

Farmaajo's Presidency

A scorecard for the first two years and the prospects for the remaining two

Executive summary

Mohamed Abdullahi 'Farmaajo' was elected as the President of Somalia on 8 February 2017 on a platform of comprehensive reform, improved security, political stability, a revived economy, reduced corruption and a smart foreign policy. Two years later, the President's scorecard is mixed, with some encouraging achievements in certain areas but plenty of shortcomings on most of the lofty political promises detailed during his presidential campaign. Together with his Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khaire, Farmaajo's administration has made sustained progress on the debt relief process, robustly reengaged with international financial institutions, increased revenues and maintained public confidence and unity of purpose among the government's executive branch (the president and the prime minister). However, many key election promises remain unfulfilled.

Gone is the promise to defeat Al-Shabaab within two years or even reopen Mogadishu's perpetually closed roads. Domestically, the last two years have been marked by upheaval and incessant clashes with federal member states (FMS). The forcible replacement of the leadership of the legislature and the judiciary surprised even Farmaajo's most ardent supporters. On key policy matters, an agreement on the most contentious issues in the constitution has yet to materialize. Similarly, there is no agreement on Somalia's electoral model for the 2020 elections, making the prospect of a one person, one vote election highly improbable. The federation process has not deepened and most of the regional governments are neither stronger nor better run than they were two years ago.

Negotiations with Somaliland have stalled and mistrust between the two camps is at an all-time high.

On foreign policy, relations with Somalia's traditional partners such as the UN, most European countries, Turkey, Uganda, the largest trading partners in the Gulf namely Saudi Arabia and Djibouti, a sister country, are tenuous at best if not strained. Somalia's closest allies are reduced to a handful of countries. There is definitely a lot more talk of fighting corruption and there is improved transparency in some aspects of the government's internal revenue collection and expenditure. However, the way in which the Farmaajo administration acquires external support, particularly from Qatar, and how it dispenses it is at best an enigma. Consequently, it's hard to objectively say whether the squandering of public resources has diminished. One may even argue it has become more brazen, with payoffs becoming the preferred currency for securing the loyalty of MPs and votes throughout Somalia.

Why make the assessment now?

Two years after Farmaajo came to power with a plethora of promises and exceptionally heightened expectations, the Somali people should understand how their government is performing in a way that goes beyond the 280 characters of Twitter or the pretentious Facebook photo ops favored by the government to demonstrate its successes. Our midterm appraisal shows that, while the president's campaign pledges remain largely unfulfilled, his administration made some achievements in the face of unprecedented, mostly self-made, crises.

The Farmaajo administration has also been able to mobilize the public behind the government in a way that previous administrations were unable to do. And although the fever pitch enthusiasm of the Farmaajo brand is demonstrably waning, the government still retains strong support among segments of the public who believe that the president has good intentions, even if he falls short on delivering them. That is good for Farmaajo but not for the country. Somalia needs a leader who can turn things around quickly, especially on key issues pertaining to security, governance and holding free and fair elections.

How did we go about our assessment?

We used the outcomes of the London Conference on Somalia in May 2017 to objectively assess the Farmaajo administration. We did this for several reasons. First, the administration presented a comprehensive governance program at the conference encompassing core objectives on security, inclusive politics, the economy and social services. Second, the London Conference was held three months after Farmaajo was elected and two months after his cabinet was formed. This gave the administration adequate time to craft strategies and begin implementing them. Third, the administration signed the Mutual Accountability Framework (MAF) with the donor community, which agreed to fund its programs and projects as long as the government adhered to its implementation. Fourth, the MAF is truly the only cogent and meaningful strategy document released by the Farmaajo administration to date, making it relatively simple and straightforward to use as an assessment tool.

Against that backdrop, we have reviewed the core outcomes of the London Conference of May 2017 and the MAF and developed key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure the administration's performance over the past two years. Of course, we fully understand that there are a number of external factors impacting performance. For that reason, we will use the lowest threshold as a KPI.

1. Inclusive and stable politics

The first outcome of the London Conference was a promise by the FGS to create a system of inclusive and stable politics which included a review of the provisional constitution; deepening the federal system; and designing an electoral system that results in one person, one vote. There was a good reason that inclusive politics was made a priority in London. Donors have realized that in the absence of a single group that controls the entire nation, the surest way to reconstitute any post conflict,

fragile and fractured state such as Somalia is to create a conducive environment for political dialogue, consensus-building and consultations, even if that means incredibly slow and frustrating processes. As is clear from the rest of the benchmarks, almost every strand revolves around inclusive politics.

On this KPI, the administration's overall score is dismal. The only strand with any tangible progress is the review of the provisional constitution. There has been quantifiable progress in widening the scope of consultations with diverse actors from civil society though these are largely PR-oriented and lacking in any results. Consultations have also taken place in some of the federal member states and this is encouraging given the otherwise acrimonious relationship between the two sides. However, as the London Conference emphasized, this process needs to be transparent given its importance. It must also produce agreements on contentious issues such as resource and power sharing, the status of the capital and the type and the form of the Somali state (a parliamentary or presidential system). Also worth noting is that a review of the constitution cannot take place without an agreed-upon amending formula which does not yet exist.

On the need to deepen the federal system, the government has also failed spectacularly. Confrontation has been the permanent posture of the government, ultimately forcing the states to form the Council of Interstate Cooperation (CIC), a loose entity designed to fend off the hegemonic ambitions of the federal government. In recent months, the CIC has lost two of its key figures including its chairman, Abdiweli Ali Gaas, the former President of Puntland, and the former president of the Southwest state, Sharif Hassan Sheikh Aden. The latter resigned under duress and the federal government's subsequent domination of the process to replace him was widely condemned as a farce.

More than 15 people lost their lives in violent confrontations in Baidoa, the interim capital of Southwest state, after the government re-arrested Mukhtar Robow, a former Al-Shabaab commander. Robow defected from Al-Shabaab, befriended the Farmaajo administration and ran for the presidency of Southwest state where he was widely considered the frontrunner because of his charisma, intra clan dynamics and his rebranded anti- Al-Shabaab credentials. The government arrested Robow with the help of Ethiopia, effectively paving the way for its preferred candidate Abdiaziz Laftagreen.

Overall there is no rapport between the member states and the FGS, and the relationship has been exceedingly toxic in certain regions, particularly Galmudug and Jubbaland. Trust has eroded and suspicion increased, leading member states to conclude that there is no incentive to further decentralize power in their jurisdictions as it could expose them to greater risks.

The administration has not fared any better with the electoral process. The last time any substantive and high-level discussions took place was in Baidoa in the middle of 2018, when the federal government and member states agreed on the principle of universal suffrage. Since then, the two sides have disputed certain key provisions in that agreement, namely the type of electoral constituency (a single countrywide constituent or state-based constituencies).

Moreover, the government seems to be deliberately promoting its preferred but very vague version of the 2020 election and avoiding discussing with Somali stakeholders (such as political parties, parliament and civil society) in a democratic and transparent fashion about how an inclusive and genuine one-person one-vote election could be organized in Somalia. This may be because Somalia's political leaders and their advisors are fixated on consolidating power and being reelected. Of course, the continued cold war and open acrimony between the government and the member states is another critical contributing factor to the lack of progress.

Above all other KPIs, holding free and fair elections is the most important thing for every citizen. For close to two decades, Somalis were relegated to the role of spectators during elections, as traditional elders or delegates – who tragically sold their votes to the highest bidders – cast votes indirectly and undemocratically. For now, it is safe to assume that the prospect of universal suffrage during the government's remaining mandate is highly unlikely. Similarly, an extension, though now being entertained by some pro-government MPs, is never a good idea in Somalia. Similarly, most political actors avoid a discussion on credible and attractive alternatives to universal suffrage. If bold, non-partisan mitigating measures are not taken soon, the prospect for a rushed, manipulated and undemocratic (s)election is a looming reality.

The inclusive and stable politics pillar also included respect for human rights, the protection of civil liberties and freedom of assembly and an unimpeded media. The government has failed on all these fronts.

Its security forces attacked opposition politicians, killing several bodyguards, and the government has repeatedly denied political parties their constitutional right to assemble. Moreover, it renditioned, illegally, a Somali national to Ethiopia and branded him a terrorist.

The government has muzzled independent media and engaged in unprecedented propaganda campaigns on social media and even from the pulpit to deliberately manipulate a susceptible citizenry. The president himself was recently on record labeling independent media critical of his administration as “promoters of violence”. The erosion of democratic space under the Farmaajo administration is both alarming and unprecedented.

2. Strengthening national security

The second major agreement reached in London among Somalis (the federal government and the states) and with the donor community was to strengthen national security by reinstating the National Security Council (NSC); rebuilding an inclusive security force; and aligning security action with reconciliation and grassroots community engagement known as the Wadajir Framework.

The government has not yet reestablished the NSC, in part because it was reluctant to empower the member states whose leaders had been members of the previous council under President Hassan Sheikh. The NSC is designed to be a high level strategic platform where policy decisions concerning the security sector are made. It was designed that way in recognition of the fact that the government and member states co-governed the country, as the federation process was at best a work in progress. Farmaajo has convened the NSC only once since returning from London and wrangling with the member states has made further meetings unattainable. However, he has reestablished the National Security Office, led by a senior advisor, to coordinate security efforts.

Under the agreement to build inclusive security forces, the federal government and member states committed to providing 18,000 soldiers, 3,000 from each of the five member states. The objective was to finally reform the armed forces by truly nationalizing their rank and file. The international community committed to equipping the troops and paying their salaries until the government could afford to take over. The new force was intended to come under the direct command of the federal ministry of defense, with consultations with member states where necessary. This plan was dead on arrival.

Its demise had a lot to do with an absence of political consensus among key stakeholders, namely the federal government and member states. Moreover, some parliamentarians politicized the restructuring of the SNA asserting that it was an attempt to weaken the national army while it is engaged in fierce battles with Al-Shabaab. This gave the Farmaajo administration an excuse to quash a plan it had never been keen on in the first place.

Instead, the government established a security team known as the Stabilization Force, which was widely criticized as it was not part of the police or military structures, making it look like an armed militia. After months of heightened and politicized debates the Stabilization Force was absorbed into the police in Mogadishu.

The London Conference also recommended creating a 50,000 strong police force over the next five years. The objective was to localize security efforts in towns and villages, as many of Somalia's insecurity problems don't require a military response. The country needs intelligence gathering capabilities and a police force with robust training and local roots. Under plans laid out at the conference, member states would create, finance and command their own local police forces.

The security plans envisioned at the London Conference were not implemented. Instead, the government created command instability by changing army, police and intelligence commanders several times over. Meanwhile, Al-Shabaab continued its destabilization and terror campaigns, wreaking havoc in Mogadishu. The 14 October 2017 and 28 February 2019 attacks that killed several hundred people in downtown Mogadishu symbolized the government's inability to fulfill its election promise and get a grip on the security of the capital city.

The third and final plan to strengthen national security was to implement the Wadajir Framework, creating unity at the local level and embedding reconciliation efforts by forming local districts. The logic was that the pervasive insecurity could only be tackled at the district and neighborhood levels once the country's administration and security forces were integrated. Aside from two districts formed in Southwest state and countless consultations, this plan also failed, becoming more collateral damage of the political infighting between the federal government and the member states.

3. Economic recovery

The final agreement reached in London focused on economic recovery. It had four strands: a) Debt relief and re-engagement with international financial institutions, b) Increasing domestic revenues,

c) Implementing the current National Development Plan and preparing for the next one and, d) Exploiting and managing natural resources responsibly.

This strand is where the government has made the most progress over the past two years. First, it has accelerated the process of debt relief. In two short years, it has managed to successfully pass the third Staff Monitoring Program (SMP). The SMP is a highly technical process with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) intended to discipline poor countries into a strict financial management and economic development regime. In fact, the government has won the confidence of the European Union, which is providing direct budgetary support for the first time in decades. That is a tremendous achievement in a short period of time. It is also on track to secure the first concessional loan from the World Bank within the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) process.

On the objective of expanding domestic revenue, the government has increased its income by about 15-20 percent over the past two years (the trend over the past 10 years has been a steady revenue increase). Still, this administration, particularly its finance ministry, has been effective in keeping the public informed about income trends and deserves tremendous accolades for finally putting the entire budget online. That said, the decision by the government to sack the Parliamentary Finance and Planning Committee after it alleged that USD 42 million was missing was an overreach and antithesis to the administration's claim of fighting corruption. To remove an oversight body that has lodged a serious claim against you only deepens suspicions of malfeasance.

The government has tried hard to implement the programs outlined in the 2017-2019 National Development Plan (NDP) – the first in 30 years – and has consistently held the monthly government and donors meeting known as the SDRF (Somali Development and Reconstruction Facility) under which the implementation of the NDP is organized. However, it was unable to fully align the NDP with its own four-pillar program, and hasn't been able to implement all aspects of the plan given the high turnover at the helm of key line ministries and at the senior civil servants level. This was also due in part to the complex nature of the SDRF funding pipelines and the alignment of programs with resources. To its credit, the government is already in the process of drafting the next NDP and consultations are underway across the country with member states and civil society groups.

On the fourth and final objective, focused on exploiting and managing national resources responsibly, the government is making dangerous mistakes.

It is rushing to auction off oil blocks without first putting in place strong oversight and transparency mechanisms. The fact that the prime minister used to be an executive of Soma Oil, a company with checkered past, is more than enough of a reason to worry about the deal. The government has been unpersuasive about why it is rushing to present the offshore seismic data collected from the Indian Ocean by Soma Oil and marketed by Spectrum SA. This firm has been paying the salaries of the petroleum ministry for years and is also given the opportunity to explore some of the blocks – another glaring conflict of interest. For all its talk of fighting corruption and transparency, this process is fraught with self-serving ambiguity and has the hallmarks of conflict interest. The government’s handling of Somalia’s natural resources is a stain on its credibility as a guardian of Somalia’s natural wealth despite FGS leaders’ ‘see no evil, hear no evil’ pretensions.

Hasty oil exploration has been a curse in other post conflict contexts. An ongoing debate around oil exploration is needed if Somalia is to ever manage its natural resources carefully and responsibly. Even the fishing deal awarded to a Chinese company raised significant questions about its fidelity and transparency. The revenue generated by the government (USD 1 million) sounds like a pittance compared to the haul permitted for the Chinese fishing company.

Conclusion and way forward

Halfway through its four-year mandate, the performance record of the government, assessed against its own program presented during the London Conference on Somalia in May 2017, is far below expectations. It has effectively used traditional and social media to portray a rosy picture of its work, but by our assessment it has barely met a quarter of the benchmarks it set for itself. However, we are taking the extraordinarily complex working environment and meager resources into account, and giving extra credit for some of the achievements, mainly on the economic recovery pillar.

Looking ahead, the government needs to revisit its core promises, particularly regarding inclusive and stable politics. Without creating a broad, stable, and consensus-based dispensation among key stakeholders (the member states, opposition parties, business leaders and civil society), the government won’t be able to achieve much, particularly the high priority tasks still pending such as tackling insecurity, finalizing the constitution and agreeing on an electoral model for 2020. Failure to fix Somalia’s politics will result in the government being shackled by the combined forces of its detractors and opportunistic external actors who stand to gain from its failure.

If the government can actually produce what it promised during the two years remaining on its mandate, it can make a compelling case for re(s)election. But with its current checkered scorecard, getting a second chance might be a tall order. For that reason, we believe that:

1. President Farmaajo should use the upcoming meeting with the leaders of the federal member states to press the reset button, repair relations and find common ground with all stakeholders. Those who are advising the president that compromise equals weakness are setting him up for failure. The government does not derive its power from its police and army but from the mandate it gained from the member states, opposition groups, civil society and the wider public.
2. The president should invite leaders of opposition parties for a genuine national dialogue on the core, outstanding issues such as the provisional constitution and the electoral model for 2020. The continued belligerent posturing towards opposition parties, independent media and civil society is not only counterproductive but it leads to a dangerous *cul de sac*.
3. Farmaajo should revive the National Security Council and use it as a platform to set strategy and outline policies on how to defeat Al-Shabaab. This would help to turn around the prevailing insecurity in the country along with the butchery of Mogadishu citizens on whom the government relies for taxes. The President should use his administration’s sophisticated mobilization capacity to lead an all-out war on the irredeemable elements of Al-Shabaab and call for dialogue with those who are interested in the political process. Al-Shabaab remains a deadly factor in Somalia, in part because Farmaajo-Khaire administration has never dedicated adequate energy to defeating them.
4. Only a popularly elected government with a solid mandate from citizens should explore and exploit the natural resources of this country. Even then, serious technical capabilities and robust legal and regulatory frameworks should precede engagement with foreign oil companies. The government should refrain from making deals involving Somalia’s oil and other natural resources, as they do not have a mandate from

the Somali people. The president will never be able to win the corruption argument as long as secrecy-shrouded wheeling and dealing is used to auction off Somalia's oil.

5. On the electoral process, the government needs to come clean to the Somali public and explain the challenges and hurdles impeding a one person, one vote election in late 2020. It should also state what is needed to mitigate such challenges and focus on creating a practical electoral model supported by all key stakeholders. This is not likely to be a nationwide one-person one-vote election, but should lead to a manipulation-free, peaceful and timely transfer of power in 2020.

6. To deepen reconciliation, the president should use the National Security Council to issue a call for a genuine dialogue with Somaliland based on mutual respect and compromise. The administration should also reverse its restriction on Somaliland's international development support. Farmaajo should issue a genuine apology to the people of Somaliland who suffered immensely because of the atrocities of the military regime, which would be a strong gesture for reconciliation.
7. President Farmaajo should strive to improve Somalia's relations with its traditional allies particularly the United Nations. Credibility, straightforwardness and an objective appraisal of state interests rather than tactical and expedient moves are indispensable tools for state building and fixing fragile and post conflict countries like Somalia.



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