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Buuhoodle: The Key to Saving Somalia's Unity

By Osman Hassan

April 27, 2017

Buuhoodle is famous for its past and present history, though its establishment as a town merely goes back to living memory. Its past history is rooted in the struggle of Sayid Mohamed Abdulla Hassan's Darwiish liberation movement against the colonialists of all stripes colonizing the Somali homeland, notably the British and their native collaborators. The Sayid was born at a site called Sacmadeeqo, a neighbouring location only few hours walk from Buuhoodle. Many of the Sayid's fighters, if not most, hailed from the Buuhoodle region.

Buuhoodle is one of the cradles of Somali literature. It boasts as being the birthplace and home of some of the greatest Somali poets, such as the Sayid, Ismail Mirre (his chief lieutenant), Ali Dhuux (his main critic of the time), Samatar Baxnaan and Aden Arab among others. Professor Ian Lewis came to Buuhoodle as a place (not a town then) in the early 1950s when he was doing his research for his PhD Doctorate on Somali pastoral democracy.



Otherwise, Buuhoodle rarely made to the headlines since its glorious Darwish days-not until after the collapse of the Somali State in January 1991. That was when, the one-clan based secessionist rebels in the north, going by the SNM acronyms (Somali National Movement - a misnomer since they stood for the antithesis of Somali nationhood) declared the secession of the northern regions (former British Somaliland) from Somalia. Making good on their declaration, the Awdal unionist region was the first the SNM used their immense military arsenal acquired from the disintegrated Somali national army based in the north. The region was immediately brought under their heels, committing in the process widespread atrocities against the defenceless unresisting civilian population.

Those brutalities amounting to crimes of humanity were meant not only to cow the locals for ever but also to serve as an exemplary lesson to the remaining unionist regions of Sool, Sanaag and Cayn (SSC) that the same punishment would await them unless they summarily succumb to their dictate. They did not oblige and what the SNM capture of Awdal did was to prompt the SSC regions to unite with their fellow

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kindred clans to the east and form what came to be known as Puntland - a mainly defensive bulwark against feared secessionist invasions - from the SSC's perspective.

For a while, the existence of the Puntland administration served as a deterrent dissuading Somaliland from embarking on reckless predatory adventures to grab the SSC regions. But Dahir Rayaale, Siilaanyo's predecessor and a former officer in Siyad Barre's security services, realised that Puntland valued the SSC regions merely as a milking cow but otherwise had no commitment to their defence nor welfare. He was not wrong. And so in October 2007, Somaliland invaded Lascanod, the regional capital, with hardly a shot fired in its defence. As Rayaale rightly calculated, Puntland's defence forces in the town simply vanished, withdrawing to the safety of, Garawe, the capital of Puntland. Progressively thereafter, Somaliland's occupation expanded to most of the Sool and Sanaag regions.

Conquests make history for their conquerors and Rayaale became an instant household hero as the leader who succeeded to deliver Lascanod, hitherto considered unassailable beyond their grab. Siilaanyo who succeeded Rayaale, and looked down on him as an outsider to the ruling clan, reckoned he could do better and capture Buuhoodle. The people of the town, representing the last free area of the SSC regions, saw the situation as a do or die challenge, the last ditch that stood in the way of the total occupation of the SSC regions by the secessionists and hence the end of the union. In what turned out to be Siilaanyo's and his enclave's biggest disastrous gamble, his forces were routed at Kalshaale, Buuhoodle town itself and other places.



What saved the people of Buuhoodle from the jaws of their secessionist predator, and kept that beast at bay ever since, was not only their fighting prowess, or their unshakeable unity, but above all their unwavering desire to be free and defend Somalia's unity. Buuhoodle, if it remains undefeated and free, could turn out to be the catalyst that finally unravels the secession.

Who is who in Buuhoodle: Somalia, Somaliland, Puntland , Khatumo?

Much as Buuhoodle's people would have wished their town (and its region) was under the rule of Khatumo and Somalia, the simple truth is that it is neither; nor is it under the control of either of the two clan-based neighbouring enclaves- Somaliland and Puntland- who are vying for it. Both are doing their utmost best, in their different ways, to be the master of the place, either through machinations (Puntland) or outright occupation (Somaliland).

A. The case of Somalia

Somalia's recent leaders, and in particular the former one, Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud, had shown no interest in, or commitment to Somalia's unity or the plight of the SSC regions under the occupation of the one-clan secessionist enclave. At no time has he, or his predecessor for that matter, condemned the secession or the occupation of one part of Somalia (SSC) by what is technically another part of it (i.e. Somaliland). On the contrary, Hassan Sheikh had cynically reached tacit quid pro quo understanding with Somaliland so that he could count on the support of their MPs in the Somali Parliament in exchanged for leaving them in "peace" if not mollycoddle them. This tolerance has given the green light to foreign governments and international organisations to deal directly with the enclave as a de facto government responsible for the north (former British Somaliland).

B. The demise of Khatumo

The Khatumo State established in Taleex in January 2012 has been blatantly hijacked by its leader, Dr Ali Khalif Galaydh, to serve his interest and that of Hargeisa. Khatumo now is nothing more than a name appropriated by Galaydh which has no writ beyond his hotel room in Buuhoodle. As far as he is concerned, Khatumo conflates with himself and for all practical purposes it is his personal baby. He has hand-written its sham constitution and generously awards himself unquestionable prerogatives in order to reach personal treacherous deals with Somaliland.



C. Somaliland's Territorial Greed and Gamble

Having gobbled much of the SSC regions, Buuhoodle otherwise remains for Hargeisa the hard nut to crack to complete the total annexation of the SSC regions. Given that the military option is not on the table after their Kalshaale debacle, the only option is to unravel its unity against the secessionists, a job that could best be done by agents hailing from the SSC regions. Their greatest success was when Suleiman Ahmed Isse, (aka Xagle Toosiye) defected to them - hitherto a hero (now the minister for health in the enclave). As it turned out, he did not deliver on the mission assigned to him partly because, as one can judge from his actions, he never wanted to hand Buuhoodle to Somaliland in the first place. He would come back to the town now and then and remain there for a day or two, stay most of the time indoors with his spouse, make few noises just for the camera bashing Ali Khalif, and then return to Hargeisa claiming mission accomplished (*qowda maqashii waxna how qaban!!*).

In retrospect, Xagle Toosiye stands in better light than all other collaborators. These days, he rarely ever calls on his people to support the secession. From his perspective, he has the best of both worlds: his ministerial job and a free Buuhoodle, thus facing Hargeisa with a Hobson's choice. On balance, it considers keeping him pampered as a lesser evil than giving him the boot, figuring rightly that a disgruntled Xagle Toosiye

could turn out a dangerous wrecker and foil whatever hopes Hargeisa entertains about grabbing the town; he could do worse and upset their apple cart in the rest of the occupied SSC regions. The man after all has better credentials than Ali Khalif as a Darwish. He was the former head of the SSC Hogaan Liberation Movement and earned kudos for his military and material contribution to the battles at Kalshaale. Better leave him happily enjoying his favourite life style in swinging Hargeisa than to reawaken a hibernating warrior.

Hargeisa's Supper Catch

If Xagle Toosiye has let down Hargeisa, they have every reason to be pleased with themselves having netted the biggest partner among SSC collaborators- who else but [Ali Khalif Galaydh himself](#). What makes him so dangerous for the SSC people is not so much he is more devious and duplicitous but that unlike the others he is based and operates from within Buuhoodle hatching their downfall while all the while masquerading as their president of Khatumo. For what it is worth, the mask is off and these days he makes no bones about his true colours as a Somalilander, rubbing shoulders with Faisal Ali Waraabe and his secessionist cohorts.

Far from winning the hearts and minds of his people and liberate them, he does more to alienate them. Behaving more like a stand-up comedian than a serious leader, his unguarded anecdotes and cavalier conduct often lands him in deep waters. In one such recent occasion, he quoted Siilaanyo as saying that the greatest heritage (*dhaxal*) he would like to leave behind is to see Buuhoodle (and the rest of the SSC regions) finally in the bag (of Somaliland). In the same occasion, he angrily dismissed Farmaajo as that elected president for Southern Somalia, implying he belongs to Somaliland which is a separate country having Siilaanyo as its president.

Not surprisingly, these distasteful provocative statements have enraged the SSC people, and more so those in Buuhoodle where the atrocities Siilaanyo's militia committed against their civilian population are still fresh in their minds. If nothing else, he shot himself on the foot and put the final nail in his presidential coffin. Until they manage to get rid of him (and the sooner the better), he will remain Buuhoodle's biggest pain - an albatross around its neck.

D. Puntland: The Parasite that Feeds on the SSC

Though Puntland has no presence in the SSC regions, military or otherwise, it maintain the farcical fiction that they are part of Puntland even if the SSC people terminated their membership of Puntland in January 2012 when they established their own Khatumo regional State at Taleex. This initiative did not cut much ice with the rulers of Puntland, least of all Abdiweli Gaas who maintains ad nauseam that the partnership is still binding unless they sanction the divorce!! This stand amounts to claiming that the SSC people are in bondage to Garawe and not free to decide their destiny, a status which, to the extent it is maintained, is worse than being colonial subjects of Puntland. The most painful thing about this is



that there are those in the SSC who would defend and put Puntland first even when it is clearly at the cost of their own people.

What motivates Garowe's unscrupulous selfish stand is simply the economic and political clout it derives from claiming the SSC regions without incurring any cost. This would not have been possible if it was not for the underhand concurrence of former President Hassan Sheikh Mohamoud and his administration. To make matters worse for the SSC people, Puntland and Somaliland's parallel and baseless claims on them have condemned their land as "*disputed territories*" as if they were an uninhabited no-man's-land. And to make matters worse for them, they also labelled them as unsafe areas just to keep them isolated from the rest of the world.

The result of this pernicious intrigues on the SSC regions was to make them no-go-areas until now, inaccessible to the international community to deliver humanitarian and development aid. In some ways, Puntland's actions have been by far the more nefarious and damaging. It made sure to the extent possible that these regions would remain captive for their benefit, not be able to prevail against three fronts at the same time - Somaliland, Puntland and a complicit Villa Somalia. It is ironic that two villains (Garowe and Mogadishu) would form an unholy alliance against Somali unity which after all is the *raison d'être* of Khatumo's struggle against Somaliland.

With Camay who needs enemies

Since the election of President Farmaajo, Buuhoodle began to emerge from Somaliland and Puntland's years of siege and stranglehold with several flights coming to the town, carrying visitors and much-needed humanitarian aid. Much to Puntland's unhappiness, this long-awaited breakthrough has debunked their contrived big lie that the security of the town is not assured for outsiders. What they consider they will lose more important than what the SSC gain and Somalia's unity gain.



At a time when things were at last moving in the right direction for the town comes [Vice President Camay of Puntland](#) (himself hailing from Buuhoodle), ordering a small private plane flying from Mogadishu en route for Buuhoodle to land at Garowe for security clearance before it can be allowed to proceed to its destination. Mr Camay justified his action on the grounds that Buuhoodle is part of Puntland and therefore Garowe controls their airspace. To say the least, this is a daft ludicrous claim. For one thing, Buuhoodle and its SSC regions are not part of Puntland but of Somalia and no one else. That is the will of its people and not his or his masters in Garowe. And secondly, Puntland is not, as he implies, an independent country separate from Somalia having and controlling its own air space.

One can only wonder whether Mr. Camay is daydreaming or just airing empty rhetoric for the consumption of his domestic audience in Garowe. Since Puntland has

not seceded from Somalia and recognized as such by the international community (though it behaves as such), the airspace over its regions, just like that over Somaliland, are Somalia's national airspace which is controlled from the capital, Mogadishu. An internal flight from Mogadishu that had clearance to fly to anywhere else in Somalia, (say Buuhoodle), cannot willy-nilly be ordered by another third town (say Garawe) to land there for security clearance unless that order comes from Mogadishu which is not the case.

Clearly, all this hocus-pocus about airspace violations and gratuitous security clearance are red herrings. The real purpose is to pull the rug from under Buuhoodle's opening to the rest of Somalia and the world by resurrecting Puntland's (and Somaliland's) old fabrications about alleged insecurity in the town. What Camay is doing is to raise the bogey of al Shabaab and insinuate that it has a foothold in the town which is absolutely baseless. It is a stab in the back of the town, coming of all people from one of its sons whose priority seems to be: "sacrifice his hometown for the benefit of Puntland and his own empty title". Who needs enemies when you have your own kin undermining you!!.

Conclusions: Somalia is Either United or Falls Apart

To revive a dysfunctional State would be backbreaking for any leader. But it is more so for President Farmaajo who has to resurrect a State that has more or less been defunct for more than quarter of a century and hampered by enemies at home and abroad, above all neighbouring countries used to feasting on it all these years. The challenges are overwhelming and some Herculean, and the means to address them at the President's disposal so limited. Yet, where there is a will there is a way.



Given his dedication and patriotism and the immense support he has from our people, together with the solidarity from the international community, he can over time prevail over his adversaries, overcome his obstacles and succeed in his national mission God willing. In picking up the pieces, the fundamental pillars of the State that should receive his single-minded top priority are its security (both internal and external) and its unity. The two are critically interdependent. There can be no Somali State possible without fulfilling these indispensable prerequisites.

The president has already outlined his vision for the security sector but said little so far about restoring the unity of the country. Silence can give rise to different interpretations, often negative. For his detractors, this subdued silence could be construed as signifying ambivalence on his part just like his predecessors who kept putting it on the back burner for all their years in office which in the meantime made the situation worsen. Those who have faith in the President on the other hand are

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confident that the issue is uppermost in his mind and sooner rather than later he will come up with his strategy.

Needless to say, the greatest threat to Somalia's unity is secession by one clan/region or another. That has already happened in the north. Secession however can be contagious and respects no regional or clan borders whether in the north or south of Somalia. Abdiweli Gaas's Puntland, though nominally part of Somalia, is no more unionist loyalist Somalia than Somaliland, perhaps less, judging by his actions in foreign countries. Myopic, selfish short-term interest, both personal and regional, is what derives his leadership. Other regions/clans in the south have not gone as far adrift as Puntland but neither are they that far behind. They cannot all be taken for granted to eschew secession. The key to maintaining the unity of Somalia and averting future secessions elsewhere is to end Somaliland's current secession for good by one means or another.

Three -Way Track for Ending the Secession

Ending the secession would require a three-way track approach: one directed at the secessionist polity and the other at the unionists in the north.

For the track towards the secessionist enclave, they would have to be persuaded that their grievances were with a regime that has gone and not with the Somali people per se. It should not be used as a bargaining chip to capitalise on it. Today, Somalia is a federal State where all the clans/ regional States have equal rights (though not yet for occupied Awdal, Khatumo and Makhir States). They should not expect preferential treatment for giving up the secession. That would be appeasement, or worse rewarding blackmail, pure and simple. As typical of Somali clans, contriving unfair treatment grievances is used as card to extract unfair awards. That practice should not be encouraged but discouraged for good whether in the south or north.

The second track is to fire up the awakening nationalism among the youth in the secessionist enclave which President Farmaajo's election precipitated. The generations born in the enclave since the collapse of the Somali State constitute the majority of the people and are not, unlike their more chauvinistic embittered seniors, burdened with hang-ups from the past. A strong wind of nationalistic fervour is blowing in the enclave. Some have been detained, others imprisoned for no crime other than attune to the reborn Somali nationalism sweeping the Horn. The government has fertile ground of goodwill to target if it gets its act together.

The third track should be directed at the unionists in the occupied regions in the north(Khatumo, Makhir and Awdal). The first line of action for this approach, which is the one most feasible, is to establish the federal government's first foothold in the north at Buuhoodle, the last free area among the unionist regions in the north and the one crying loudest for the federal government. Unless they are crazy (which is possible), it is unthinkable that the renegade secessionist enclave will challenge the internationally recognized federal government to establish law and order and social services in its territory, all the more when its people are crying for such intervention as in Buuhoodle. If they do, they can't win. The international community will see to that. For Buuhoodle at least, if not the wider SSC regions, the presence of a federal

foothold will have the extra bonus of getting Puntland off their back. The government could even go one step further and recognize in principle the right of Khatumo to become a federal State of Somalia.

The multiplier benefits of such limited initiatives cannot be overemphasised. It would immediately and dramatically serve as a rallying magnet for all unionists in the north and deliver a deadly blow to the secession. Conversely, if Buuhoodle, the last free unionist area goes, and gets gobbled by Somaliland, so will end the union. Somalia could even come apart at its clan seams - God forbid.

Final Word for President Farmaajo

Mr President

You can restore Somalia's unity. Start it at Buuhoodle whose freedom from occupation and imposed secession is a living symbol that keeps the union alive. For a start, you could not do a more powerful gesture for giving a boost to the union than giving Buuhoodle the visit it deserves from you at your earliest convenience. And to go one step better, the federal government should recognize Khatumo at the right time when it is under a unionist leader. That will instantly rally the unionists and raise their morale in every region in the north long betrayed by Mogadishu. It could well usher the beginning of the end of the secession, all without having boots on the ground. Barack Obama used to say during his election campaign: " Yes we can (do it)" to solve America's daunting challenges. So too you can, Mr President, restore Somalia's unity, security and sovereignty. Long Live Somalia and its unity.

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