

Ways and Means of Restoration of the Failed State of Somalia

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There is no question now that the international community's huge efforts to help Somalia in the state-building project are failing, and there is an urgent need to change track to save the country from further deterioration in peace and stability and to avoid the outbreak of absolute anarchy where terrorist groups could take over the entire country. Changing track means taking a critical stance on the past mistakes made by local actors. This would pave the way for a new understanding of the basic problems, and that approach would open the path to finding ways and means of restoring the failed state in Mogadishu since 1991.

The first step to restoring the Somali state, which ceased to exist in 1991, is preconditioned on the rise of an enlightened Somali political class with a high level of sophistication and audacity, allowing them to visualize the need for an inclusive, fair, and democratic Somali state owned by all concerned clans and minority groups. The idea of building a viable state requires a deep conviction in justice and democracy (fair sharing of power and resources), and a scientifically well-founded vision on how to achieve it is equally required. This task necessitates the presence of a patriotic political agenda that can attract enough people to create societal change.

Furthermore, building a viable Somali state in the current historical circumstances requires a new project far different from the ideological and political legacies and vestiges of the 1950s and 1960s. At that time, the Somali people were engaged in the struggle for political freedom and the unity of the five Somali parts. The political leadership of Somalia during that historical phase was predominantly from ordinary people, who rarely made appropriate interpretations of the realities around them. From these realities, the two slogans—"Freedom and Unity" of the five Somalis—seemed reasonable and rational. However, the question is whether today's local, regional, and global realities align with the same situation. The answer, according to historical and civilizational records, remains a resounding no.

As human civilization has been defined as a transition from legendary ideas to rationality, "Somali Nationalism" as a dynamic and relative reality is subject to change and alteration from simple to complex. In the 1950s and 1960s, the urgent demands of Somalis were to attain political independence and the unity of the five Somali regions. After thirty years of military dictatorship, the issues of democracy, justice, and equality have become top priorities for Somalis. After 1991, the slogans of "Independence and Unity" lost their appeal and allure. This means that the "Greater Somalia" slogan is no longer a motive for positive change. Therefore, the reconstitution of the Somali state, based on the current realities in Mogadishu and Hargeisa, requires new principles and approaches.

Restoration of the Failed State: Democratic Somalia vs. Greater Somalia

The Somali failed state in Mogadishu, which withered away in 1991, could be restored on the basis of a new vision different from both Somali 'Irredentism' and 'Political Islamic' ideologies.

This means that the political thinking that was the root cause of the state failure in Mogadishu must be discarded and condemned as evil. Subsequently, the need for an alternative political doctrine that guides the efforts toward building a new, just, and democratic society becomes indispensable. Once such an alternative idea is attained, the prerequisite for constructing a better Somali state would be conceivable, but it must be internally motivated and inspired. Therefore, holding a national reconciliation conference in Mogadishu would be inevitable in the effort to build a new type of Somali state. This would constitute a preliminary phase toward a general consultative national conference for state formation.

The fundamental aims and objectives of such a conference must be to put an end to all clan conflicts in Somalia. Only through conflict resolution and management can an environment favorable for organizing an inclusive community consultative conference for all inhabitants be imaginable. The basis of participation must be proportional according to the numbers of each of the four main communities—Hawiye, Darood, Digil-Mirifle, and Dir (of the South)—as this would be the only way to reach consensus. This conference would decide on the establishment of the Somali state, define the form of the state, and determine the type of participation. Without consensus and inclusiveness, there is no possibility for state-building, particularly because Somali clans do not accept the abstract notion of “majority rule.” However, that is the irony where all efforts to build a state in Somalia have been failing.

State Building in Somaliland: Feats and Failures

Feats and failures have been practically witnessed in the state-building endeavors in Somaliland. Right after the collapse of the military regime in 1991, the state-building process in Somaliland began based on reconciliation conferences, at a time when a lack of trust among different clans in Somaliland was prevalent, and civil war was widespread due to the “divide-and-rule” policy brutally practiced by the military dictatorship. These conferences were built on consensus, bottom-up approaches, and internally driven fundraising efforts, with the concerted participation of both modern and traditional actors. All of these efforts were directed toward building a hybrid political and security governance. Moreover, there has not been a single foreign military presence nor a noteworthy amount of U.S. dollars from the outside world.

However, despite these achievements, the retreats and setbacks that agonized the Somaliland state-building process began with the lack of conceptual understanding of the course toward state-building by the political leadership that came to power after President Mohamed Ibrahim Egal and his colleague Dahir Riyale. Despite the significant achievements, Somaliland's state-building has not been successful as an institution due to a lack of vision and experience by the political stakeholders. Unlike others, President Egal had a comprehensive project for institutional building, starting with the demobilization of clan militias, local government elections, a referendum on the constitution, the formation of a government of national unity, and the initiation of political parties. The foundation of all these endeavors was built on consensus and compromise agreements rather than confrontation with various clan-based centrifugal forces. These undertakings continued in the right direction during President Egal's and his colleague Riyale's tenures. Unfortunately, under Ahmed Silanyo's government, with Mr.

Hirsi and Mohamoud Hasashi in charge, the institutional building process has significantly diverged from Egal's path. After assuming power, they discharged all trained, qualified, and experienced government general directors and replaced them with clan and party supporters, most of whom were Islamists.

The main political direction of Ahmed Silanyo's government (guided by Mr. Hirsi and Mohamoud Hashi) was understood by many intellectuals as a compromise with Somalia on reunification, led by the Islamists of the new regime in Mogadishu and Al-Itihaad in Hargeisa. Today, many close observers believe that, aside from compromising on reunification with Somalia, these methods and policies have not significantly changed under President Muse Bihi's tenure.

The Kind of Reform Somaliland Needs

Reform means change, but not every change is for the better. The concept of change with Islamists is not forward-looking but backward, aiming for the restoration of the Islamic Caliphate, which became irrelevant in 1924 in Turkey. On the other hand, the conflict between clan-based politics and the building of a modern state would lead to the same failure seen in state-building in Mogadishu. This is also where Somaliland's state-building is facing a deep crisis. State-building in Somaliland has been uniquely distinct from other post-conflict situations in the region. Traditional consensus-based conflict resolution and modern multi-party democratic exercises have combined to shape hybrid political and security governance, creating a solid foundation for the state-building project in Somaliland.

However, the situation has changed, and many negative developments have emerged, calling for significant reforms that Somaliland urgently needs. The following areas require conceptually based reform:

The Somaliland Political Parties: From Clan Ownership to National Institutions

The role of political parties is to lead the state and society toward progress, and as political responsibility is the highest duty and the heaviest burden a human being can take on, the renovation of society depends on the qualities and qualifications of the party's leadership. Therefore, party leadership should not only consist of the most active and honest individuals but also the most knowledgeable. Above all, the leader of the party and the state must have outstanding qualities of leadership. Reforming the political parties must transform them into not only political institutions but also schools of thought for the promotion and enhancement of political science. Therefore, the party's leadership must be among the most advanced and distinguished elites in society.

Remember, when party and state leadership lack such qualities and remain at the level of the common people, political movements continue without horizon or vision, enduring random and haphazard sequences of action and reaction.

Remaking the Guurti

The Somaliland Guurti emerged from the traditional clan society where clan leaders once played the role of polity. As community elders, wise men were the fundamental reference and source of reconciliation, conflict resolution, and management. When the people of Somaliland took up arms against the oppression of the military regime, and when the leading groups organized the armed struggle abroad, the need to mobilize people inside the country for the struggle emerged. The community elders and wise men took on this role. Again, when the SNM took power in 1991 and the need for state-building arose, the Guurti played a crucial role in building peace through reconciliation and consensus-building. Moreover, the efforts to combine the Guurti and the House of Representatives led to the amalgamation of traditional and modern systems, which constituted hybrid political and security governance.

Unfortunately, due to a lack of proper conceptual understanding of the multi-dimensional aspects of institutional building by the political elite, much of the Guurti's role has degenerated into mere bureaucratic practice. Not only the Guurti but, in many cases, the clan leaders, who once played an enormous role in state-building and security governance, have increasingly become a class of people in the service of their own needs. When state-building turned into clan-based political contestations for power, the Guurti lost much of its former dignity and respect.

To reform the Guurti into a dignified national institution, its members must be elected by the clans that the Guurti traditionally represents. The election should be held under a constitutional law that defines the qualifications of Guurti members, and elders representing their respective communities must be elected for a specific number of years. The election of members of the Guurti by their communities would further strengthen the role of traditional institutions in political representation. While it would not be rational to advocate for the complete abolishment of the traditional system in a society built on clan-based relations, the traditional institutions need reform, and these reforms must be achieved by making the system more transparent and accountable.

Greater Somalia vs Democratic Somalia/Somalis:

Greater Somalia ideology has failed because several Somalis generations have been envisaging this idea from tribalism point-view that time attested its bankruptcy, and which would no longer stand as a guide to action nor a model for "Ideal City" in steady the idea of renovation of the Somali States in Mogadishu and Hargeisa as new democratic options would stand as bright future alternative for the Somali Ethnic group as whole and would open a new horizon of pathway to integrate in the brotherly communities of Ethiopia and Kenya where Somali Ethnic group would be one of significant factor for interaction of these peoples, this would constitute a great leap to the future prospects of peace and development.

