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BRIEFING PAPER

Somalia Contemporary Foreign Policy Milestones: A synopsis of Current and Emerging Issues

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INTRODUCTION

Somalia has emerged from a period of contracted turmoil and conflict. During this crisis, the nation lost a legitimate government, economic power, to some extent its sovereignty especially as depicted by proliferation of foreign troops aligning themselves to different factions and the power to self-determine. Many scholars, political actors, commentators and journalists described Somalia as a “failed state”¹. The import of this on international relations and diplomatic front is that the state loss of its voice on international and regional state matter arising from a nonexistence or tattered foreign policy.

Somalia people have now taken upon themselves the responsibility of managing the post conflict transformation process which is bearing much fruit. The parliamentary elections were held successfully in October and November 2016 bringing about encouraging outcomes such as:

“The Upper House of Parliament had come into existence, comprising 54 members chosen on the basis of federal member state rather than clan; the electorate had expanded from 135 male elders in 2012, to more than 13,000, 30 per cent of whom were women; and voting had taken place in six locations around the country, reflecting emerging State structures.”²

This effort culminated to the parliament electing the current sitting President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, as head of state and government having garnered 55.9% of the vote in February 2017.

It is now two years since the Abdullahi Mohamed administration came into power and Somalia has witnessed GDP growth estimated to \$7 billion in 2017 and an annual growth rate of 2.5%³ despite the experience of worst drought in decades greatly affecting the export trade of livestock and other agriculture products. Better engagement between government and private sector has seen the introduction of value added tax on imports and sales tax on merchandise. While these are the only tax regimes present currently, better tax administration strategies have

¹ The terminology and ideology was first attributed to Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State in the Clinton administration, and appeared in the US National Security Strategy Report submitted to Congress by Clinton in May 1997, A National Security Strategy for a New Century, and again in subsequent strategy reports.

Several years later, it became synonymous with Somalia references being made by Corkburn (2002); The Economist (2005) Kaplan (2006) and Rageh Omaar (2006) among others.

² Report given on the Floor of the Security Council meeting held on 27 January 2017 by Francisco Caetano José Madeira, Special Representative and Head of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

³ Based on World Bank’s Press Release of September 13, 2018 titled: Somalia Economic Update: Rapid Growth in Mobile Money. IMF and AfDB prediction of growth in 2018/2019 are 2.7%.

witnessed the collection of \$ 600 million. If this trend continues, state over reliance on official development assistance will be curtailed.

These macroeconomic trends have been seen as somewhat a revolution. However in this article, we are intent on demonstrating that the Abdullahi's administration has quickly and strategically determined its geopolitical locus which it is now leveraging to ensure that it remains a significant power in Africa and the Middle East region. In so doing, this article will establish the nexus between foreign policy agenda and actions imputed to the state. We start by looking at historical perspectives of Somalia's foreign policy status to determine whether there is an interplay in the contemporary positions taken by this administration. We also interrogate the actions and supposed gains while proposing a way forward.

This discourse is cognizant of the guiding principles⁴ enshrined in the current foreign policy.

These are:

- Promotion of national, regional and international peace and security
- Promotion of commercial and economic activity for sustainable development
- Effective participation in multilateral diplomacy
- Implementation of obligations regarding international treaties and conventions.

The principles have served to interlude main aim and objectives which the Somalia government intends to pursue at the behest of the Somalia people. The priorities pursued under this framework are peace and security within and without the Somalia people, socio economic development, Somalia in the diaspora, sustainability in environment management and cultural heritage issues⁵.

In this article we commence with a critical analysis of Somalia historical perspective of its foreign policy. This is interluded by decisions and actions that the current administration has made to strengthen relationships with its neighbors and attendant regional influence. We also consider actions in light of the ongoing gulf crisis while enforcing the interplay of Somalia as a member of the Arab League. We conclude by profiling the gains made as a result of this effort and provide further strategic direction that could be pursued in order to consolidate the gains so far achieved.

⁴ See The Federal republic of Somalia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Investment Promotion has set out an elaborate Foreign policy of Somalia which was promulgated in December 2015.

⁵ Ibid.

SOMALIA'S FOREIGN POLICY HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The period between 1961 and 1991 was punctuated by important foreign policy milestones most of them highlighting strongly the belief in the principles of sovereignty; national independence; humanity's larger freedom, equity and the indisputable right to a shared heritage.

While the initial interest in Somalia by other states has been attributed to the geopolitical strategic advantage given its proximity to energy rich Persian Gulf regions and a node on international trade routes, its colonial history as seen by the interaction between the British and Italian are important considerations. Also significant is the fact that Somali people were spread out beyond the Somalia state subject to Africa partitioning as seen in the regions of Ogaden in Ethiopia and North Eastern Kenya.

In this same period, the US keen to secure and preserve its interest in this region against the Soviet Union as the cold war heated up, Somalia government preyed on what may be perceived as dynamics of coercion⁶ managing to secure immense military support. This is evidenced overtly by events such as 1977-78 Ogaden war; 1980 Arms- for –Base-Access accord; 1982 Emergency Arms Airlift and 1990 Base Access recognition⁷. While some critiques have attributed these to fueling and propagating Siad Barre's dictatorial tendencies internally, regionally Somalia received accolades for its very strong army and was able to keep its borders secure.

Somalia's relations with its neighboring states was initially characterized as tumultuous. However, the formation of Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) in 1986 (which has since been succeeded by Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD)) an effort sponsored by Said Barre's government may be considered as a watershed moment in Somalia's positive regional influence. In 1974, Somalia joined the Arab League. This alignment though no specific benefit has been attributed to it is another hallmark point in the historical foreign policy view.

⁶ Though it may be difficult to conceptualise coercion in reversal (advanced by a country without military and democratic power on its superpower counterpart), actions pitting competing powers against each other to the point of where they are willing to pursue the whims of Somalia could be perceived as such. See Dobbin, Simmons, Garrett (2007).

⁷ See: Arms for the Horn: U.S. Security Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia, 1953–1991

The decisions reviewed here though not exhaustive point to a Somalia state that has acted strategically and positioned itself as an influencer of policy within Africa and the east African region. The current administration may consider these events as pedestals through which today's issues can be canvassed with much success.

STRENGTHENING RELATIONSHIPS WITH NEIGHBORS

Neighboring countries have played a key role in resolving the conflict in Somalia. That said, fostering national interest which is one of the key principles of foreign policy in Somalia is about exercise of legitimate power bestowed by the state, which may include reminding these neighbors that Somalia is now a sovereign nation with the ability to self-determine. The current government has taken vivid decisions to emphasize its internal legitimacy and its role in the regional affairs of the horn and eastern Africa as detailed in Box 1.0 below.

The Abdulahi administration believing in the power of regional co-operation has made a deliberate effort to revive diplomatic relations with neighboring countries in the horn of Africa. This has caused a thaw in diplomatic relations which would otherwise have been unsurmountable. The efforts by this administration have extended to peace keeping initiatives through interventions in peace building as demonstrated in bilateral or tripartite peace agreements that have been signed in the last few months.

These policy decisions have solidified Somalia's place and influence in regional politics and diplomacy. While the region remains plagued with complex issues of peace building, tensions, migration, trade among others, the openness invited by this administration and its other partners' fosters dialogue required to deal with existing and emergent issues. Some of the conflict issues in Somalia are cross border related.

Somalia is also articulating its legitimacy as a federal government by reminding its neighbors and the African continent that states that make up the federal states are subject to its authority and cannot be said to be independent entities without infringing on Somalia's sovereignty, a position that has been well stated by newly found diplomacy between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti.

The offer to deploy troops to South Sudan has been criticized as akin to giving the neighbor food and leaving the children hungry given the internal security issues that the military has to deal with internally. However this decision aligns carefully to one of the foreign policy of this

government which is to actively encourage peace and security through the promotion of Somalia as a neutral venue for dialogue and mediation. It is not uncommon for governments to come to the help of neighbours in military matters even when they themselves are facing internal security crises as witnessed in the UK which was fighting Iraq war even with North Ireland conflict at its door step⁸. Burundi⁹ is also a case in point.

SMARTING THE STORM IN THE GCC CRISIS

Interestingly, Somalia as a member of the Arab league in the last one year has been caught up in the least expected diplomatic scenario. In June 2017, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) rivalry entered a new low that culminated into the blockade of Qatar a process that was sponsored by UAE and Saudi Arabia. Naturally members of the Arab League were supposed to take sides.

Contrary to expectation, this administration adopted a pragmatic approach to this crisis committing to stay strictly neutral in the wake of this crisis. However, the crisis did boil over to Somalia's own borders with UEA making several actions – illustrated in box 2.0 that left diplomatic relations between the two states very frosty.

The closure of a key hospital in Mogadishu that provided critical humanitarian aid to over 300 persons per day laid bare the intentions of UAE was not to support the government in dealing with post conflict humanitarian issues but to gain political leverage that could be used to coerce Somalia and by extension curtailing its effective participation in multilateral diplomacy as espoused in its foreign policy. Similar considerations can be made in respect to the withdrawal of military support though it goes to show the lengths UEA would go to threaten the internal security of Somalia.

⁸ According to the Telegraph (2014) during the Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991. Operation Desert Storm saw 53,462 UK personnel deployed to help liberate Kuwait. This was against a backdrop of British Military deployment in Northern Ireland code named Operation Banner billed as the longest deployment in UK history spanning between 1969-2007. Operation Banner: "An analysis of military operations in Northern Ireland". UK-Ministry of Defence. 2006

⁹ The Burundi contingent is the second largest within AMISOM with 5,432 troops. The country was also the second to deploy troops into Somalia, its first soldiers having arrived in Mogadishu in December 2007. AMISOM (2018)

Box 1.0: Foreign Policy Decisions advancing regional co-operation

- African Union Mission to *Somalia* (AMISOM) is planning to pull out troops out of Somalia as soon as 2020. Handover of Mogadishu Military Academy to the Somali government is underway.
- Smart diplomacy by Somalia has been credited by some sources as a main contributor to peace deal signed on 9th July 2018.
- In August 2017 Somalia and Eritrea restored relations, after nearly 15 years of animosity
- In September 2018, a tripartite pact by Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea was signed in Asmara. The agreement states that:
 - a) The three countries shall foster comprehensive cooperation that advances the goals of their peoples.
 - b) The three countries shall build close political, economic, social, cultural and security ties.
 - c) The three countries shall work in coordination to promote regional peace and security.
 - d) The three governments hereby establish a Joint High-Level Committee to coordinate their efforts in the framework of this Joint Declaration.
- In September 2018, Somalia agrees to send peace keeping troops to South Sudan to reinforce the Addis Ababa Peace Deal.

On the upside, the GCC crisis has provided an opportunity for this administration to demonstrate that it will go to any lengths to Protect Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The severance of Berbera port contract and termination of military cooperation in Puntland is a clear indication Somalia is a federal state and that the federal government has the prerogative to enter into international treaties on behalf of the Somalia people. This power cannot be assumed by a state which is a member of this government.

The haphazard withdrawal of UAE development assistance, the contingencies to these agreements notwithstanding, can also construed as an opportunity for this administration to engage with bilateral and multilateral partners in a manner that sets forth it agenda of mobilization of national, bilateral and multilateral resources for Somali-led development. Of course this position was not forthcoming in the current and immediate past Mogadishu- Abu

Dhabi nexus. Further, it has been alleged that Emirates were using the port of Berbera to launch attack in Yemen and to foster this war. The severance of the passage goes a long way to reinforce Somalia's position that it would not venture into a union that disfavors a member of the Arab league. This would have otherwise been construed as diplomatic double speak if the status quo would have been maintained.

In addition, the government has also come up strongly to stem criminal activities taking place on its soil irrespective of the perpetrator and relationship with the government thereof. The crimes of international money laundering and smuggling has been exposed, much to the chagrin of UAE and other like-minded states. This reinforces the principle that countries ought to respect the laws and independence of their counterparts since foreign relations are based on mutual respect a principle that this administration is keen to pursue.

Box 2.0: In the heat of the GCC crisis

- President Abdulahi government declares neutrality in the intra-GCC spat and offers to reconcile the rival parties
- UAE pressurizes Somalia to support the Qatar blockade through the following actions:
 - a) Closure of Sheikh Zaid hospital in Mogadishu
 - b) Withdraws military training of Somalia troops in Mogadishu
- In response Somalia government:
 - a) Annulled agreement between UAE government and Somaliland for use of the port of Berbera in March 2018.
 - b) Somalia ended military UAE military co-operation program started in 2014 including in states of Puntland and Somaliland
 - c) UAE diplomatic plane is stopped after a tipoff and USD\$9.6 million is found and confiscated
 - d) In April 2018, a UAE military plane is subjected to normal security procedures causing a diplomatic spat between the two countries

RENEWING SOMALIA'S ROLE IN IGAD

Somalia continues to recognize the important role played by IGAD towards fostering regional cooperation within eastern Africa. It is also reminiscent of the important mediation role played during the conflict years. This relationship can fairly be described as give and take. Somalia has played a role in hostility cessation in South Sudan as demonstrated in the agreement between conflicting parties signed in December 2017, with FGS acting as a Guarantor among other member states. This goes to show the level of commitment and priority this administration accords to peace and security in the region.

As if to lend a hand to a brother, IGAD on its part has continued to support national reconciliation, integration and peace building in Somalia through actions illustrated in Box 3.0 below. These actions will further reaffirm the FGS position as the only entity within the federal republic capable of serving the interest of all Somali's indiscriminately. This backdrop may explain why this administration has succeeded in negotiating a refugee resettlement program that aligns with its national development plan as opposed to its predecessor who had to contend with forced repatriations from Kenya.

In further recognition of the need for regional integration, FGS has applied for joining the membership of East African community. This will help consolidated the integration gains made to the north fostering them clearly with those of the east and south. The geopolitical strategy will be fortified forthwith. Bilateral agreements have also been entered to aimed at improving government service delivery to the people of Somalia as exemplified in the civil service capacity building accords entered into with Kenya and Burundi.

Box 3.0: Fostering regional integration and renewing Somalia's role in IGAD

- December 2017 Federal Government of Somalia along with other IGAD Heads of States guaranteed the Revitalized Agreement for the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS)
- July 29, 2018: The European Union (EU) and Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) today signed a One Million Three Hundred Thousand Euros Grant Agreement to support Inclusive State Formation, National Reconciliation and Political Dialogue in Somalia.
- IGAD is supporting the integration of Somalia and consolidation of Sovereign authority by the FGS. For instance, through its Special Mission to Somalia (SMS) with the lead role of the FGS embarked on the commencement of the implementation of the Peace Agreement signed between the leadership of Galmudug Administration and Ahlu Sunna Wal Ja (ASWJ) in December 2017. This will entail merging of parliament, the harmonization of the constitution and the formation of an inclusive cabinet for Galmudug region as well as the integration of ASWJ forces
- March 2018, secured an undertaking with IGAD member countries that repatriation of Somali refugees and reintegration of returnees will be done within the framework of Somalia's National Action Plan.
- 2018: Republic of Somalia tendered its application to become the 7th member of the East African Community (EAC).
- Civil servants capacity building partnerships between Kenya and Burundi

OPENING UP TO GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

The Somalia nation and its people have suffered from all forms of ostracized and labelled trouble makers for mistakes that are not their own in what has famously been referred to as the 'Somalia syndrome'. It therefore incumbent on any administration that has the interest of its people at heart to counter such negative narrative especially within the domain of international relations.

This administration may not have entirely succeeded in doing so since negative travel advisories still exists against Somalia but it is making steady progress towards permanently changing this scenario.

This article observes that the travel route to Mogadishu is now open with direct flights to Nairobi among other cities. It is worth noting that previously, flight bound to Nairobi would stop over in Wajir for reasons only well known to the Kenyan authorities. While this may look like a normal occurrence, given the circumstance it is a milestone.

Still on the issue of international travel, this administration has continued to negotiate and secure free movement of Somali people as part of its agenda in building friendships and allies. Even in the midst of sensational, emotive and populist migration debates in Europe, FGS has enjoyed recognition of its passport in several jurisdictions the latest if not most significant being Norway which arrived in July 2018. This serves to affirm that Somali people can freely integrate with the international communities and become truly global citizens equally participating and partaking in the gains of social economics and culture.

Box 4.0: Opening up to global citizenship

- April 2017 direct flights from Mogadishu to Nairobi
- July 2018 Norway decides to recognize Somali passports. Other European Union countries that have since recognized Somalia Passport include France, Italy, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia.
- Direct flights are available from Mogadishu to Addis Ababa and Djibouti

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above discourse it is obtainable unequivocally the Abdallah's administration has breathed life into Somalia's foreign policy either by deliberate well thought actions or circumstantial decisions aimed at reinforcing its diplomatic position and narrative. Amid these successes, this article advice that the government pays attention to some strategic issues if the gains earned so far are to be consolidated.

First, the administration needs to be wary that partners with whom relations have become frosty. This is because they may use their influence and resources to prey on internal tensions and create animosity between the federal government and states that seemingly enjoyed prosperity during the national crisis. Such influence should be nipped at the bud.

The current administration needs to invest in foreign relations optics that will direct its position and advance its narrative. Naturally, some of the aggressors may want to play victims as a way of seeking attention and advancing their rhetoric against the trustworthiness of Somalia in

international matters. It is therefore imperative on this administration to find ways of vigorously telling its stories to the international community and to the Somali nation. In so doing any effort to paint this government as confrontational or self-serving will be discounted.

There is need to rally the political class in Somalia in supporting foreign relation decisions made by the administration. The support should present as a framework for domesticating and institutionalizing foreign agreements, treaties and compacts made so that follow through can be achieved in the FGS. For instance, as more and more nations declare recognition of the Somalia passport, the immigration systems in FGS should be made to conform with international best standard so that these relations can be maintained. This is surely the work of the legislative assembly coupled by thoughtful actions of technocrats and civil servants. Similar issues require to be confronted as regards many other foreign policy decisions.

Finally, the ultimate test of a robust foreign policy initiative is the impacts it presents to the citizens of a country. This administration needs to develop mechanisms through which decisions made at the international level are made to deliberately impact the masses in Somalia in their quest to fight poverty, secure good education for their children and live healthy lives. It is necessary to consolidate immediate and long term benefits in trade, humanitarian action, while paying attention to assuring much needed safety and security. In doing so, the politics and idealism of foreign relations will converge with the reality of the Somalia people.

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