

President Farmaajo's Addis Ababa Interview (Part 3)

Relations with Federal Member States (FMSs)

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You can read parts 1 and 2 here, as well as the full transcript of the interview in Somali. In part 3, I discuss one of the main themes that emerged from the interview which was the President's perspective on relations with FMSs. Here is what he said on the subject followed by my comments:¹

1. In answer to question 8: On the causes of the political fallout between the FGS and some FMSs? "... the country has been in trouble for a long time; it has fragmented, and people have become disunited. Into this, a federal system was introduced and a federal constitution that we all swore (to defend). But people do not have much information about it, and do not understand what federalism is all about. So that itself is a problem, i.e., people's lack of understanding about federalism. Secondly, the problem (about relations) with FMSs is not something that has only affected this government, it is a pre-existing problem that has been there before my time. Part of the problem is perhaps in the way they were initially structured as foreign governments had a hand or influence in their creation. That led to FMSs to see themselves as entities that are independent of the central government or FGS. As they have relations with foreign (powers), and there's in reality competition between us and those foreign (powers), and there could also be other issues between us. Some of the FMSs have become part of the dispute between us and these foreign governments who have used them against us. When no discord or disagreement could be found in the FGS, then foreign governments that we had disagreements with (began to) use the FMSs against us. It was unfortunate, but it happened several times. This is not something that happened to me (my government) alone. This problem predates our government, so it wasn't a problem for us alone. For instance, in the previous election (?), FMSs were called by foreign governments who gave them money to facilitate the winning or victory of (particular) individuals in plain view. It wasn't hidden at all. When I came into office, the diplomatic crisis that erupted between

¹ The President's statements are written in italics to separate them from the rest of the text.

the Gulf countries to which we remained neutral, some FMSs were called by other governments and set them against us. Others (FMSs) declared that they went (to meet these foreign governments) to obtain shaxaad (money that is not earned legally or was paid in exchange for something or influence) from them. When they returned home, they started causing us problems. They created an independent organization through which they would oppose or undermine the smooth running of government functions and the federal system, and that was clear for all to see. And this is basically because the way they understand the federal system is wrong. The FGS has four exclusive powers: defence, economic and monetary policy, immigration policy and control of borders, and foreign affairs. The FMSs interfere in these exclusive areas for the FGS and directly take over these functions. It has also been suggested that some of them even print money. Some of them travel abroad to meet foreign governments and make treaties with them, or talk to them about (bilateral) issues concerning FMSs and those foreign governments although we have done some work to put a stop to this, and managed to end it. But still the (foreign) interference goes on and the FMSs are deeply penetrated (by the foreign governments) and are used against us”.

2. As part of an answer to question 10: On relations with Jubbaland? “... and we won’t accept that (others) use our FMSs against us. We know that some of them (FMSs) were created from outside (Somalia), and that IGAD was tasked with their creation ... we won’t allow that they become an obstacle to the smooth running of the (functions) of central government, its progress, and (sustainability) for the future.”

3. As part of an answer to question 11: On why does the FGS bans or imposes restrictions on the activities of FMSs that are not politically aligned with it? “When we smoothed out difficulties at central government level, some of the FMSs were stirred to make obstacles for us so that our progress is prevented or made more difficult.”

4. As part of an answer to question 11: On why does the FGS bans or imposes restrictions on the activities of FMSs that are not politically aligned with it? “When it comes to FMSs, foreign interference or involvement in our affairs has been a major feature, and it is still ongoing.”

5. As part of an answer to question 11: On why does the FGS bans or imposes restrictions on the activities of FMSs that are not politically aligned with it? “... there’s nothing else here. What we refused to do was to operate in a way that is contrary to the Constitution. There are powers to be exercised exclusively by the FMSs, under the Constitution. There are also powers to be exercised exclusively by the center; and there is a concurrent list

of powers that can be exercised by both the center and the FMSs. Border control is our prerogative, whether it is land borders, sea or air. There's no sanction or restriction here (that we have applied to them). We have got to know what is coming into our country (going through our borders), and we must have immigration controls. If the (local) administration says 'we don't want immigration controls, and we won't allow them into our territory; or we won't accept the central government's prerogatives', then we'll have to deal with them. We'll have to find some mechanism to take the necessary measures to monitor and control the movements through our borders by hook or by crook."

COMMENT:

President Farmaajo's tone in his statements above is belligerent, combative and disrespectful of certain FMSs and their leaders (the ones not politically aligned with him). He accuses them of being created and sponsored by foreign powers, of breaking the law and violating the Constitution of FGS, of low political motives, and even of plots against his government. One good piece of advice before judging others is to take a good look at yourself!

President Farmaajo's *modus operandi* over the past three plus years has been to demand submission to his will, and to compel conformity to his authoritarian whims. Almost from the moment he came into office, he started dismantling core elements of the provisional constitution that stand in the way of threats of new dictatorship and repressive rule: the independence of parliament; the principles of the federal system enshrined in the constitution; a free press; and the rule of law.

His regime is not subject to checks and balances, hence corruption is rife. It is difficult to measure corruption in this context, but we can define it as the theft of state revenues which constitutes an abuse of a most basic contract between a ruler and citizens. The regime brutalizes both its opponents and persons critical of or suspected of being critical of the policies of the government. There are allegations of arbitrary arrests, detentions without trial, physical attacks against political enemies, and the spread of generalized mayhem which are all tools used by the Farmaajo machine to repress and terrorize citizens.

Parliament was completely muzzled and the President relies on a narrow base of supporters and patronage networks to govern. His government hired almost a third of MPs, many of whom were unqualified, into ministerial positions for which they were unsuited and buys off another third in exchange for political support, thus undermining scrutiny and oversight. In the meantime, the rights and interests of opposition MPs, and especially those who tried to stick their heads above the parapet, have been trampled upon.

The regime routinely uses force of arms to prevent political competition and dissent, and to compel obedience. In Mogadishu, there was an attempted political assassination of a known opposition figure and the slaying of some of his body guards in the process. Farmaajo may additionally have been flexing his muscles – showing who was boss, when he imposed travel bans on public figures, including former Presidents. His constant meddling and bullying left some FMS leaders, especially those adjacent to Mogadishu, feeling impotent and powerless.

In a more serious meddling in the electoral process of South West regional government, President Farmaajo maneuvered his own man into position as president of the region in Dec. 2018. Days earlier, he arrested the main opponent of his candidate (a former al-Shabaab commander who defected to the government), sparking protests in which at least fifteen people died. It has been suggested that Ethiopian forces who were stationed in Baidoa, the regional capital, put down the protests and arrested the candidate at the behest of Mr. Farmaajo. At this, the then UN Special Representative Mr. Nicholas Haysom asked the government some pertinent questions about its responsibilities in the matter. In answer, he was expelled from the country.

The President has toyed with the idea of extending his rule beyond his term, and said so in public. Many people believe his highly publicized 'one man, one vote' project was a clever con trick and a pretext for extension. He has been accused of trying to conduct fraudulent polls in which the outcome is shaped by coercion, fraud, gerrymandering, or other forms of manipulation. In other words, it has been said, Mr. Farmaajo will go to any extent to find ways to control the results while perhaps sustaining a veneer of competitive balloting.

Mogadishu has been in continuous lockdown ever since Mr. Farmaajo came to power back in 2017, with roads and whole areas blocked, main streets sealed off from the public, and armed soldiers at myriad checkpoints. Night-time curfews as anti-Coronavirus (COVID-19) measure has now been added to the mix. With the city subjected to high security measures comes the denial of basic freedoms, the absence of the rule of law, as well as brutality and merciless attacks on civilians. The essence of such state enforced terror is its unpredictable arbitrariness, the absence of explanation, the lack of any means whereby wrongs can be addressed and the inculcation of a widespread feeling of mental impotence and lethargy.² Sadly, none of these measures have broken off al-Shabaab's attacks on the city or the country at large, as the table below shows.

AL-SHABAAB ATTACKS AND CASUALTY FIGURES³		
8 FEBRUARY 2017 – 4 FEBRUARY 2020		
MAJOR ATTACKS	VIOLENT INCIDENTS	CASUALTIES⁴
174	1,073	4,342

The election of President Farmaajo in February 2017 presented an important opportunity to address Somalia's many outstanding human rights challenges. Instead, the regime resorted to using heavy handed techniques to suppress media freedom and the right to freedom of expression in general. According to Amnesty International,⁵ media freedom in Somalia has been suppressed by the FGS security forces and officials, authorities in regional states and by the armed group Al-Shabaab. Amnesty's recent report documents allegations of threats, harassment and intimidation of the media including physical attacks, killings and attempted killings of journalists, arbitrary arrests, harassment and intimidation of journalists and other critics, restrictions on access to information by both the government and Al-Shabaab. In addition, the report further documents new techniques employed by the authorities to bribe media outlets to engage in self-censorship and through online harassment, intimidation and social media manipulation. Amnesty's report also covers a few cases from Puntland that are relevant to some of the violations and abuses documented in its report. Of the 50 countries designated as NOT

² I acknowledge an intellectual debt to Robert Rotberg whose work continues to inspire. See Rotberg, Robert (2007) *Repressive, Aggressive, and Rogue Nation-States: How Odious, How Dangerous?* In Rotberg, Robert J. (ed.) *Worst of the Worst: Dealing with Repressive and Rogue Nations* (pp. 1-39). Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

³ See here for my recent article 'President Farmaajo's Addis Ababa Interview (Part 2) and a compendium of Al Shabaab atrocities under his watch'.

⁴ Casualty figures include death, injury or missing persons from both civilians and soldiers, including 36 al-Shabaab assailants.

⁵ Amnesty International (2020) "We Live in Perpetual Fear" *Violations and Abuses of Freedom of Expression in Somalia*. London: Amnesty International. viewed 18 May 2020, <<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AFR5214422020ENGLISH.PDF>>.

FREE by Freedom House, Somalia at 7 points has one of the worst aggregate scores for political rights and civil liberties. Only 4 countries fare worse, including Saudi Arabia, North Korea, Eritrea, and Syria.

Talking of foreign intervention, Mr. President, you must be reminded that the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) was authorized by the African Union in January 2007. It was deployed to protect the then TFG, principally in Mogadishu. Almost 13½ years later, AMISOM forces are here all the same protecting Mr. Farmaajo's government because the country is still marked by severe insecurity. The foreign forces remain in place mainly because the President failed to build the unity of purpose necessary among the FGS and FMSs to reconstruct internal security institutions capable of providing security. Talk about the pot calling the kettle black! The table⁶ below presents the history of foreign interventions in Somalia since 1991.

Lead Organization or Country	Mission Name	Start Date	End Date	Peak Personnel Strength (Military Unless Noted)
UN	UNOSOM I	Apr. 1992	Mar. 1993	947 (including 54 military observers) ^a
United States	UNITAF/ Operation Restore Hope	Dec. 1992	May 1993	37,000 ^b
UN	UNOSOM II	Mar. 1993	Mar. 1995	29,209 ^c 236 police
United States	Operation Continue Hope	May 1993	Mar. 1994	1,000
United States	Operation United Shield	Jan. 1995	Mar. 1995	4,000
UN	UNPOS	Apr. 1995	Jun. 2013	3 police ^d
Ethiopia		Dec. 2006	Jan. 2009	10,000 ^e
AU	AMISOM I	Feb. 2007	Jul. 2010	5,221 ^f 6 police
EU	EU NAVFOR ATALANTA	Dec. 2008	Ongoing	1,900
UN	UNSOA	Jan. 2009	Nov. 2015	No military or police ^g
EU	EUTM Somalia	Apr. 2010	Ongoing	121 ^h
AU	AMISOM II	Jul. 2010	Feb. 2012	9,796 ⁱ 50 police
Kenya	Operation Linda Nchi	Oct. 2011	May 2012	6,000 ^j
AU	AMISOM III	Feb. 2012	Ongoing	22,564 562 police
UN	UNSOM	June 2013	Ongoing	579 (including 8 military observers) 16 police ^k
UN	UNSOS	Nov. 2015	Ongoing	41

⁶ Sourced from Dobbins, James, et al. (2019) Africa's Role in Nation-Building: An Examination of African-Led Peace Operations (Chapter Six: Somalia, pp. 145-168). Rand Corporation, p. 148, viewed 15 May 2020, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2978.html>

Political leadership involves the relations between leaders and led, and leaders provide not only political organization and judgement but also ethical and moral qualities that are concerned with the nature and future direction of society.⁷ President Farmaajo hasn't come up with any practical ideas to address the lack of state capacity, lack of legitimacy, and conflicted group identities bedeviling the body politic or, for that matter, officials using their office to loot public money; public employees relying on patronage rather than performance for advancement; and unscrupulous individuals or groups exploiting the hundreds of thousands or perhaps millions of IDPs in makeshift camps across the country.

Nor has he come up with any fresh or constructive ideas for the enhancement of human security, such as building democratic institutions; establishing legal bodies that are capable of enforcing human rights norms; improving basic infrastructure, such as access to safe water, electricity and medical care; or improving educational and vocational training for ex-combatants.

Despite the load of claptrap which we have heard so often from President Farmaajo, Somalia is in a time of political transformation, not of political stability. The obvious question is what new and positive ideas has Mr. Farmaajo put on the table over the past three plus years to bring about the fundamental changes required in governance to help transform politics and security in Somalia? The answer, in my view, is zilch.

A few follow up questions the reporter should have asked! What is the reason for the frenzied attack by President Farmaajo on some of the leaders of FMSs (essentially Puntland and Jubbaland) who are suspicious (reasonably, I would say) of his authoritarian tendencies and proclivities? Regardless of political differences, why can't the President relate sensitively towards his fellow countrymen leaders? How does the President think that he and his opponents can find common ground to produce constructive outcomes to long-term disputes? Isn't he the one, as a national leader, who was supposed to come up with ideas, policies and strategies for conflict mitigation through the development of more inclusive narratives and identities?

⁷ See Gill, S. (2012) Introduction: global crisis and the crisis of global leadership, In Gill, Stephen (ed.) *Global Crisis and the Crisis of Global Leadership* (pp. 1-20). Cambridge University Press, p. 11.

Three and a half years into his term and about less than 9 months or so before the anticipated elections, it is now clear that Mr. Farmaajo was clueless about the profound challenges ahead which required inspired problem solving, resilience and leadership. He claims in his statements above that the people 'do not understand the federal system'. What he actually means is that the leaders of the FMSs (particularly those who are not aligned with his politics) do not understand the federal system, and that he alone understands it.

But all the evidence suggests otherwise. Mr. Farmaajo acts as if he's a ruler with absolute power, and behaves as though he's running a unitary state in which sovereign power and authority lies with the central government which, for reasons of administrative convenience, devolves some of the functions of government to regional and/or local authorities. A federation couldn't be further from that, and the reality is that he's anything but a powerful leader.

A federation is a form of government designed to permit and indeed facilitate within an essential unity: 'out of many one' (*e pluribus unum*) is the motto of the constitution of the United States of America. It is sad that Mr. Farmaajo hasn't learned this beautiful concept and many more, despite living in the USA for most of his adult life. The unity of a federation is exemplified by the constitution, which has a fundamental role, since it is the guarantee of the rights of the separate units against any attempt by the centre to take them over, or subordinate them to itself.⁸

The problem for Mr. Farmaajo is that he's still wedded to the failed ideology of centralization and totalitarianism by the late dictator Siyad Barre, no matter that it has abysmally failed. Ergo, he sees the FMSs as enemy clans and their leaders as enemy clan leaders. He doesn't see them as governing institutions that are created by their own communities to maintain security and provide citizens with their basic needs.

President Farmaajo needs to understand how history and critical junctures have shaped the path to our current state of affairs. Like many other countries, Somalia didn't make a

⁸ See A study of decentralized political structures for Somalia: a menu of options. Report prepared by consultants from the London School of Economics and Political Science, August 1995, p. 18.

peaceful political transition from dictatorship to where we currently are, which is a post-conflict state trying to rebuild and reintegrate. We came here through violence, still ongoing and with immense human suffering and social dislocation. We had a dictatorship thirty years ago, and we overcame that dictatorship through guerrilla warfare.

However, guerrilla warfare rarely, if ever, benefits the oppressed population or ushers in a democracy. Even when successful, they often have significant long-term negative structural consequences, including militarization or weaponization of society, and the weakening or destruction of political, civil society, and independent groups and institutions during the struggle — bodies that are vital in establishing and maintaining a democratic society.⁹ Add to this, the death, destruction, and disruption wreaked, and the existential threat posed by al-Shabaab terrorist network. That, in a nutshell, is where we are today.

When President Farmaajo came to power three plus years ago, thousands of people came out into the streets in every city, town and village in Somalia, thinking that their prayers were answered and that, now that they have a new President, their hope for even a marginal improvement in their material well-being; limited access to social services, including healthcare and education; and a moderate degree of individual physical security might be realized. Their hopes have all been dashed by now because Mr. Farmaajo didn't provide the critical leadership required to build a unity of purpose, primarily, among the FGS and FMSs, as the provisional constitution demands.

The Provisional Constitution is in place in the interests of fostering a democratic system and impeding dictatorial trends and measures in Somalia. It is the one under which President Farmaajo himself was elected, and he should abide by it. The idea of a dictator in Mogadishu that would use foreign money and weapons to centralize power is past its sell-by date. The whole world has witnessed the weakness of this model in terms of leadership, functionality and legitimacy with the downfall of the late dictator some thirty years ago. The country needs a pragmatic and visionary leader who can bring about the changes required to transform politics and security so that, once and for all, the nation

⁹ See Sharp, Gene (2010) From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation. Fourth US Edition. The Albert Einstein Institution, Chap. 9, viewed 16 May 2018, <<http://www.cfic.org.uk/media/From%20dictatorship%20to%20democracy.pdf>>.

as a whole can start marching forward towards the goal of liberty, justice and freedom for which numerous citizens of Somalia have made tremendous sacrifices.

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