularity is underpinned by a public reaction against international interference and the hijacking of the Somali sovereignty by the concerned action of the troop-contributing countries, the Nairobi-based NGOs. He might be brought to power by the re-alignment of clan-based political alliance. President Farole of Puntland is another contender who is counting on the mere fact that he is the leader of a stable federal state that accounts for one-third of the Somali territory. There are many aspirants and political novices banking on mere fate that clan affiliations may qualify him/her as the third option and sweep him/her to power in this unpredictable Somali political environment.

In a nutshell, this New Year doesn't seem to inaugurate any political reconciliation. The current scuffles and fistfights that ended with the unconstitutional dismissal of the powerful Parliament Speaker is breach of the contract on the part of the MPs that had legislated that the one-year extension ending in August, 2012, should give immunity to the top leader of the TFG institutions as well as the adopted Road Map from chaotic motions of the Parliament. The current palace coup by some MPs is part of the broader plan to stall the Road Map scheduled to be held in Puntland for clannish reasons. This shows that political reconciliation is a way too far to be achieved in this New Year.

## **Panacea to the Gloomy and the Mesirable tormenting Prospects:**

These gloomy prospects can be remedied if honest and sincerity on the part of the international community is achieved. The following points would have counter-acted the gloomy picture of the New Year:

1. The Somali public needs to be disarmed psychologically before any political process is to be implemented. This disarmament should be in a form of international guarantee that territorial integrity of the country is safeguarded, illegal fishing and dumping of hazardous industrial waste dumped on its coasts stopped and genuine honest reconciliation in which the traditional elders play a pivotal role is sponsored. As long as these concerns are not addressed, Somalis will not have confidence in whatever endeavor the international community makes and extremists will

gradually regain their lost grace and continue to obstruct peace in Somalia.

2. The genuine traditional community leaders, (not the bogus, clannish venom-ejecting cliques who are kicking up the fuss in the political arena) need to be involved, and given the ownership of reconciliation on traditional basis. Somali community elders have the capacity to resolve the prolonged conflict if provided the right stage and support.
3. The current parliament needs to be disbanded. Their constant breach of promise and their mandate emanates from the fact they are unschooled and uncultured, negligent of their national duties. Such warlordism can be contained by reducing its number and setting some sort of mechanism that excludes the warlords, the illiterates and the corrupt elements and the unpatriotic brokers that are blocked any forward. Somalia and the Road Map would have been better off without these pseudo politicians, standing in the way of political rapprochement. They seem to be weaving the rope to be lynched with. The so-called MPs counteract their mandate dragging the country deeper into never-ending crisis. Former warlords in the parliament are craning their necks to re-affirm their dislodged grip in their strongholds.
4. Existing federal states must be empowered and the formation of new federal states encouraged. It has become in vogue that hoax, non –existing federal states are being proclaimed and leaders inaugurated. Different political groups claim to be legitimate leaders of a region or a new state. The situation is chaotic and unproductive.
5. Al-Shabab is a spent bullet and there are visible signs that it will not survive the popular alienation by the society, unless reinvigorated or propped up by the concerns of Somali sovereignty-breach and the usual manipulation interference of the international stakeholder.

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