

Why Somalia Cannot Be Fixed? Sources of its Political Problems and their Solutions

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Abstract:

Is Somalia doomed to a failure? Is it going to fade? I don't like to be pessimistic, but I want to share with fellow Somalis a legitimate concern on the continuity of the haunting problem in our country.

This article will outline the sources of Gross National Problems, sorting them into effects and causes, and identifying their interconnections; it will further suggest tips for their solutions; and before the conclusion, it will go through some more details. In another word, the article will consist of the following:

1. Introduction: Survival Concerns
2. Anatomy of the Problem
3. A paradigm of a Solution
4. Why Do Problems Persist? (further discussion)
 - 4.1 . Undoing Approach
 - 4.2 . Leaders as Liability
 - 4.3 . Intellectual Failure
 - 4.4 . Basics, Values Ignored
 - 4.5 . Grievance vs. Greed
 - 4.6 . Unbalanced Environment for a National Government
 - 4.7 . It is we, Our Self, and Not Others
5. Conclusion: No Gain without Pain

1. Introduction: Survival Concerns

In a rapidly changing world, Somalia has been characterized for more than three decades by destruction, despair, and dreadful human tragedy. After the formation of an official government, the country is not still on course. The hope that accompanied this government has apparently now evaporated. The pervasive, persistent tragedy is not yielding yet. The era of agony and aberration is not getting over.

Within this situation, what needs now to be focused upon is why cannot this problem be ended? Why cannot Somalia be fixed? Why cannot a solution be found? There must be answers for these questions. But there are more.

There is something momentous happening in Somalia today. But we don't know its direction and dimension because our destiny is not in our hands. The fact that the Somali authorities cannot so far make an agreement without pressure from outside shows that they are not still relevant in the current process. Are we supposed to accept that?

Somalia might be helped by the process. But there is a risk in that help because there is no free horse in the politics. In fact, there is deep concern about the process's reluctance to support transforming the informal Somali forces, which have played an important role in defeating the discredited militants, to a formal security force.

It is also fact that the world order is occasionally reshaped by human actions in the favor of some nations and at the expense of others. That change cannot usually be reversed. For example, the colonial legacy left Somalia as a leading loser, and we know what that costs for us. Do we want to be passive spectators of another mortal loss?

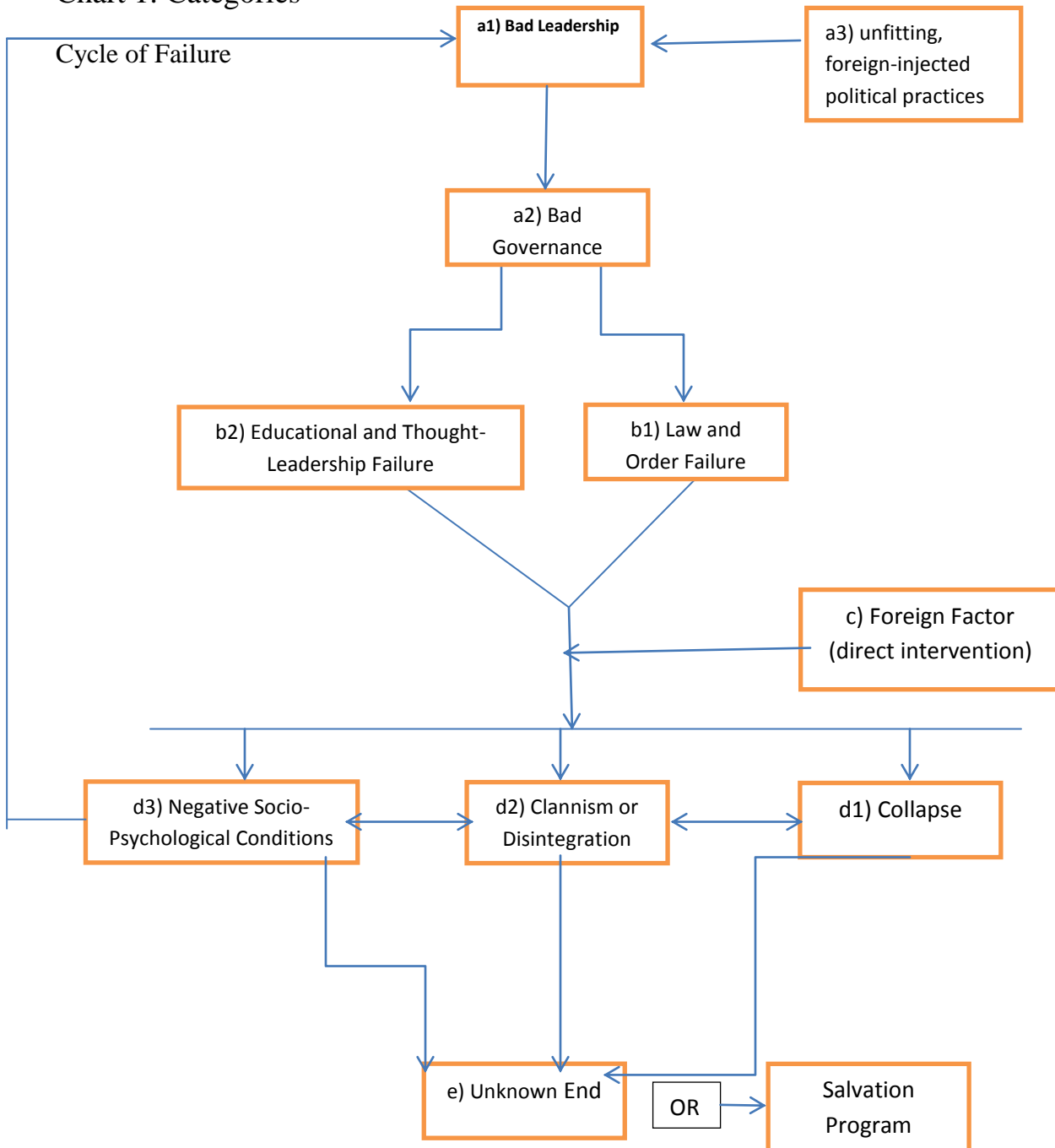
I should hasten to point out **our problems emanate from our leadership and educational practices, and our character**. Some further questions may indicate the legitimacy of this view, and if that isn't the case, why do not our educational system or educated people contribute to making difference in our national cause? Why cannot we uphold a good character when we end up in a leadership position? Why do not we have an ability to recognize our mistakes? Why do we always feel our leaders don't make a difference except that they divide us?

(For leadership, I don't mean only the one at national level but at all levels, ranging from presidency through branches and regions to a supervisor of office, chief of clan, and administrator of school or masjid).

2. Anatomy of the Problem

Problems in category 'a', are seen here as causes, whilst categories 'b', 'c', and 'd' are seen as effects, as they are shown in the following chart and the subsequent explanations:

Chart 1: Categories



Explanation:

a1) Incompetent, corrupt Leadership:

Usually, Leaders are accidently-positioned, visionless, power-oriented, arrogant, misspeaking, manipulative, and Machiavellian.

a2) Pervasive Corrupt Governance:

Inability to serve, self-serving, State Privatization, favoritism, divisive; inability to deal with useful ideas or their producers.

a3) Incompatible political practices from a foreign source: Socialism, despotism, extremism, sectarianism.

These have corrupted or confused the indigenous culture in leadership behavior and political thinking, as Mark Turner of Financial Times has noted over a decade ago: " For the past half a century, Somalia has been a testing ground for all political theories the outside world could throw at it: colonialism, European-style statehood, Soviet and, later, American cold war philosophies. None worked."

b1) Law and order failure: violent, chaotic situation of life.

b2) Educational Inactivity

- Incompetent educators and Pseudo thinkers.
- Misused or unproductive education.
- Unfitting education in social studies.
- Lack of training in public responsibility, good citizenship, and statehood and human developments.

c) Foreign Factor (direct intervention):

- Deliberate exacerbation of the situation and pre-emption on positive developments.
- Inter-governmental contending interests at the expense of Somali interest.
- Flow of arms from the neighbors.
- Illicit money, usually from Arab source to a Somali group or individual.
- Humanitarian assistance as a source of corruption and crisis: male management and unfair distribution of the limited international aid contribute to widening the differences among the Somalis. Due to this, the term NGO has a negative connotation in the country today. (The writer has been a witness of many cases for the opinion in this paragraph.)

d1) Collapse: failure in political, social, economic, environmental, ethical, healthy, legal, and security dimensions.

d2) Disintegration or Clannism:

- A Violent clan action of taking advantage from the collapse in attempting to turn back the clock into the past to claim supposed missed opportunities such as land and power.
- Counteraction from the targeted groups.
- Geographical social separation.
- A cycle of violating agreements on peace and reconciliation, and even avoiding a genuine reconciliation.
- A victimization of a whole community by a marginalization because they are less empowered; or by perception and alienation because they can check unpopular political dreams of the person or group in the power.

d3) Negative socio-psychological conditions:

- Silent grief that puts the nation collective in a sad condition of health situation.
- Frustration, perception, opinionated, mistrust, miscommunication.
- Lack of will in learning and education.
- Loss of loyalty to the country.
- Failure to recognize self-weaknesses and others' strengths or concerns.
- Reacting within emotion and lack of commitment.
- Accepting to live with misconduct and discord.
- A war of word, and inability to control minor differences that are usually developed into a major confrontation.

Chart 2: To shorten the chart, we see that the bad governance on the top creates a chain of problems that come back and affect it routinely. Now the question is: what is the most appropriate point to cut from the cycle?



3. A Paradigm of a Solution

As it is difficult to think about a third way, one of these ways is not naturally an option, thus, let us see what is required by a salvation program or a solution of the problem.

a) Conducting a constructive dialogue and discussions with engagement-platforms for generating useful ideas for solutions.

b) Turning the ideas into planned and principled objectives and goals, within nationalistic spirit and practical application.

c) Running the process by a carefully-built, vibrant civic movement which is led by a screened, non-sectarian team with qualities of character: vision, determination, courage, integrity, sincerity, selfless service, Perseverance, accountability, and flexibility.

d) Striving for, and having ability **to**: transform the negative political discourse into reasoning and respecting practices, propel true reconciliation, unite the people, restore the lost spirit of nationalism, empower the public authority, pressure the government to be accountable to the public, and assist the government **in the following**:

e) Building a well-functioning state: national strong one and effective local ones; achieving the long-demanded change and reformation; fostering a law-abiding and education-absorbing environment; promoting a home-grown educational system based on indigenous culture and modern scientific competencies with relevant creativity and intellectual production; and developing a safe relationship with the engaged countries and organizations.

f) Working for provision of a mechanism for adequately studying, substantially evaluating, reasonably challenging, and appropriately applying the political, legal and administrative forms, such as federalism and the so-called ‘social engineering’ approaches, in accordance with the prevailing national interest. No externally developed idea on these areas can be taken for grant as the best interest of a country like Somalia while United States is, for example, in what is called ‘Crisis of Democracy’ today. In fact, one can recall that Somalia was in confusion of democracy in 1968-69, what later the coup makers of October, 1969, described as excuse for their sacking of the civilian government.

g) Fighting at the **Real Battle**: Fixing the minds: Good ideas don’t work at a place where there is no peace in mind, as they say: “reer nabad ah looma talin waayo” - if there is a peace in the family or community, there is a way to manage everything else. Socio- psychological factor is one of the main drivers in the Somali problem. This is challenging our future.

Why is a selfless struggle for justice and fairness necessary for our survival? The bad leadership, incompetence, and corruption are in fact the sources of violence and psychological instability. These also prevent any change in the situation. Subsequently, there will be no victory in war on violence if it’s not accompanied by a war on these administrative problems.

Selfless services in restoring law and order, and believing the country through public involvement will provide peace in mind. In that involvement, the people will form and run the locally serving institutions. In that formation, they will feel ownership and, in turn, will protect the institutions. In that step, the central government must provide for itself an ability of assisting the locals in the needs beyond their capacity. In that assistance, the people will realize that the government authority is “balo loo baahan yahay”, or as some Americans put it “a necessary evil”, and they will also protect it. In that stage, the minds are fixed.

In short, the process should cover four operational areas:

- a) Capable, volunteering civic movement under character
- b) Generative discussions and decisive conclusions under control
- c) Genuine reconciliation and readjustments under compromise
- d) And Government with background check, and with balanced social and administrative environment under contract.

It is noteworthy to mention that true leaders are usually identified through the first three stages of this process. **It is also noteworthy to emphasize that** a lot of ideas can be presented and a lot of actions can be taken, but there is one thing that does matter: the unity of the people. The secret of a solution and success lies with organizing and utilizing the power of the general public.

This means that all existing sectional entities must be overtaken by a nationalist, credible, and popular movement. It also means that any future reaction from a leadership failure will not take place again at the expense of basic national interests. Let us turn now to why this did not happen so far.

4. Why Do Problems Persist?

The above-mentioned problems, however, are not close to be resolved or even treated due to the following reasons:

4.1. Undoing Approach

An appropriate atmosphere for ending the socio-psychological conditions and hostilities has not hitherto been created. Relevant discussions about the nature of the problems and their solutions have not been conducted. A true reconciliation has not been carried out. Some superficial conferences for making a kind of law or government cannot defuse the effects of 43 years of dictatorship or civil war, with determined injection of sedition by powerful forces.

Some seek to describe the problem as clannism phenomena. But clannism is not a basic problem; it is an effect of poverty, corruption, bad leadership, and the resultant attitudes and aberration. You cannot control an effect within active cause; and you cannot solve the problem by clan-based arbitrary quota in the government. Kinship has been a natural social organization in Somalia before it is misused in the current politics. But clannism is distortion and it exists where the power and law are abused, and the society has no means for change. Consequently, it is used as an offending or defending cry; so as a political aspect, essentially, it is a clash between two communities created by greedy leaders.

If it isn't so, why isn't clannism in the practical social life such as marriage, and individual or group relations? Why isn't it in business? Why isn't it in the political alliances in the normal situations? Many times, localized interests dictate the realistic affiliation in the country.

Further, two more realities are usually ignored. First, the crooked rulers in general use the available divisive factor for power maintaining. The Somalis are divided only by lineage, and that is what is left for their opportunist leaders to use for the tactic of 'divide and rule'. Second, any society that undergoes a long period of dictatorship and subsequent crises has to face a sharp disunity. Look at Iraqis, Syrians, and Egyptians. Within fewer crises, they are fundamentally less united than the Somalis today. Thus, clannism has something to do with leadership behavior.

4.2. Leaders as Liability

Nations fade, fail or disintegrate because of repetitive, fatal mistakes of their leaders. When a series of leaders fail to deal effectively with pressures exerted by aggressive outsiders or corrosive civil war, the existence of their nation is in danger. This means that they don't understand or care about the harbinger of the events. The biggest failure for a nation is a failure in drawing a lesson from the past. This means they don't know or make use the history.

Leadership efficiency is not measured by a leader's total dependence on him/herself or special supporters, but a leader's character, and ability to gain public support and intellectual advice. Without this support or advice a ruler cannot refer to the past and cannot control the present to save the future.

Leadership is building a trust and a good relationship with your people: working hard for meeting their expectations from you; being courteous and considerate to them; inviting them into decision-making; appreciating their contributions; and welcoming their aspirations. If you find yourself fighting or dividing your people, you are a failed leader.

There is little evidence that our leaders of the era in question do care about this, or even the future of the nation apparently because of selfishness or shortsightedness. Otherwise, they would understand that a vulnerable nation cannot survive from strong external pressure without internal unity. But why is everything left with them? Why is there no independent intellectual role?

4.3. Intellectual Failure

A reasonable observer cannot see that there is a reasonable or effective intellectual role in the Somali decision-making. (The only organized intellectual authority is a religious group that is surrounded and weakened by sectarian circumstances).

As political leaders divide and deceive us, so mainly do our media and thought-leaders. They make their employment to propagate baseless, divisive or seditious word; to focus on weaknesses of the nation, and to demote the morale of its people; while they don't mention its unique strengths and don't show the light in the tunnel.

Some of them miss no opportunity to join violent or corrupt circles; while others even curse the nation and dig into molesting its identity and mutating its history. A great deal of intellectual dishonesty can be detected. I know these are serious allegations, but one cannot help do otherwise. At best, some may prefer to hibernate. But, is that an option?

The availability of an organized intellectual role and the intellectual assistance required by the rulers are interdependent conditions. If that has not been the case so far, the present thinkers and leaders need to create those conditions together. But, that again needs a great heart.

4.4. Basics, Values Ignored

The essence of the Somali culture is values and ethics, yet Somalis suffer from lack of exercising these basics of life. The values or character were not an issue in the Somali politics for about 4 decades. But it's commonly known that the individuals, families, firms, and nations who accept low values eventually fail and don't recover if they don't change. We have mentioned here some basics and values as fundamentals of ending the problem. Let us recapitulate a few of them to show how a sharp choice between exercising and ignoring them does really matter.

To start with, consider the education. Education is a formal and informal never-ending process of learning ideas, principles, values, and skills and applying them in life and in leadership. But education loses its meaning if it is assumed to mean only earning a sort of certificate or degree for privileges.

By the same token, courage is taking an action or making a decision at a right time and proper way in a difficult situation, but this word also loses its meaning if it does not include acknowledging failures and shortcomings, and taking necessary action such as expressing regret or stepping down.

Similarly, integrity is having the courage to do what is right; but what about having a notorious corrupt person, culprit, or criminal as a leader; or someone who cannot be fair when it comes to claims against his or her preferred community or leader.

Determination also means having willpower and working toward your goals no matter what. But it has been observed that the incentives that motivate many Somalis, who claim they are working for the national cause, are actually personal interests or political preferences.

Now, the answer for our question ‘why cannot Somalia be fixed’ lies here. Somalia will be fixed when we control our bad attitudes and develop our good attitudes, all components of attitudes: our thinking (cognitive), our feelings (emotive), and our actions (behavioral).

A ruler or a citizen who cannot control the problem in his character cannot conceive the danger for his country. And a situation of a society does not change if the behavior of its leadership is not changed.

4.5. Grievance vs. Greed

There are common or diverse enduring concerns among the communities, which if not resolved, reconciliation cannot be realized. These concerns or complains are generally about:

- Marginalization, under-represented, inequality in socioeconomic opportunities.
- Inability to honor the political agreements, intrusion and land grabbing, taking public and private properties by force, adopting a gang life while avoiding a governmental life.
- Continuation of corruption, power manipulation, and warlordism.
- Controversy on the constitution; and the clash between two painful experiences: from extremely overreaching state to critically fallen state.

PERCEPTION is also a source of grievance. Even some powerful communities complain that they are victims of chronic feelings which has resulted endless war on them and become the cornerstone of the conflict. These are multiple grievances within greed which needs to be treated simultaneously. But there is more.

4.6. Unbalanced environment for a national government

This is an issue of grievance, but it should be singled out for it has categorically a leading nature in the problem. There have been great concerns over putting the leading entity in a place convenient for its success because the supposed centers were seen as socially unbalanced by some. For fragile entities, laws and regulations cannot provide check and balance if they are not supported by satisfying the social equilibrium. A weak government cannot be nurtured in a controversial situation simply because there is no public support and political legitimacy without sociopolitical and geo-administrative settlement.

As a sign of imbalance or power manipulation, it has been asserted, the parliament, the cabinet, the judiciary system, the security forces, government employment procedures; as well as some assistances to it or to NGOs, still remain in a questionable status or non-neutral operating situation.

Thus, the Somali government needs a geographical environment in which socio-political stability and balance are satisfied. As for other grievances, without **renationalization** of the government seat, true reconciliation is not tenable and credible national government is not applicable.

And not only that, but initial efforts for restoring the social integration and interaction in key places such as Muqdisho, Gaalkacyo and Kismaayo followed by Baladweyn, Marka, and Baydhabo will determine the reconciliation, and success of the government and the proposed movement.

4.7. It is We, Our Self, and Not Others

It is us who are destined to deal with the problems. Imaginary leaders are not coming to solve them. Outsiders will neither do it. It doesn't make sense that we divide ourselves and expect from others to unite us; become a big liability to Somalia and think others will be a great asset for it; destroy the country and want others to build it; we describe the intervention process as "Dhurwaa riyo la raaciyay - a hyena looking after goats", but we don't come up with a useful alternative.

Yet, we are not sure who is really a friend. Friendship occurs between two sides that are on equal terms. History shows that the Somalis may not have many or helpful friends, but may have a lot of powerful enemies. They don't have many choices either: to save themselves together or to serve the purpose of their enemies. The choice between the two will dictate their destiny individually and as a nation.

5. Conclusion: No Gain without Pain

Our condition begs a response. We have to respond for a change. On the response, there will be great need of resources for the struggle; that requires a sacrifice. There will be a great deal of challenge from domestic and foreign spoilers; that requires a unity. And there will be tremendous discouragements and distractions from our own situation; and that needs character.

The problems persist because we don't practice these principles. We have inherited basics and prerequisites for changing our condition. But a change will not take place until we prioritize collective participation of achieving that goal at the expense of our own personal preferences. Understandably, a formation of an effective civic movement is not an easy job by the Somali situation, but it is not difficult within amount of efforts and commitment by a group of people.

Although the Somalis have been wronged by their leaders for a long time, and their energy and intelligence wasted for meaningless ends, they are known as capable and courageous people. It is time to be re-awakened for recovering the national potential, pride, and dignity.

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