

## **President Farmaajo faced a moment of truth in Parliament on Saturday<sup>1</sup>**

**by Aweys Omar Mohamoud, PhD**

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President Farmaajo has had his moment of truth come to him face-to-face on Saturday, June 6, in parliament as MPs booed and hissed their disapproval when he started his speech at the opening of the last session of parliament before the anticipated elections later this year, and early next year. And if he does lose power in the coming election, as is most likely going to happen, his only visible mark on Mogadishu's symbolic landscape will have been the highly controversial restoration of a few civil war destroyed monuments originally erected by the late dictator.

At issue was Mr. Farmaajo's delusions of an impractical 'One man, one vote' con project and his attempt to transform what could become a mortal blindness and possibly a relapse into civil war into a fable of excessive patriotism and nationalism. He thought he could sell his sham project, which many see as a pretext for extension, to parliament but MPs were wise enough to look behind the mask of lies and propaganda and to challenge the President on his dreadfully misguided project. Contrary voices were silenced, intimidated or out-shouted up until he showed up in Parliament and his speech was interrupted by furious chants started by one MP who shouted 'Mr. President, do you realize that you've failed in your duties as President?'. Over sixty others (as the protesting MPs claimed) followed through with similar chants, including 'Down with Farmaajo'.

The reason why Mr. Farmaajo's 'One man, one vote' electoral model is impractical is because it doesn't address many unresolved issues in the electoral law, including the definition of constituencies, the allocation of seats to constituencies, how the 30 per cent quota of seats for women will be implemented and the management of seats in Banaadir and Somaliland. These questions need to be answered in order to make the electoral law technically implementable. Moreover, the FMSs and the FGS haven't worked together to keep the elections on track or agree on a practical model for peaceful, timely, inclusive and credible elections.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> All speech in this piece, whether verbatim or redacted, is printed in italics to separate it from the rest of the text.

<sup>2</sup> See Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia (S/2020/121), published Monday, 24 February 2020, especially the contributions by Mr. Allen (United Kingdom, pp. 8-9) and Mr. Hunter (United States of America, pp. 9-10), viewed 7 June 2020, <[https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S\\_PV.8731.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_PV.8731.pdf)>.

At issue also was the ever-deteriorating security situation in the country. According to the latest UN Security Council's 'Report of the Secretary General on Somalia' (paras 15-21) published 13 May 2020, the security situation remained volatile, with 235 violent incidents in January, 274 in February, 278 in March and 299 in April. This was due mainly to higher numbers of terrorism-related incidents, such as mortar attacks, improvised explosive device attacks and assassinations. Levels of crime and armed conflict-related incidents have also remained steady since January.

Al-Shabaab retains the ability to carry out high-profile attacks using VBIEDs, suicide bombings, mortars, and small arms. It has significantly increased its mortar attacks in Mogadishu recently, according to the above UN report. Al-Shabaab also continues to use a range of asymmetric tactics against Somali security forces and AMISOM, members of parliament, and other government personnel, as well as soft targets, such as hotels, restaurants, and cafes. Outside Mogadishu, al-Shabaab remains in control of vast segments of Somalia and major roads throughout the country. It is also present in major urban conurbations and regularly conducts attacks as well as collects taxes.

Some of the protesting MPs cited the murder of eight 'very young' doctors (aid workers) who have been abducted and killed by an armed group outside the capital, Mogadishu.<sup>3</sup> They complained that President Farmaajo didn't even acknowledge let alone condemn this horrendous crime committed by armed groups just outside the city. In a recent article, I proffered similar accounts of barbarous acts of violence and terrorist outrages that Mr. Farmaajo also failed to condemn. This begs the question 'if our President is not prepared to speak up publicly against al-Shabaab or condemn terrorist acts committed by them or by other armed groups, how can we trust that he will take action to defend the people?'

Mr. Farmaajo is also accused of installing a system that serves the narrow interest of those in power through patronage and clientelism at the expense of the public good. He has also violated the constitutionally agreed structure based on a federal system of separate political units, all of which enjoy certain exclusive executive, legislative and

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<sup>3</sup> 'Somalia says 8 'very young' aid workers abducted, killed,' by ABDI GULED Associated Press, 29 May 2020, 15:43.

judicial powers independent of the central government. He's done this, for instance, by waging war against Jubbaland.

President Farmaajo finally managed to make his speech, albeit drowned out by the noise. Here are edited excerpts: *"It is an honour for me to be invited to participate .... [commotion and protest that went on for almost 2 minutes]. We've also achieved political stability; no body came to divide you; no [foreigner] came to influence you; you didn't table a motion; which means that our government that we were all members of has found stability and that we're serving the Somali people, be it education or health-care. ... We have paid salaries to all government employees regularly ... [words indistinct]. We've still got a long way to go; you cannot fix a government in 3 or 10 years. But you started the journey ... Applause ... [Words indistinct]."*

## MY OWN COMMENTARY

Mr. President, political stability is more than what you've just said above. What you've achieved is not political stability, it is political survival or regime survival. There's a huge difference. The bits that I think would be relevant to the Somali context when it comes to the logic of political survival as proposed by de Mesquita et al.<sup>4</sup> (the author of the logic of political survival) is that the power holding group must be small to enhance the leader's ability to install a system or mechanism whereby those in power exploit state resources for their own benefit. The main argument of this classic work is that when the government is in the hands of a very small group of people and there are no checks and balances, the result is bad politics and bad policies and that is what is happening under Mr. Farmaajo's leadership.

Political stability pertains to creating strong state–society relations which is critical to building an effective, legitimate state, and durable, positive peace. In a fragile country like ours, weak state–society relations based on patronage and lack of accountability are the norm. You have not changed that, Mr. President. If anything, you and your government have continued with those old ways of doing things. You failed to establish a government that is subject to checks and balances, and hence works for the common purpose. You've attempted to build your regime's legitimacy on what is known as legitimacy based on

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from de Mesquita, Bruce Bueno, et al., (2003) *The Logic of Political Survival*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

‘populism’. That is a legitimacy derived from a mass model of politics in which charismatic leaders appeal to the people directly as the source of their right to rule.<sup>5</sup> But you’re not a charismatic leader so you failed. Moreover, the Somali ecology has completely moved on from the time you knew how politics was done by your hero Siyad Barre, back in the 1980s. If you’re still entertaining that model of populism, good luck with it Mr. President!

Here are edited excerpts from three members of Parliament who summed up what the protest was about when they came outside:

The first speaker was Mr. Hassan Ismail Samatar, Member of Parliament, who’s had this to say: *“... we are all concerned that there may be a disturbance of public order. The fact that we could not meet at the Police Academy in Mogadishu for safety reasons shows how precarious the security situation is, and yet he (the President) is saying that masses of people will go into the streets and have a ‘free and fair’ election of ‘one man, one vote’ under these circumstances. That is a plan for extension, for staying in power beyond the end of his term. It also means changing the Constitution; transforming the government into a dictatorship; and putting the country through a time of great peril. You could deduce from what he was saying that the Constitution of the FGS will be breached. That could set this country back into strife and civil war. The Constitution of the FGS cannot be tampered with (by the government). It is a sacred agreement between the people of Somalia. As I said, this will seriously endanger the country and the people of Somalia. We’ve got only four months remaining now according to the election schedule. We call on the government to go for election; we say ‘no’ to extension. The people must be given the opportunity to have the election. We say this government will not be able to do anything that it could not have done in the past four years, even with a two-year extension. The country must be saved ...”*

The second speaker was Ms. Sa’diya Salad Samatar, Member of Parliament, who had the following words to say: *“... you saw more than 60 MPs rise, and the reason is that we have had to stand up against the lies and misinformation peddled by the President. He didn’t speak about the (young) doctors that were murdered, nor did he convey sympathies to their families. He said so far this year 27 people have died (were killed?)*

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<sup>5</sup> Menocal, Alina Roach (2010) “State-Building for Peace” – A New Paradigm for International Engagement in Post-Conflict Fragile States? EU Working Paper RSCAS 2010/34. European University Institute, Florence; Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies; European Report for Development.

*and, you know, everyday people are being killed, young and old, due to insecurity. You can see, they've summoned us to Villa Hargeisa. We couldn't even hold our meeting in our usual place out of fear of mortar attack. The police Academy in Mogadishu could not be used for our meeting. That is the state of (insecurity) in the country. I want to launch an appeal here. This appeal is to the people of Mogadishu. I say to you, the people of Mogadishu: you claim to be numbered up to 4 million people. You know in Minneapolis, there was a black man (George Floyd) who was unlawfully killed. For 8 days, people are protesting. In your case 8 doctors were murdered, why aren't your leaders, your women and your youth speaking up? We're speaking up but we won't be listened to because you're not speaking up. It's within your power to do so. My question is who represents Mogadishu? Where are your MPs and Senators? I say if you (the people of Mogadishu) do not have anyone to speak on your behalf, let's make a call to the five regions for people in the regions to come and help you. We have to make a call to the people in the regions to come and liberate Mogadishu. Farmaajo is against you. He said today that he was born here in Mogadishu. If he was born here or has a care and concern for this city, he wouldn't have taken away the security personnel who were protecting the people here to use them for his fight against Jubbaland. Our own security personnel have been taken away to fight in Jubbaland. So again I call on the people in Mogadishu to speak up and not be silent. ... Farmaajo couldn't acknowledge today that he failed, but he failed. I don't believe that we should wait (keep him in power) for Farmaajo for another 3 or 2 months. I don't believe that Farmaajo deserves to be given any more time. ... There's high security measures and lockdown everywhere. We cannot travel in the city. People are crushed and humiliated everywhere. I call on the people of Mogadishu to rise up and liberate themselves. Farmaajo has failed you. We are the people who voted for him in the (last) election. You saw what happened in parliament today, and we're taking our votes back from him. Aren't we doing that? (to the MPs standing by her, who all respond with 'yes'). We took our votes back from him, and he is not our President anymore. We no longer recognize him as President ...".*

The third speaker was Ms. Amina Hassan Ali, Member of Parliament, and she's had the following to say: *"Today was the start of our 7<sup>th</sup> parliamentary session, the President attended ... myself and the other members protested against his shoddy speech. He failed to talk about the real issues and the facts. People were waiting for him to express his condolences and sympathies about the (murder) incidents. Instead, he started*

*congratulating himself, boasting that the country was secure and talking about achievements, etc. He didn't talk about the latest incident whereby 8 (young men) medical personnel were murdered in Gololey. He didn't express his sympathies regarding this massacre. He said in the last three months, there were twenty something incidents! In the last three months, there was the aircraft that was downed in Bardaale, killing all six people on board. He has never offered his condolences to the families and relatives of those victims. Instead, he expressed his sympathies about the death of the two Kenyan young men, not the Somali people who died in that plane. Also in Qansahdheere (another town) another aircraft was shot at. Luckily, the aircraft wasn't brought down. The pilot who saved that plane was arrested when he arrived in Mogadishu. The President didn't talk about any of those incidents. He's covering up. People are being killed here in Mogadishu everyday ... There's no area that is safe, anywhere. Mogadishu is not safe, apart from this little enclave where we are at the moment. The President claimed that they made progress. We don't see this as progress. We see it as backsliding. As all the other MPs have said, the President is busy trying to have his time extended. ... and he's saying 'the masses will take part in an election that he'll stand'. Where will the people take part in the election? Where is the safe place that people can take part in an election? Does he want to cause massive casualties of death among ordinary people? Or is his purpose to fill up the parliament with stooges that he appointed? Our response to the President is that he has failed. ... He said that he couldn't deal with the Federal Member States. You can't imagine the level of enmity that he created among the FMSs. He's caused the wars that are ongoing now in Beled Hawo. This is not a time to create wars; it is a time to make peace. He's causing the young army recruits that were trained to fight among themselves. Everywhere, you have the troops that were taken away from Mogadishu. Some of these young men are crying their eyes out because they were taken to Beled Hawo and Luuq, areas which are very hot that they're not used to. He's also causing clashes among those young people who were trained in Turkey, and they are now fighting among themselves. Somali to Somali fighting, that is what's happening. In his long rambling speech, he's saying that we're all Somalis and we're brothers, but he's breaking up that brotherly bond between the people. He's playing one side against the other, and he shouldn't be doing that. The division is now so deep that the country is literally falling apart, so he shouldn't be doing such things. He shouldn't play one set of Somali people against the other. As regards Jubbaland, they (he and his team/friends/associates) are saying that they're going to capture Bu'aale everyday. Who's in Bu'aale? From whom are*

*you going to capture Bu'aale? Are their enemies in Bu'aale? No there are no enemies to fight against in Bu'aale. There are Somali people who live in Bu'aale. If the idea is to fight off al-Shabaab in the areas where they are, the nearest places that you have al-Shabaab is here in Mogadishu, in Afgoye, and in Bal'ad. So if the President is sincere in fighting al-Shabaab, let him put his strategy forward to the Somali people in broad daylight and act on it. He shouldn't be talking with excessive pride and self-satisfaction when he came to give a speech in parliament, while he has clearly failed. He's talking about overcoming tribalism, we can see excessive tribalism in his administration. We see junior army officers and second Lieutenants turned into generals; whereas senior officers and generals who've worked for decades are made redundant..."*

Finally, word has it that neutralization of political opponents and competitors by the use of bribery, threats and, sometimes, violence has been the main instruments of control by Mr. Farmaajo and his team over the past three plus years. These structures remain entrenched and wield power in an unaccountable and arbitrary fashion. As we go into the last few months of his term, Somali leaders and the international community must come up with ways to neutralize these structures lest they further exacerbate tensions and undermine prospects for free and fair elections.

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