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CONNECTION WITH  
THE UPCOMING  
ELECTIONS IN  
SOMALIA

## TOPIC:

- The commotion surrounding Somalia's transition



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Deputy Executive Director: Amb. Kasahun Dender  
Senior Adviser: Amb. Teferra Shiawl Kidanekal  
Senior Researcher: Dr. Belete Belachew Yihun  
Editor-in-chief: Fiona Ashley McKinnon

Centre for Dialogue, Research and Cooperation  
Ethio-China Friendship Avenue  
Medina Tower 5th floor  
Tel: +251 11 470 370/73  
Fax: +251 11 470 0359  
Email: [info@cdrcethiopia.org](mailto:info@cdrcethiopia.org)  
<http://www.cdrcethiopia.org>

## **The commotion surrounding Somalia's transition**

Somalia's presidential election, previously scheduled for December 2016, was postponed by a month and is now expected to take place in late January 2017. The Somali people, Regional States and the international community eagerly follow proceedings in Somalia and are optimistic about the successful completion of the election process. A smooth transition, marking an end to the continuous dismantling of institutions in the country, is what is hoped for. On the other hand, there are accusations that the process has been marred by corruption and unnecessary intervention from the National Leadership Forum (NLF), which has triggered a reaction from the international community.

The international community based in Mogadishu issued a statement in December 2016 underscoring "that the integrity of the 2016 electoral process hangs in the balance. More delays and a failure to hold accountable those parties who have committed serious abuses and malpractices will compromise the international community's ability and willingness to engage with Somalia's next federal government."

In the meantime, there is a consensus among all stakeholders that these unfortunate delays in the elections should not be allowed to overshadow

Somalia's tremendous progress in security and political spheres or to compromise Somalia's struggle to deal with the terrorist group Al-Shabaab and its affiliates. In this regard, the inauguration of the Federal Parliament is a leap in the right direction and a great step forward in the realization of the much anticipated smooth transition of power.

Of course, the composition of the Parliament and the personalities of those running for its leadership hint at the challenging times ahead in Somali politics. The Parliament is mainly composed of young politicians associated with the diaspora, Damul Jadiid (New Blood) affiliated Ministers who see challenges to their future reappointment, and sympathizers of Al-Shabaab and other groups. Shifting alliances and counter-alliances between secularists and religiously motivated MPs, rich MPs and financially insecure ones, between religious groups (Salafists, Sufists and Wahabists, "reformists Islah and Damul Jadiid" and the die-hard Al-Itisam) and others are expected to inform its proceedings in the immediate future.

It is rumored that elected MPs have used their financial clout, in the process investing a huge amount of money, ranging from a minimum of \$20,000 to more than a million dollars, based on the extent of competition they have

encountered in their respective constituencies. In a way, this is indicative of how the upcoming Presidential election and subsequent leadership-level competition in the upcoming administration are going to be held. In this vein, one cannot help but speculate about the cost of a single parliamentary vote in this upcoming presidential election and related appointments to government offices.

The upcoming presidential election, compared to previous elections and/or selections in Mbagathi (2004), Djibouti (2008) and Mogadishu (2012), appears to be inclusive in terms of participation and decentralization. More significantly, the current bi-cameral parliamentary arrangement, with Upper and Lower Houses having 54 and 275 members respectively, is expected to facilitate the task of ensuring checks and balances between the legislative and executive branches of Somalia's government. Moreover, members of both Houses, jointly constituting 329 representatives, would elect the President.

What is critical to consider at this stage is the way the Upper and Lower House representatives are selected. A nation-wide process now replaces the previous arrangement whereby 135 elders and clan leaders would gather in Mogadishu to endorse incumbent parliamentarians or elect new ones. Now 14,500 clan elders and clan leaders take the lead.

They have elected their representatives in the two houses. These local-level selections were to be conducted such that on average 51 elders and leaders of a respective clan endorse a representative, thereby ensuring an electoral process that is clearly competitive and very much participatory, and of course expensive for the candidates.

As indicated earlier, a huge amount of money has been circulating as candidates are readily spending fortunes to sway election results in their favor. Such a trend is expected to obstruct the smooth functioning of the Parliament, for elected MPs' attention may be focused on political maneuvering aimed at income generation, as has previously been witnessed in the pursuits of Parliament members. Presidential candidates have also injected money with a plan to get 'their candidates' nominated from respective clans in order to bolster their attempts to attain the Presidency.

Given these politically coated pecuniary transactions, the presidential election, the endorsement of the executive and the subsequent activities of the government are at risk of large-scale external intervention and manipulation. MPs that come to the House may be indebted to their sponsors and they will be obliged to return the favors. In this regard, one can expect an array of

resolutions and legislative actions, including impeachment and vote-of-confidence motions, which in turn will force the executive branch of Somalia's government to spend more money by way of appeasing those determined to obtain financial benefits through gridlock.

Moreover, a number of politicians old and new are competing for the Presidential position – if not to win, at a minimum aiming to get a piece of the power and wealth sharing arrangement. Some are very active in making deals and creating alliances, while others focus more on the task of rallying the opponents of the incumbent. Since these activities all require a huge amount of financial investment, it would not be naïve to expect a very costly Presidential election in Somalia.

In the meantime, a Caretaker Committee will oversee the upcoming election process, with three clearly stated mandates: the creation of an election commission; formulation of the election modalities; and the determination of election dates in collaboration with the new legislative body. This represents clear evidence of how much more decentralized and hence legitimate the process is, as well as participatory and inclusive compared to all of the other elections that Somalia has held since 2000.

Equally critical is the full establishment of the Regional States. The Federal Constitution provides that two or more regions can come together to establish a Regional State. Based on the Provisional Federal Constitution of Somalia adopted on 1 August 2012, each Regional State has a charter, executive branch and a regional parliament.

Nonetheless, the sustenance of these regional administrative units will not be without challenges, for the task of creating symmetry at local and national levels has yet to be refined. These challenges, *inter alia*, include: finalizing the delineation of power between the Federal Government and the Regional States with respect to security arrangements and the command and control of the security forces; dichotomization of resource sharing and control; and possible challenges in terms of border delineation of Regional States that were created before the constitutional arrangement, such as the issues between Puntland and Somaliland, Puntland and Galmudug, and that of Benadir, which hosts the capital and the surrounding states that share borders with it.

Most critical here is the way the Federal Government and the Regional States work together to address these challenges. The Boundary Commission, though established by the Federal Government, still requires revitalization

and a major boost to enable it to fulfill its mandate. Likewise, stakeholders and partners should step up their commitment in providing all necessary support to both the Federal Government and the Regional States, to enhance cooperation and harmony.

*Al-Shabaab's shifting modus operandi – virtual governance*

In recent months various views regarding the current status and capabilities of Al-Shabaab have been expressed. Some sources indicate that visible progress has been achieved with respect to containing Al-Shabaab and the resultant curtailment of the terrorist group's destabilization role. Apparently the group's grip on territories it once controlled and administered has diminished. When evaluated from the point of view of conventional rules of engagement, a few critical issues would attest to Al-Shabaab's visible decline: waning popular support; weakening command and control of its forces; decreasing income levels from ports (as it has progressively lost its grip on all ports, including almost all the natural ports), charcoal trade and the collection of zakat contributions, as people are resisting and refusing to make those payments through Al-Shabaab. In addition, the targeted attacks launched by the US Special Forces have successfully weakened the leadership and their mobility capacity.

Moreover, localized security forces in the South West and Jubaland Regional States have effectively managed to overrun the territories that Al-Shabaab has been controlling, reducing the latter's capacity to maneuver on the ground. Hence, the capacity of Al-Shabaab to launch conventional attacks like that carried out against Kenyan forces at El-Adde, Ugandan forces at AMISOM base in Mogadishu, and Burundian forces in Mogadishu and Leego, or even the attack it unsuccessfully tried to launch against Ethiopian forces in Halgan, appears significantly contained. Proponents of these views also argue that Al-Shabaab obviously seems to have reached a point from which it cannot even conduct ambushes on convoys, except through Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and landmines.

But some other observers caution that what are seen, as conventional signs of victory should not overshadow the realities of Al-Shabaab's *modus operandi* on the ground. Al-Shabaab's territorial loss and the factual change of its methods should not be construed as evidence of the total demise of the extremist group. Only recently, Al-Shabaab demonstrated its capabilities with daring attacks launched in sectors I and V against the AMISOM forces, and against the main airport in the first week of the New Year.

There is a strong, well-informed opinion that Al-Shabaab has all the necessary capacity to perpetuate its activities as a criminal and terrorist syndicate. Al-Shabaab may have desisted from launching grand operations in a conventional manner. But the terrorist group for sure is re-strategizing and designing ways to sustain its victories. The likes of Al-Shabaab cannot afford to entertain setbacks such as the one it faced in Halgan and, therefore, the leadership has to reevaluate its strategies. That is why the terrorist group will definitely continue to be a force to reckon with and a major threat to Somalia's peace and stability. Its adaptability to realities on the ground, as demonstrated by the group's resurgence amidst the recent redeployment of Ethiopian forces from various parts of Somalia, leaves much to be done if the group is to be defeated for good.

In fact, Al-Shabaab has reverted to its original form as a terrorist and criminal syndicate with the capability to govern territories in Somalia virtually and to breed havoc in the sub-region. Hence, there should be no illusion that Al-Shabaab has ceased to be the most significant threat to peace and stability in Somalia and the entire region for years to come. Fear, blackmail and terror are the instruments through

which Al-Shabaab rules; it is critical to understand this.

Al-Shabaab continues to operate unconventionally, adjudicating criminal activities virtually as it sees fit in areas that it has no territorial control over. Irrespective of the fact that Al-Shabaab has lost those territories and the infrastructure that provided it direct resource collection capacities, there is no guarantee that the same infrastructure now controlled by the Federal Government or Regional State administrations or other businesses has stopped leaking resources to Al-Shabaab. Since the group uses devastating methods of punishment against defectors and those who refuse to pay "Al-Shabaab's taxes," carrying out destruction of property and targeted killings, the issue requires serious scrutiny to understand the dynamism of the group and its underground network in this regard.

Hence, given the realities on the ground, Al-Shabaab appears to recognize the futility of physically controlling territories; controlling territories and claiming those areas effectively has only made its forces and leaders easy targets. Actually the leadership was naïve in aiming to control and govern territories in Somalia, following in the footsteps of its immediate predecessor, the Islamic

Courts Union (ICU), which was defeated for doing just that.

With this realization, it is clear that Al-Shabaab has gone back to its roots as an underground terrorist group. And with the existing realities in Somalia, in operating from clandestine positions Al-Shabaab appears to have successfully created mechanisms for securing resources, and it has all the capacities necessary to continue its asymmetric war against the SFG forces as well as AMISOM. In this context, the fight with Al-Shabaab has entered a new phase, where the intelligence apparatuses of involved parties play a key role. Hence the rules of engagement primarily rely on the intelligence apparatus's capacity to decipher and preempt the network, governance and resource mobilization efforts of the terrorist group.

Moreover, Al-Shabaab's capacity to recruit and train enough forces is intact. The group's leadership is still organized. One can ascertain that Al-Shabaab fighters who joined the group at a young age, when they were between 15 and 20 years old in 2006 and 2007, are now aged 25 or more. This means that the group can quickly replace its leaders whenever the leadership is removed through targeted attacks or on the battlefield. Furthermore, Al-Shabaab continues to be multinational, with members from all over the region and the world. And it still retains the ability

to systematically unleash fear in Somali society.

Conducted as a *de facto* administrative body running in parallel with weak state structures, Al-Shabaab's coercive power actually increased significantly after losing territory, with the potential to generate finances through virtual adjudication and running proxy administrations. In addition, Al-Shabaab's strong propaganda machinery still operates freely in the conventional and social media networks. So the terrorist group is now conveniently determining proceedings virtually, from its hideouts in inaccessible areas, with relative safety for its leaders and foot soldiers.

That is why containing and eradicating Al-Shabaab, irrespective of the group's resilience and capacity to adapt, requires a synchronized effort from all stakeholders. One approach would be to track and stem the group's financial resources and channels of money transfer, thereby depriving the terrorist group of the primary weapon that has helped it survive for so long. Planning a social movement, which resists Al-Shabaab's *modus operandi* throughout the entire society is also essential.

In parallel, concerted military operations involving endogenously organized regional forces of the states, the armed forces of SFG and AMISOM should be

launched with the objective of battering Al-Shabaab within the little physical space it currently controls. These missions should be comprehensive, decisive and final. The end result should reassure Somali society that Al-Shabaab will not be a threat anymore, and there will be no chance of its resurrection.

Of course, such operations are bound to face challenges. Foremost is the lack of understanding among the international community, which must recognize the shifting *modus operandi* of Al-Shabaab and design proper mechanisms to tackle the challenge. The international community is preoccupied with criticizing the Government and the way the internal clan-balanced selection processes are conducted. The international community considers and has put constraints on Somalia, assessing it as a normal situation. But by all measures, the situation in Somalia cannot be considered 'normal' and therefore should not be evaluated on the basis of normal parameters. Another challenge is the lack of initiative on the part of Somali forces and the visible scarcity of much needed resources.

An additional challenge is Burundi's recent declaration that it will withdraw its contingents from Somalia because the EU has delayed payment for its 5,432 soldiers in AMISOM for several months due to differences with Bujumbura over the new mechanism of

payment. The EU now wants the \$1,028 for each soldier per month to be paid directly to the beneficiaries and not through the Burundi Government.

### Ethiopia's military engagement in Somalia

Ethiopia, challenged by Al-Shabaab and other terrorist groups, continues to engage in Somalia both politically and militarily. Based on the gravity of the threat emanating from Somalia, Ethiopia often alternates the level and extent of its military engagement. Ethiopian forces officially joined the African Union peacekeeping mission in Somalia on January 22, 2014, as approved by UN Security Council Resolution 2124, which authorized an additional force of more than 4,000 troops to bring the total number of AMISOM peacekeepers in Somalia to 22,126.

Apart from its role in AMISOM, Ethiopia deploys a sizeable force of its own based on a bilateral arrangement with the Somalia Federal Government. This force might change its deployments and readjust on the basis of the level of threat against Ethiopia and SFG's institutions. But Ethiopia's redeployment of its forces has recently raised some concerns among members of the international community. Those engaged in Somalia representing the international community expect some sort of consultation on the movement,

redeployment and purpose of Ethiopian forces, while the Government of Ethiopia is of the view that its engagements in Somalia operate exclusively on the basis of a bilateral understanding with the SFG.

If consultations are required, they should be related specifically to Ethiopia's forces belonging to AMISOM. Obviously, a communication gap has developed between the stakeholders, and bridging this gap would facilitate the speedy resolution of the crisis in Somalia. Disregarding the question of moral high ground, the two parties could turn this into a win-win situation through engagement.

Ethiopia obviously wants the support and understanding of the international community, and actually it is Ethiopian troops that bear the brunt of the burden in facing the threat of direct confrontation with extremist groups in Somalia—and through the country's own resources. Equally, the international community must recognize the critical role Ethiopia plays in the process of guaranteeing peace and security in Somalia, and, therefore, should engage its government practically. Ethiopia may have faced internal challenges recently; however, that does not mean that Ethiopia cannot fulfill its international commitments as before. The government is addressing the internal challenges and is more than ready to

also maintain its role in regional peace and security.

Hence, partners need to take these developments into account, engage with Addis Ababa, and find a comprehensive solution to the current disparities, in the best interest of Somalia and the sub-region. There is also a need for all stakeholders – Somalis, as well as the regional and international community – to come together to chart the way forward so that the achievements in Somalia will not unravel.

*Ensuring continuity in Somalia: Critical for sustainable peace*

In the meantime, the competition for the post of the Presidency has begun in earnest. Somali politicians, old and new, are competing for the high post; Somalia's partners and neighbors near and far are also trying to mobilize support for "their" presumed candidates. Some are acting with a view to supporting the incumbent based on the conviction that continuity will crystallize the process of institution building and governance, and hence are exerting great effort to make deals that are acceptable to sustain the incumbent. Such an approach hinges on experience in Somalia, where change in leadership often entails a complete destruction of existing structures and systems, leading towards a perennial dissolution of

government institutions and loss of institutional memory.

Past experience shows that those officials replaced by new ones to run government offices will take their files and all government related documents, as well as equipment including vehicles and other items. Incoming officials in turn bring their own bureaucracy, destroying what has been built. This has not helped Somalia's effort to create sustainable institutions of governance. In this regard electing the incumbent would guarantee the continuation of the existing institutional and structural arrangements. But this vicious cycle needs to change, of course, so that all Somali politicians adhere to widely accepted principles and work towards the greater good of their country.

As a counter-argument, others in the region promote a change in the *status quo*, whereby the incumbent President loses the election and a candidate of their bidding wins. They claim that the President is religiously inclined and works in cahoots with Damul Jadiid. However the President has said clearly and publicly that he is working for the people of Somalia and is not a stooge for anyone else.

But those who oppose the President appear to advocate for the current Prime Minister assuming the Presidency. Some sources indicate that the

incumbent Prime Minister has already assured the Kenyan government of a favorable settlement of the offshore territorial dispute between Somalia and Kenya in return for the latter's support in the Presidential election. Yet there is no guarantee that the Prime Minister will deliver on his promises. Previous similar politically motivated agreements signed between the Federal Government of Somalia and Kenya only recently backfired on the administration in Mogadishu. It would be vain also to assume that the Somalia Federal Parliament will readily endorse such a sensitive issue involving any handing over of Somalia's offshore rights to Kenya. Obviously, such a personally motivated arrangement brings more complications to election-related proceedings than may be evident on the surface.

It is notable that previous commitments between Kenya and an active government from the Middle East demanded that the current President vacate the post to the incumbent Prime Minister. Money obviously changed hands in this process as well. Moreover, a number of oil companies that have a stake in the offshore oil exploration in the areas where Kenya and Somalia have disputes are also meddling in the campaign. Hence, one can clearly see the web of conflicting interests already

tampering with the presidential election in Somalia.

*Clan perception and power sharing: A matter that should be taken seriously*

More significant here is an understanding of the underlying clan related subtleties so critically informing political processes in Somalia. The 4.5 formula that the Somalis designed and implemented to ensure fair representation to all Somali clans, small and large, following the 2004 IGAD led peace process in Kenya provides a framework for the four major clans' equal representation with the remaining 0.5 (half of a share) for the minority groups.

Even if some Somali politicians and a few members of the international community have criticized the arrangement, this formula is probably the only one that will retain a semblance of fairness, legitimacy and acceptability in the eyes of the Somali communities. Utilizing even this framework requires some convincing, however, to bring all Somali leaders to the fold, so that they endorse the current arrangement.

Somali people have developed wisdom and a sense of justice, a sagacity that can be skillfully employed in politics as well. In this regard, any attempt by an outsider to mold Somalia's election process in an alien culture that does not

accommodate local values would be an exercise in futility; such efforts anticipate more than Somalia can offer. If the arrangements introduced at the national level thus far are applied at the Regional State level, then Somalia will register tremendous success in its efforts at democratization and overall transformation of the country, with positive consequences for developments in the sub-region.

The current administrative arrangement at local levels expeditiously creates a situation whereby every major clan has at least one Regional State, in the process creating a sense of equity among the major clans. Representation at the federal level is also expected to follow this tacit arrangement. It would be difficult to change this reality. For example, it appears that all along the Darood and the Hawiye clans have agreed that a representative from the Digil and Merfile clan will assume the post of Speaker of the Federal Parliament. The reelection of the incumbent Speaker of the Parliament, Professor Mohamed Osman Jawari, should be understood within this context. Moreover, the contests and the final outcomes related to the first and second Deputy Speakers' positions are worth considering as well. The Somalis have ensured fair representation accommodative of clan-based interests in those elections. In the 4.5 power-

sharing arrangement the post for the Deputy Speaker is slotted for the minorities, for which Farah Sheikh Abdiqadir, one of the most powerful Somali politicians, has competed with his main rival Abdiweli Sheikh Ibrahim (Mudey) in two election rounds and graciously conceded defeat. What brought this specific contest for the position of Deputy Speaker to the spotlight was the apparent friction between Farah Sheikh Abdiqadir and President Hassan, which presented the strong possibility that the former would block the re-election of the latter to the post of the Presidency. But now that Farah has lost, the President will be breathing a big sigh of relief. This development significantly increases the prospect of his re-election.

At the same time, four contenders were running for the post of the second Deputy Speaker, members from the Dir clan exclusively dominating the line-up. After two rounds, Hon. Mahad Abdalla Awad was declared the winner, with a total of 174 votes compared to his main rival, Abdiqadir Sheikh Ali Baghdadi, who only scored 84.

Once again, these events ascertain Somali politicians' acceptance of and adherence to the 4.5 formula, which was crafted during the Mbagathi Conference that established the TFG in 2004. Accordingly, positions are apportioned such that a representative

from the Digil and Merifle clan assumes the position Speaker of the House, another one from the Minorities assumes the First Deputy Speaker and a representative of the Dir clan takes the post of second Deputy Speaker. Attempts to contravene this arrangement have failed thus far, indicating the viability of the system. Now the agenda for the new Parliament is to fix a timeline for the Presidential election, which is expected to be held towards the end of this month.

The posts of the President and the Prime Minister are to be shared between the Hawiye and the Darood clans, respectively, and this then allows the Dir/Issaq to take the Deputy Prime Minister position. And so it goes. This tacit understanding will continue to inform the power-sharing arrangement down to the lowest appointed echelon of the government bureaucracy. Every stakeholder involved in Somalia's election procedures needs to understand this delicate arrangement of clan representations. Somalis at the leadership level and the incumbents should be allowed to negotiate a framework that will sustain the delicate balance.

Any effort to undermine this arrangement at the top of the pyramid would have serious security implications, with the potential to disrupt the stability of Somalia, with further implications for

the entire sub-region. One must also consider the political geography of the country, with its possible implications for the power-sharing arrangement. The Hawiye, for instance, who inhabit the areas around Mogadishu, harbor resentment based on the feeling that they have been subjugated by the Daroods (especially the Marehan, Ogaden and Dulbahante trio during the oppressive regime of Gen. Siad Barre) and believe now that it is their turn to govern.

Based on historic and current realities, allowing the Hawiye to keep the Presidency might be a wise move. Considering the growing feeling of Abgal leadership fatigue within Somalia, giving the chance to a non-Hawiye might appear to solve a set of problems. But this might also backfire. It is important to understand the feeling in Mogadishu that non-Hawiye Somali politicians are guests. It appears increasingly certain that taking the Presidency away from the Hawiye, and allowing another clan to assume the post, especially the Majertain, could allow groups such as Al-Shabaab to make Mogadishu a playground, making government operations from the capital nigh impossible. This in turn would be a major setback for governance and security, derailing the achievements so painstakingly realized in Somalia in the past decade.

Given the current reality in Somalia, it appears practically impossible for a Darood in Mogadishu to offer leadership, particularly to the security institutions constituted of endogenous clans and sub-clans engaged in the fight against Al-Shabaab. If the election produces this result, the likes of Al-Shabaab will have a field day in Mogadishu and the surrounding areas. Such underlying contexts inform the need to tread cautiously while handling the complicated clan-based election politics in Somalia.

Countries of the region must understand the consequences of their policies very well and consider the implications for Somalia and the entire region, rather than looking at the policies from their own perspectives alone. Those who oppose the President appear to opt for the current Prime Minister assuming the Presidency. Some sources indicate that the incumbent Prime Minister has already entered into a *quid pro quo* arrangement, which involves Somali concessions on some national matters in exchange for support for his presidential ambitions. There is no guarantee that the Prime Minister will deliver on his promises.

In the same vein, there appear to have been attempts, with those within the region working in cahoots with parties outside the region, to persuade the incumbent president not to seek

reelection. Money has obviously changed hands here too. Moreover, a number of oil companies that have a stake in the offshore oil exploration in the areas where Kenya and Somalia have disputes are also meddling in the campaign. Hence, one can clearly see the web of conflicting interests already tampering with the presidential election. But the dispute between Kenya and Somalia will only be resolved through bilateral dialogue or through an internationally arbitrated judicial arrangement rather than individual *quid pro quo* arrangements.

Conscious of the looming election related challenges in Somalia; an effort was made recently to create an understanding between the incumbent President and the Prime Minister. The initiative hinges on the grand objective of involving both the President and the Prime Minister in working together towards a common goal: campaigning together to win the upcoming elections and ensure continuity in building institutions and peace in Somalia.

Unfortunately, according to information from credible sources, Prime Minister Shermarkey insisted on campaigning alone to try his luck in a run for the Presidency in spite of all the challenges he faces in the process. Whatever the candidates do, though, the initiative to impress on them the greater good of working towards the wellbeing of the

people and state of Somalia, as well as the entire sub-region, remains commendable.

A similar effort was made to convince the President of South West Regional State to work with the incumbent, with the promise of an acceptable power-sharing arrangement for leaders and clan representations. Unfortunately, the latter declined the offer. Now, given the election of Professor Jawari as the Speaker in an overwhelming vote, the President of South West has squandered an opportunity to act as a presumptive 'kingmaker' in Somalia's politics.

It is in this context that those involved, particularly neighboring states, are best advised to desist from sticking their necks out in the interest of immediate personal gain, and should combine their collective efforts to ensure the election's expeditious conclusion.

#### *The way forward*

Based on the assessment above, all interested parties have to seriously contemplate the best way forward in resolving the multifaceted challenges Somalia is currently facing. Foremost on the agenda should be the creation of a common understanding and consensus among all stakeholders regarding developments in the country. Though this may be difficult, it needs immediate attention and commitment if Somalia is

to progress in the right direction. Secondly it is urgent to prioritize the challenges confronting Somalia, among them the critical issue of Al-Shabaab, which can make or break Somalia as the terrorist group poses a threat to the process of state building. The question is how best to deal with it. If the international community manages to determine a common stance, then creating mechanisms to deal with the terrorist group will be relatively easy. In the immediate aftermath of the demise of Al-Shabaab, it would also be relatively easy to think of accountability, democratization and good governance in Somalia.

Some in the international community are deliberating on Somalia's prospects in 2020 while giving little attention to the question of how Somalis should be supported to move forward at this moment. If Somalia is to advance, with the prospect of peace and stability in the immediate future, then all have to concentrate on the present and expeditiously perform their duties. First and foremost should be the task of capacitating the Regional States, the SFG and their security institutions to enable them to deal with Al-Shabaab. But the emphasis should be placed on the Regional States so that clan protection and guarantee mechanisms are used in full.

It should be known that Al-Shabaab's military engagements defy clan deterrence mechanisms, as the terrorist group's insurgents cover themselves to escape identification. But when SFG forces kill them in a military engagement, a clan insurance mechanism is implemented, discouraging those with the SFG from killing Al-Shabaab's fighters. This is critical. This is why local-level security organization can secure full clan and sub-clan backing.

Ensuring peace and stability in this regard will help the reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. Now is the time to act, and act with a sense of commitment and farsightedness, to decisively deal with terrorism in Somalia.

There are clear indications in Somalia that promise a smooth transition with a relatively improved consensus among clan and political leaders. This hinges on the sense of responsibility and obligation of all stakeholders in Somalia, who must look beyond their immediate interests to foster common ground with the sole intent of helping Somalia transform. This time around Somalis should be more serious about not squandering the opportunity the election provides for political transformation in their country. Somali leaders who have held the people of Somalia hostage through denying the country to move forward from war and destruction

towards peace, development and economic prosperity, should also review their role. More importantly, there is an urgent need to put the national interest before anything else, with a far greater vision for peaceful Somalia. Now is the time to demonstrate to the world that Somalis, individually and as communities, possess more wisdom in regard to ascertaining fair representation. This will ensure that the international community – which has joined Somalia's politics as an external 'tribe' and often endeavors to prescribe 'solutions' and to recreate Somalia in its image – will accord the Somali people the benefit of the doubt in sorting out their problems for themselves.

The upcoming Presidential election offers a significant opportunity to bring a semblance of political tranquility to Somalia, and all stakeholders, Somalis as well as the international community, should capitalize on it. IGAD member states, more than anyone else, have long exerted a concerted effort to bring peace and stability to Somalia. Their dedication to the cause is now bearing fruit, with the prospect of a peaceful and all-inclusive Presidential election and the peaceful transfer of power in Somalia, in spite of the fact that the electoral process is not yet based on popular participation and the customary 'one-person-one-vote' principle. A lot remains to be done; and IGAD states,

particularly immediate neighbors who continue to bear the brunt of Somalia's troubles, cannot afford to lower their guard. In fact, their engagement in Somalia needs to increase manifold. Peace and stability in Somalia will certainly augment the potential for region-wide cooperation in political and economic realms. But regional states cannot afford to take the recent changes in Somalia for granted and stay disengaged. They must help to ensure the way forward in order to move Somalia in the right direction. In fact, they need to double their efforts in Somalia and the sub-region, where intra- and inter-state crises have so long been the Achilles heel. Conflicts must be resolved in a sustainable manner. If not, this will come back to haunt IGAD's member states and surely frustrate the immense potential for cooperation and prosperity in the sub-region. None can afford this. Moreover regional engagement will also encourage Somalis, the main stakeholders, to exert all of their efforts towards building sustainable peace and stability. This is why it should be clear that success depends on the people of Somalia first, the regional states and the wider international community later. All must create a united front to capitalize on the positive developments in Somalia and facilitate the process of democratization and transformation that for so long has eluded the country.