



Center for Policy Analysis & Research (CfPAR)

On May 27th, 2013, we, the Center for Policy Analysis and Research (CfPAR), had the opportunity to visit the former Prime Minister of Somalia from 1964-1967, Hon. Abdirizak H. Hussein in his home in Minneapolis, MN. The reason of our visit was to interview him and document his views on different issues that are related to Somalia.

We have to underline that Hon. Abdirizak H. Hussein has offered great insights about how Somalia can overcome some of the ills that its people have been suffering from for the last two decades. We hope that all Somali stakeholders will pay attention to the views offered by Hon. Abdirizak H. Hussein, and use them to apply how to fix the self-inflicted crisis that the country is still undergoing.

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1. **CfPAR:** Mr. P.M, it is a great honor for us to meet and sit with you. We thank you for accepting our request, and having us in your house today.

If we may begin our first question, during the transitional period since 2000, we have been hearing conflicts between presidents, prime ministers, and parliament speakers. Since you were the second P.M. of Somalia under President Adan Abdulle Osman, could you describe your work relationship with him, and in general, the work relationship between presidents and speakers of the parliament?

P.M. Abdirizak H. Hussein:

This is really a great question, and I am not sure if I would be able to give its due answer. The core relationship between Prime Ministers and Presidents is connected to the job description that the constitution mandates in detail. I was part of the Government that you mentioned, and Adan Abdulle Osman was its President—PM Abdirashid A Sharma'arke (may Allah have mercy on them) was before me.... President Adan Abdulle Osman had worked hard to uphold and safeguard the constitution. This is what he was known for, and must be commended. He was very careful to not interfere in the responsibility that the constitution gives to the Prime

Minister. Therefore, I think upholding the constitution was the main factor that prevented major disputes from happening between President Adan Abdulle Osman and his two Prime Ministers for the seven years that he was in the office.

On the other hand, the relationship between presidents and speakers goes back to the specific roles that the constitution defines. The speaker presides over the process of legislative bills submitted to the parliament for debate. He/she orders and prioritizes the tasks before the parliament, and in our time, the Parliament held two sessions per year. Generally speaking, legislative bills can be submitted by the government, but most of the cases, Parliament produces bills for legislation. So, the speaker's big responsibility is to put all the legislation bills together, and ensure that the Parliament operates in a smooth and orderly fashion.

Presidents, prime ministers and the speakers of the parliament must always have a sound working relationship. They have specific roles, and all these roles are interdependent.

- 2. CfPAR:** Recent years, we have been hearing accusations that Somalia is very much associated with “corruption.” Also, we hear the same accusation is stumped with the civilian system that ruled the country before 1969. However, you were part of the civilian system, and it was nicknamed as "the era of corruption.” Is this what the military system wanted to defame you, or it was a reality?

P.M. Abdirizak H. Hussein:

On the issue of corruption, any institution that exists in the world, there is some sort of corruption. The question is on the degree or the level of the corruption that is taking place. Specifically, when we talk about the developing countries, especially African countries, corruption is really a widespread phenomenon. Somalia nowadays is ranked number one in corruption by [Transparency International](http://www.transparency.org), the agency that researches corruption indexes in the world. I think, if true, the corruption that is associated with Somalia is related to the chaotic condition and the lawlessness that the country has been going through for the last two decades.

The big question is where is the source of corruption in Somalia? Are the donor countries themselves part of the corruption? Or is it the Somali government that mismanages the funds that it receives from the donor countries? I hear the Somali leaders, who are in one way or another, accused of corruption, saying that they have never received the funds, because the funds are managed by NGOs, which may even have not been in the country [nowadays they started to move into the country]. Therefore, even though Somalis are not immune from corruption, fingers can be pointed at those who manage the funds that are allocated for Somalia. Personally, I don't think that those international NGOs are immune from corruption.

On the other hand, the issue of corruption is an unfortunate phenomenon that is also part of the poverty. People are looking for opportunities and resources so that they can fill their pockets.

During our administration, from 1964-1967, I can't say that we were 100% free of corruption, but I think compared to other African countries, Somalia was a very much less corrupted country.

- 3. CfPAR:** Leaders in African countries are known for their passion in power: to stay in power till death or overthrown by uprisings. How did it happen that you and President Adan Abdulle Osman accepted defeat through the ballot and left office?

P.M. Abdirizak. H. Hussein:

Simply, we respected the Law. We upheld the constitution and all the other laws pertaining to Presidential elections. However, we were fully aware that with elections rivalries arise. One of the things that made President Adan Abdulle Osman very exceptional was that he rebuffed the Members of the Parliament who approached him [for bribes]. And if corruption had a father and mother, it is the MPs [regardless of time]. In our time, it was the MPs' custom to wait for the right occasion of turbulence, as at election time, [to strike]. I know many MP's approached President Adan Abdulle Osman to ask for bribes in exchange for votes. President Adan Abdulle Osman's invariable answer to these men was "If you think my election is in the interest of the country, vote for me; but if you think another person is more suitable, follow your conscience and vote for the other person!"

When he refused [to give bribes], MPs used to claim, "This man is not serious about re-election." The President's political opponents interpreted his refusal to bribe Members of Parliament as ingratitude, and his rivals exhorted the MPs that they [unlike President Adan Abdulle Osman] would pay them and are grateful for their votes. However, their main objective and intention was to unseat the President.

So, we upheld the Law. My team and I as a Prime Minister worked hard campaigning for the re-election President Adan Abdulle Osman. The fact was that President Adan Abdulle Osman had been in Office for seven years; and it is customary that, when one has been in office for a long time, fatigue sets in among the populace. Others will claim they can be better. So, maybe, that was a factor that we lost the election. Within three or four days after President Adan Abdulle Osman left Office, however, people had a sense of his worth.

We were very concerned about being the cause of anarchy and conflict for the first Somali state. We did not want to leave the office with bad reputation associated with us for the rest of our life time.

4. **CfPAR:** In the last twenty years, Somalia has been known as a "failed State." what do you think were the main factors that led Somalia to fail?

P.M. Abdirizak H. Hussein:

The causes of the collapse of the Somali state were bad leadership and bad policies. And all this, bad leadership and bad policies, is [in the Somali context] fundamentally caused by tribalism. In Somalia, up until today, as is obvious... I don't know... I don't want to prejudge the current President. The times are tense, and there are quite a few little contested issues in Somalia... and just in case, anyone who expects a quick fix is dreaming. So, I am not blaming the President for anything yet, but I don't think his predecessors had a sense of the situation in the country; nor did they avoid tribalism, or understand that tribalism was what destroyed Somalia, or strive to weaken tribalism and foster Somali national consciousness among the people in such a way that their [the leaders'] words and deeds could match. So, I think the problem has so far been bad leadership and bad policies based on clan exploitation.

5. **CfPAR:** Reconciliation is one of the concepts that are heard over and over, and the reason is that Somalis have lost confidence to one another due to the conflicts of the last two decades. How the love and trust among Somalis can come back?

P.M. Abdirizak H. Hussein:

Good leadership! Good leadership!

What does good leadership mean? I think what is needed are people who can take the lead; people who are sincere; people whose words and deeds match; people who avoid everything that can divide people; people who refrain from favoritism, nepotism and cronyism; people who point to and follow the Law. People have agreed on rules; a constitution has been written; other laws have been legislated. These [laws] are the way, because many people gathered and agreed to have them as laws, and they are what we have today for the basis of justice. They should be implemented as they are without any deviation from left or right. If people realize that the leaders are practicing what they are preaching and upholding the Law, there would, in my view, be no dispute. So it is dependent on the behavior of the leadership.

- 6. CfPAR:** On the issue of federalism, we see there is a great confusion on how to apply it. Nations are known to have one President, and we hear “multiple presidents” in the country. What are other names that can be given to those who call themselves “presidents”?

P.M. Abdirizak. H. Hussein:

I have already, in many times, stated my view on federalism in Somalia. Federalism is not suitable for Somalia. The governance system that is suitable for Somali is the European system, like France and Italy. In this system, there is a central government, but regions have their own autonomy, and governors are appointed. In the United States, on the other hand, there is a federal system, and the heads of states are called governors; they are not presidents.

In our country, however, the reputation of “central government” has been lost; because of the dictatorial system that the country went through from 1969-1990 as everything was very much centralized. In the civilian rule from 1960-1969, the constitution exactly mandated a decentralized administration, and that was the goal. Decentralized administration begins from municipalities, and we had municipalities, but the unfortunate fact was that we didn’t have enough human capital who could execute the work. The small percentage of human capital that we had during our time wanted to work/hold positions in the central government, and no one wanted to stay in small municipal villages. This had led those with less capacity in leadership and administration to grab the municipal power even though, in our administration, we worked hard to encourage municipalities. We set up a policy that secretaries at the municipal level had to have a high school diploma then to give them some trainings in management so that they can be sent to regions to work (i.e., conducting the census of the population in the region, to record the vital statistics [birth and death recordings] of the cities/towns]. Regardless of clan affiliations, those who reside in small municipalities were those who used to participate in the elections at the local level.

During my administration, we did our best to train secretaries to do the work, but this did not happen due to mismanagement of the funds that the municipalities used to receive from the central government despite the fact that we had been routinely conducting internal auditing for inspection. So, decentralization was there, but human capital was not there. Today, we have enough human capital.

Furthermore, let me come to the federalism notion that we nowadays hear from Somalis. I think there are two reasons why now federalism is sought after. One, there are some people who want to boost clan interests. They want to establish their own “mini-lands” that are based on clan affiliations. Two, most of those that we hear pushing the agenda of federalism have a sense of “victimhood” in their minds. Specially, this comes from those who affiliate with the Daarood clan. It goes back to the grievances of what happened in Mogadishu in 1991. It was a great tragedy that they will never forget; they were expelled from the city that they invested; their properties were looted,

and human lives were lost. As a result, unfortunately, Mogadishu has become a place that belongs to one clan. This is why we see the notions of “Puntland and Jubbaland,” and other so-called “lands” that we hear from here and there.

On the other hand, my fellow brothers who reside in Mogadishu area, I don’t think they have realized the wrongdoings that happened, and as of today, I have not heard anyone who offered a full and public apology of what happened in 1991. If we want to bring Somalia back together, this issue needs to be prioritized. In my view, if we want to keep Mogadishu as our capital, the constitution must clearly indicate that it must be like Washington DC; a federal city that its borders are known; a federal city that has federal security system; and most importantly every Somali can feel its ownership. That is the only way that Mogadishu can be seen as a capital city for Somalia. We have to be truthful to one another if we want to reach a solution.

Finally, as you stated rightly, Somalia has to have one President, and the titles of heads of regions have to be governors, not presidents, because too many presidents within one state is chaos and don’t make any sense. In my view, those “president” titles that we hear nowadays from the heads of regions are just misnomers.

7. **CfPAR:** Mr. P.M., if you would have been asked to offer one advice to the current Somali government, what that advice would have been?

P.M. Abdirizak H. Hussein:

If I would have been asked to give an advice, I would have just given the same thing that I said in this conversation. The laws must be upheld; the rule of law must be clear and followed. Among the rule of laws, constitution is in front of us; descriptions of power separation between presidents and prime ministers are clear. There is no much difference between the current constitution [though not complete yet] and the one that we had during the presidency of Adan Abdulle Osman.

In the whole of Africa, we see there is a one man show system. Beginning the time of Mohamed Siad Barre when he came to power and then, presidents are the only visible. Prime ministers are just nominal. With due respect, as we are speaking, the current President is the only limelight that we see. It should not be that way, because the president is the symbol of unity; he/she must not be doing anything that damages his credibility, because he is the ultimate reference that people go back to whenever there are crises.

Engaging in contested issues is the work of the prime ministers and the executive branch. Since the system of Ali Mahdi and up to today, I just see presidents are the center of attention, and the constitution does not absolutely give that power to presidents. Therefore, the president must select a competent prime minister after consultations, not just to look after his own personal interest; like selecting an obedient prime minister that listens to him. If that is the thinking process, nothing will work well.

We need to have a prime minister who is highly educated, have a strong personality, competent, charismatic, upholds the law and honest. This is the kind of a person that must be entrusted to execute the day to day job of the government. The president must keep him/herself clean, because he/she is the final resort when there are disputes. If the president becomes implicated on the job of the prime minister, it is what keeps us down.

Nowadays, we hear that the blame is put on the President, because the President may seem engaging in hot issues that are not his job. If he wants to be at the center of attention, that is another issue. And if we want that should be the case, let us take a presidential form of government, like the United States system, but if we claim that we apply a parliamentary democratic system, like the European system—which is the way our constitution is really all about—we have to respect the law.

CfPAR: Thank you very much for hosting us, and we really appreciate for the opportunity that you have given us to sit and have this conversation with you.

P.M. Abdirizak H. Hussein:

You're welcome, and it was a great pleasure to have you here.

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