

# Is any System of Governance a Solution to the Somali Problem?

Abdiwahab Tarey, PhD

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*"Hubsiiimo Hal baa la siistaa"* Somali proverb

## Abstract:

The general aim of this article is to critique the arguments put forward by Dr. Afyare Elmi's recent [article](#) "*Nidaamka Federaalku Xal uma ahan Dhibaataada Soomaalida*" published on Wardheernews.com. This article is not meant to endorse any particular system of governance that could serve a panacea to the protracted problems of Somalia, but to outline the necessary ideals needed to frame the critical question as to "what and in where the solution of Somalia's long-standing socio-political problem may lie". This article is also a continuation of the pertinent themes and thesis outlined appropriately in Ismail A. Ismail's [recent seminal article](#) "*In Search of Solutions for Somalia: Prescription of A Unitary System, A Federal System And A Draft Constitution*", also published on Wardheernews.com.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to Mr. Ismail, for his eloquent deposition of much of the substances (historic or argumentative) surrounding the particularities of the debate before us. I also would like to thank Dr. Afyare Elmi for his recognition that much genuine and substantive debate and dialogue are needed on this subject (a system of Governance that may be solution to the "Somali Problem"). For that purpose, this article, as Elmi's and Ismail's, is meant to be part and parcel of that debate/dialogue, hopefully without the usual emotional blackmailing tactics. With that in mind, this author is of the opinion that the academics amongst us are expected to adhere to far higher standards of reasoning and thoroughly strung together logic, supported by real evidences/examples, of why one system of governance may best be suited as a solution to Somalia's protracted problems. More importantly, it is this author's view that the people of Somalia ought to be the ultimate judge, jury, and stakeholders of any system of governance that may best suit, as a solution, to their current predicaments/problems and to the longer survival and successes of their society based on whatever guiding ideals and aspirations they may see fit as a supreme.

Here, what may make one system more ideal than another is determined not by the system but the underlying societal ideals, aspirations, constitutional laws, and instituted policies of governance, etc.. Therefore, affirmatively rejecting any one system of governance, without thorough discussion, real evidences of

inapplicability, dialogue, reconciliation, and collective understandings of the root causes of our society's problems and the aspirations, ideals/values that we may wish to utilize as our nation's foundation for the better, is at best misguided thought experiment or at worst an indication for advancements of political agenda which ultimately may never serve the best interests of the Somali people.

### **Brief Introduction:**

Let me begin with a brief thematic introduction to the genesis of the title of this article, "Is any System of Governance a Solution to the Somali Problem?" The question outlined in this title is, in logical synthesis, prerequisite to the conclusion-oriented title of "Federal System is not a Solution to the Somali Problem" of Dr. Afyare Elmi's article. However, both of these titles are juvenile in logic because none of them define or address the core of the issue, "the Somali Problem". In Dr. Elmi's article, this core issue(s) is/are presumed and are merely presented in hearsay manner without meaningful operational definition and dissection. In this article, this author would like to opt out of operationally defining and determining what this core issue may be (see the concluding remarks). This core issue has been the subject of which great deal of "academic" and non-academic work, during the past two decades, without meaningful consensus. Therefore, this author does not think he could fairly present this issue any more meaningful than others have already contributed or failed. In this regard, this author admits it is hard to prescribe a solution to an ill-defined and/or undefined problem. Perhaps, "there in lies the rub" of the so-called Somalia problem.

### **Critique:**

Notwithstanding to the aforementioned limitations in operational definition(s), suppose we accept and presume – based on the available limited consensus of what the Somali problem may be – that the greatest concerns/needs of most Somalis are: the preservation of their unity, the establishment of Just governance system, the ownership of their affairs/ self-administration and they should be governed (and perhaps by whom), and lastly a collective desire for prosperity and peace. It is a safe bet most Somalis would agree these are acceptable starting point for a debate and discussion. If so, then the question is: can any System of Governance, because of its innate design (merits and demerits considered), guarantee in addressing these civic concerns/needs/wishes?

A simple answer to this fundamental question is an absolute NO. No system of governance can, by innate design, guarantee these concerns/wishes for any society. Any and all systems of governances (almost) can fulfill these wishes and concerns, provided there are adequate sets of guiding societal principles, agreed upon laws,

appropriate instituted policies, and justly executed administration. In this context, it is not the system but the ideals of the society, the evolving constituted laws, the set rights and assumed responsibilities, the instituted policies, among other factors that could and would determine the successes and failures of any adopted system of governance. In that logic, "Federalism" is as good as "Unitary" system of governance for Somalia – both equally beneficial administration frameworks with some merits and demerits that needs to be considered and weighed in to the formulation of "solution".

### **Point-by-Point Examination of Dr. Elmi's Arguments Against Federalism for Somalia<sup>1</sup>:**

In Dr. Afyare Elmi's article, several inherent and potential disadvantages of why "Federalism" may not be solution a "solution" to the "Somali Problem" were outlined. The arguments associated with these disadvantages are often raised. In the interest of public discourse, let's examine the merits and demerits of these arguments point-by-point.

1. "nidaamkani wuxuu ku cusleeyaa dowladda dhexe inay wax ka qabato arrimaha qaar laga yaabo in dastuurku uu siinayo dowladaha gobollada, laakiin xaqiiqa ahaan ka gudbaya xuduudaha gobollada."

This is a grossly over generalized argument. However, if the example presented by Dr. Elmi (Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, and USA) is to be considered as its basis, the logic falls apart. For one thing, the case of Hurricane Katrina is very specific which outlines an apparent failure by a specific administration and not general inherent demerits of any system of governance. In fact, the same failures of administrations across the globe can be showcased without regards to the system of governance of the countries in question. Irrespective, there is no shred of evidence provided by Dr. Elmi that could suggest a Unitary Governance System could've faired any better had it enjoyed the same level of practical incompetence displayed by then the Bush administration of USA in response to Hurricane Katrina. Moreover, Dr. Elmi provided no substantiated details of any administrative hindrances – logistic, jurisdiction, and underlying legal/administrative responsibilities- that they may have prevented the Bush administration to respond to this particular catastrophic natural disaster simply because of the Federal Governance of the USA. In fact, there are no evidences to suggest that problems associated with jurisdiction overlaps and/or administrative disputes between the Federal government of the USA and the State of Louisiana or the city of New Orleans may have had undo effect on how things transpired during this national disaster. If the Federal government of USA failed to respond to this disaster adequately, it did so out of incompetence of the administrative bodies responsible for these matters and out of indifferences of its leadership (the latter is debatable). In any case, it is this author's opinion, that Dr. Afyare Elmi is raising this

particular example, in support of his unsubstantiated assertion, in an effort to appeal to the emotions of his readers and out of fear mongering political tactics.

2. “nidaamkani kuma fiicna beeqaaminta dhaqaalaha waayo wuxuu ganacsiga ku qasbaa inay u hoggaansamaan xeerar badan oo isku soo noqnoqonaya.”

Simply translated, here Dr. Elmi is claiming Federal system of governance impedes, by design, economic development. For one thing, neither Dr. Elmi (a political scientist by training) nor I (a biomedical scientists by training) have the expertise to make such a statement. But if we all could rely on the facts on the ground in the world around us, it is apparent to all that the basis of this statement is flawed. For instance, the single most dominant economic power of this world, the USA, is a government based on the principles of Federalism. Equally, other economically prosperous nations around the globe practice Federalism. So how can Dr. Elmi square his assertions with these facts?

3. “nidaamka federaalku wuxuu ku habboon yahay dalalka juqraafi ahaan aadka u waaweyn sida Canada, Ameerica, Ruushka iyo Australia. Waxaa kale oo ku habboon yahay dalalka juqraafi ahaan kala qeybsan ee ay u dhexeeyaan buuro ama bad sida Malaysia iyo New Zealand.”

Here, “Haboonaan” (suitability) is the key word. Even then, the size and geography of any country has nothing to do with whether or not Federalism is a good or bad system of governance. It may have some relevance for “suitability”, especially when there are clear advantages such as the countries listed by Dr. Elmi. But small countries can equally find Federalism as a suitable system for reasons outside their size and geography. Such a country, for example, is Switzerland. For the Swiss’s case, the term confederacy leading to Federalism is an important element vis-à-vis to the “Somali problem”.

4. “nidaamka federaalku wuxuu ku fiican yahay dalalka leh dad badan oo ku kala duwan diinta, dhaqanka iyo sinjiga sida India, Nigeria iyo Canada. Dadkeenna waxaa laqu qiyaasaa toban milyan marka la badiyo.”

Is this a rule of thumb? Not really! In fact, it is the existence of, and a solution for, a societal qualms/problems (potential or otherwise) that is the driving force for the argument presented for Federalism system of governance as a solution. Let me put it in simple terms: a system of governance could be chosen over another in order to address, on some level, an inherent societal problem. There is nothing particularly special about the nature of the problem (be it religion, ethnicity, color, creed, etc). It could well be one of Clan in nature that may require administrative considerations in which Federalism could do the trick. It only needs to be a societal problem of which a societal solution is needed to address it. How the chosen system remedies the PROBLEM is dependent on a whole a lot more than just the innate characteristics of the SYSTEM.

5. waxaa qaadan kara nidaamka federaalka dalalka leh dhaqaale xooggan oo awooda inay bixiyaan kharashka heerar-dowladeedyo kala duwan sida Canada, Germany, Ameerica, Australia iyo kuwo kale oo badan.

I believe Dr. Elmi is, yet again, trying to square a circle with this argument. First, there is no set/established cost associated with any system of governance even if all things are considered. These costs are all relative and all depend on the case-by-case means and wishes of the particular society willing to adopt whatever system it may desire. Somalia is not inherently any different from Canada or USA with regards to how to best address its societal problems with a particular system of governance and consequently paying for it. There is no formula that dictates that poor societies ought to best govern themselves in one way while richer ones ought to in another. Remember, Somalia is not trying to be like Canada or USA by adopting Federalism. Somalis are merely trying to address a societal problem that may be unique to them with their own unique resources, ideals, and perhaps through the utilization of established universal system of governances (with its merits and demerits) that could best apply to their situation appropriately. To argue that some society can afford, and thus, deserve a particular system of governance is misguided and misplaced. Thus broadly speaking, no system is more expensive or cheaper, by default, than another. Expert Economists could have a lot more to say in this regard, but neither Dr. Elmi nor I have sufficient economic expertise and the necessary data to make such a judgment so definitively.

6. “Nidaamka federaalku ma ahan nidaam, figrad ahaan, ka yimid dadka Soomaaliyeed.”

This statement is xenophobic in its nature and never helpful. Logically, however, one needs not to reject the “wheel” and try to re-invent “it”, solely because he/she did not come up with the idea in its first place. Federalism is a system of governance practiced by many societies for better or worse. Whether it may work or not for Somalia and for Somalis has no bearing on where the idea of Federalism originally came from. What system of governance is purely Somali with which, out of loyalty and xenophobia, Somalis ought to compare and contrast against the Federalism and/or Unitary system of governance?

7. “Nidaamka federaalku ma daweeyo keli-telisnimada wallow uu ka mid yahay aaladaha la adeegsado.”

In this statement, Dr. Elmi is raising one of the many “Problems”/concerns/fears Somalis may be faced with today. Even if this was the primary “Problem”/concern/fear, that all Somalis are trying to come to terms with, the question still remains can there be any system of governance that can uniquely address their concerns/fears fully? I think not! To address “dictatorship” in governance, a society could constitute, regardless of the system it may chose, sets of norms that diminishes the individual inclinations towards

dictatorship and at the same time undermines the requisite empowerment that may allow these individuals to enact while at the same time safeguarding the collective wishes of the society and the system they may have chosen. At any rate, dictatorship thrives in an atmosphere where citizens are disempowered and consequently are either willing or powerless against the eventuality of being disenfranchised. Even then, no rules or system of governance could, by design, solely safeguard any society from such a possibility. The ideals, the strength of the established institutions, and the empowerment/know-how of the citizens of any society are the best safeguards of its constitutions and destiny. In this context, federalism and/or decentralization of power may have an edge over unitary system of governance in limitedly averting dictatorship eventuality.

8. “dhammaan waxyaalaha waxtarka ah ee ku jira nidaamkan [Federalism] waxaa laga heli karaa nidaamyada kale ee dimoqraadiga”

This is not a disadvantage and simplistic put the reverse argument is true for the Federalism system of governance. The question is, “Is any System of Governance a Solution to the Somali Problem? The prudent honest answer is: it is all dependent on what the nature of the “problem (s)” we are trying to solve and what the ideals/values and could be agreed upon laws, institutions, and administrations we are willing to consider (among others). More importantly, it all dependences how the Federalism system compares, relatively speaking, to all the other system of governances when our ideals, needs, wish lists, and societal outlooks (based on both our recent history and future aspirations) are taken in to account. No system of governance can, by default, provide an answer affirmatively to that question. And ruling one System out in preference to another at this juncture and without any meaningful evidence is an absurd proposition.

9. “nidaamka federaalku wuxuu xoojinayaa qabyaaladda, wuxuuna wiiqayaa qarannimada Soomaalida.”

This is a baseless argument without substantiated evidences to support. If one may use the same anecdotal and hypothetical stories as well as emotionally driven appeals (which is beneath us all), one could also argue that regardless of clan and creed all Somalis identify themselves as Somalis first and with their clan second. So there should be no basis why one system of governance would or should promote “qabyaalad” more than another. In fact, Somalia was ruled under a unitary system of governance for 30 years before it collapsed, arguably because of populace perception of slanted “qabyaalad”, widespread corruption, injustices, and disenfranchisements. Therefore, a case could be made that centralized and “Unitary” system of governance of Somalia is the root cause of “qabyaalad”, affording only select few or clans to have access to power. This is an argument, however, that would be equally flawed on the accord that no system of governance, on its own design, could diminish or promote the practice of “qabyaalad”.

If that is the case and it could be substantiated, then every Somali may have a reason to be concerned about a “Unitary” and centralized governance structures they have endured in the past as a new solution to the problems they inherited from such a system. Such concerns could equally give a basis that perhaps a decentralized system of governance, like Federalism – even if it is based on unabashed and not so hidden clan distributions of power – may be a possible solutions to the destructive/unfair “Qabyaadalad” of the previous centralized “unitary” system of governance that brought Somalia to its current mayhem.

### **Conclusions and Appeals to all Somalis:**

There are many opportunistic, self-serving, self-indulgent individuals who may ascribe to what Somalis are and what Somalia’s problem may be. But as a citizen and a member of this great society, I am not convinced there is anything inherently wrong with our makeup and ideals. I am proud of our society’s history and its tribal make up not to mention its egalitarian ideals. Yes, some amongst us have exploited these facts and consequently we have turned against one another, *brother vs. brother*, in a mindless civil battle that left no community untouched and left us all in mayhem, in chaos, and in a “failed state” among the civilized world. That is the price we have paid for leaving unanswered the fundamental question of “how we should govern” our society and what ideals and aspirations we should follow as a guide.

Here we are today, fallen and victims. At this bottom, we Somalis should reflect and recognize together what went wrong. At this bottom, we should have a voice, not because we are in misery and desperate need for help, but because we are Somalis and deserve much more than failures and desire for much more than mediocrity and pseudo-justice. At this bottom, we should recognize we are ONE and far better of united than divided. We should proclaim for purpose and with collective voice for unity, aspire for justice, and EXCELLENT governance (as opposed to good governance). We should weigh these things together as communities of sovereign clans/tribes, but all, nonetheless, Somali. No longer, should we be held hostage of our searches for Mandeeq’s benefits by the emotional attachment of the “she”, the benevolent camel, to feed us all and equally. No longer should we be willing to sit in silence, as our brothers are massacred in the name of our collectives. Enough is enough.

Yes, we have killed one another. Yes, we have destroyed, raped, and disfigured everything that was once innocent amongst us. Yes, Mandeeq lays in the ditch, dead and breast-less, because of the beast we were made to become and as a result of the mindless appeals to our animalistic instincts. But we are here, free humans, and for that we can make a decision today. We can make a decision to forgive but to never forget and never allow us to become the instruments of the beast or the indifferent inhuman we had become in the past. Take a look around you today and reflect if you could see a better brother/sister than your own Somali: from Dirir Dhawe to Doolow, from Borame to

Bossaaso, from Hargayso to Hagartheere, from Berbera to Bardheere, from Caynabo to Ceel Macaan, from Wardheer to Wajeer, from Jig Jiga to Jowhar. Tell me, if the Somali vein dried in you and there is no common blood to connect us all. Yes, I am appealing to your emotions. But, I am left with no logic to argue with you. I am confident we can find an answer for it. In case you have forsaken and in case others may have assumed that we are dead and debilitated. The dream of our forefathers remains intact and shall remain so. We are Somali and the Horn of Africa is our homeland and shall remain so come what may and regardless of others' desires and wishes. That much is a guarantee. As for a system of governance, any system can and would do the job so long as we are in control of the ideals and aspirations that the system is founded upon. We are Somali and united not because of any system of governance but because we are Somali. That much is for certain.

Abdiwahab Tarey, PhD  
[mussea@gmail.com](mailto:mussea@gmail.com).

*The author is a Fellow of the Canadian Institute of Health Research working as a Researcher at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and Irvine (UCI).*