

# Somalia is in Crisis between Politics and Terrorism

Abdi Yusuf



Islamic Theology of Counter Terrorism

اسلام کے تھیولوجی آف کاؤنٹر ٹیرورازم

Years of hard-fought gains made by the Somali people in order to bring peace and stability back into their country and defeat the al-Shabab terrorist group are now threatened by President Mohammed Abdullahi, commonly known as Farmaajo, to stay in power illegally after his mandate expired on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021.(1) Opposition leaders are declaring that they no longer recognize him as a legitimate President.(2) At the moment, Somalia is at the crossroads of either going back into civil war or falling back in the hands of al-Shabab. Therefore, before it's too late, the international community should intervene.

On February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017, joyful Somalis poured into the streets in celebration after President (3) Mohammed Abdullahi, commonly known as Farmaajo, became the newly elected leader of Somalia. Many were hopeful that President Farmaajo would heal the divided nation, strengthen democracy in the country, and defeat Al-Shabaab, the terrorist group controlling much of Somalia's central and southern countryside. Four years later, on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021, hundreds of Somalis once again took to the streets, this time in anger over President Farmaajo and the government's failure to hold the elections scheduled for February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021. The peaceful protestors, which included former presidents, prime ministers, (4) and presidential candidates, were confronted by the army and dispersed using live ammunition. (5) The assault against protestors marks a drastic turn of events, and risks erasing years of progress.

Over the past decade, Somalia has slowly transitioned out of a period of chaos and conflict into a period of relative peace paired with socioeconomic and political progress. Many Somalis were hopeful and optimistic about the future of their country. Elections were scheduled to take place in early 2021, and the incumbent president affirmed his desire to (6) peacefully hand over power in the event of an election loss. However, no such elections have yet to materialize and the future of Somalia is now in jeopardy. Somalia's election process is incredibly complicated and difficult to understand. The country is led by a president, who is elected by the parliament. The parliament is a bicameral legislature comprised of the Senate and National Assembly. Due to a prolonged security crisis and lack of infrastructure, Somalia elects its parliament and president through an intricate clan-based electoral college system.

Under an agreement reached on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020, (7) the 2021 Somali elections would mirror that of the 2017 elections and take place as follows: The elders of each clan convene and elect 101 delegates. The delegates then elect the 275 members of the National Assembly, based on each clan's

predetermined quota. Separately, each state's parliament convenes and elects the 54 members of the Senate, based on each state's quota. The entire parliament then convenes and selects the next President of Somalia by a two-thirds majority vote.

While this clan-based system worked in 2017, the government has so far failed to replicate its success. Officially, the current parliament's four-year mandate ended on December 27, 2020 and the term for Somalia's incumbent President Farmaajo, expired on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021. (8)

Opposition leaders recently released a statement (9) declaring that "starting from the 8th February 2021, the council of opposition candidates does not recognize Farmaajo as president." Instead, the opposition called for an interim government to be appointed until new elections are held. (10) While the president's supporters argue that Farmaajo remains Somalia's legal president (11) until the conclusion of future elections, his opponents rebuke this. "The president is solely responsible for the delay to the election," Ilyas Ali, a Somali senator, told Al Jazeera. (12) "He had four years to organize an election, but he didn't do that. Now, his term has ended. We don't recognize him and he only has himself to blame."

President Farmaajo claims he was ready to conduct an election based on the September 17<sup>th</sup> agreement. However, the government's overt involvement in the election process immediately came under suspicion and caused negotiations to fail over three key issues. First, under the September 17<sup>th</sup> agreement, the government was required to partner with states, local stakeholders, and civil societies, to appoint and co-manage independent election committees. (13) However, the government instead appointed partisan committee members, calling into question the legitimacy and independence of the committees. Many members of the election committees were known government servants, (14) members of the President's office team, and officers of the National Intelligence Agency Service (NISA).

The deputy chief of staff of President Farmaajo, Abdinur Mohamed, was allegedly one of the committees' chairperson NISA chief Fahad Yassin was believed to be directly involved in managing the election process. The presidents of Jubaland and Puntland, along with prominent leaders of the opposition groups, immediately opposed the government's unilateral appointments, claiming the committees were illegitimate, partisan, and designed to bypass Somalia's electoral laws. (15)

Second, a dispute (16) between Speaker of the Senate Abdi Hashi and President Farmaajo arose over who was authorized to appoint Somaliland's committee and electors. (17) Hashi, a Somali nationalist and native of Somaliland, which maintains de facto independence but nominally remains under the

federal government, claimed that President Farmaajo had no jurisdiction over the appointment (18) of the Somaliland committee. Since he claimed to represent the interests of the people of Somaliland, he would select their commission members. (19) The government disagreed and instead appointed their own members (20) to the committee.

Third, under the September 17<sup>th</sup> agreement, the local and federal elections would be held in each state's largest two cities. However, prior deployment of federal troops to the Gedo region in 2020 resulted in a military occupation of Garbaharey, the second largest city of the Jubaland state. Jubaland viewed the occupation of the city during the proposed election as overt government interference in the state's electoral affairs and demanded that President Farmaajo withdraw the troops (21) before any elections would be held.

The failed negotiations, under President Farmaajo's tenure, reflect rising divisions in the country and a general unhappiness with the government. President Farmaajo has failed to fulfill his campaign promises of fighting corruption, improving the country's economy, and removing the threat of Al-Shabaab. Somalia is still listed as the most corrupt country in the world, (22) the economy continues to flounder, (23) and Al-Shabaab remains a persistent security threat. (24) Instead of working towards unification, reconciliation, and democratization, President Farmaajo has undermined the country's institutions, broadened internal divisions, and weakened domestic stability. Somalia is currently in uncharted waters and is in desperate need of international support. The U.S. and the EU should act quickly to hold the Somali government accountable, facilitate an immediate dialogue between the government and the opposition leaders in order to preserve the decades of hard-fought gains made by the Somali people. Otherwise, Al-Shabaab will capitalize on the newfound instability, conquer new territories, and destroy the fragile peace that Somalia worked so hard to achieve.

*ITCT does not necessarily endorse any or all views expressed by the author in the article.*

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