

# Somalia at a Crossroads: A Candid Assessment of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's Second Term

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's return to Villa Somalia in 2022 was historic. As the first Somali president to be re-elected in a non-consecutive term, he had the rare opportunity to lead with the benefit of hindsight — a second chance to reflect on what worked, correct what didn't, and realign the nation toward lasting peace and statehood.

His campaign message, “***Somali heshiis ah, dunida la heshiis ah***” — “**A Somalia at peace with itself and with the world**” — was both timely and ambitious, echoing the national yearning for reconciliation and re-engagement after years of fragmentation and violence.

## **Notable Accomplishments**

Despite immense challenges, President Hassan Sheikh's administration achieved several tangible and historic milestones:

- **Security Gains in Mogadishu:** The capital has seen a marked reduction in high-profile terrorist attacks over the past three years — the most stable period in over a decade. While Al-Shabaab remains a threat, Mogadishu's relative calm reflects significant coordination between local communities and national forces.
- **Debt Relief and Sovereignty Restoration:** Under his leadership, Somalia secured long-overdue **debt relief**, and the **UN arms embargo** — in place for over 30 years — was finally lifted, restoring a critical measure of state sovereignty and trust from the international community.
- **East African Integration and Diplomacy:** Somalia officially joined the **East African Community (EAC)** and secured a seat on the **UN Security Council for 2025** — major diplomatic wins that elevate Somalia's role on the global and regional stage.
- **Executive Cohesion:** President Hassan Sheikh and Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre have maintained a rare working partnership for over

three years — a stark contrast to the frequent executive power struggles that have plagued past governments.

- **Defending Sovereignty:** He took a firm stance in opposing Ethiopia's controversial deal with Somaliland, strongly reaffirming Somalia's territorial integrity and sending a clear message to regional powers.

## **Strategic Missteps and Leadership Gaps**

However, these gains were undercut by key strategic miscalculations and missed opportunities that have slowed Somalia's path to deeper reform:

- **Creation of the *Macawisley* Militia:** One of the most controversial decisions of his presidency was the formation of the **Macawisley**, a grassroots tribal militia mobilized to support the fight against Al-Shabaab. While the group saw initial success in liberating several rural areas, its momentum waned due to inconsistent support from national military command structures and a lack of professional oversight. Many Somali intellectuals and security experts warned early on that the use of tribal-based armed groups — **in the absence of true tribal reconciliation and national coordination** — risked further fragmentation and undermined long-term security strategy. Unfortunately, those warnings proved prescient.
- **Military Instability and Symbolic Reversals:** The removal and reinstatement of the Somali National Army's commander created confusion within military ranks during a pivotal moment in the anti-Al-Shabaab campaign, weakening morale and strategic coherence.
- **Disruption of Municipal Governance:** The frequent appointment and dismissal of **three different mayors of Mogadishu** during his term undermined the consistency of urban planning and service delivery in the capital — especially as the city struggled with rapid population growth and infrastructure strain.
- **Political Deals Over Democratic Norms:** President Hassan Sheikh's willingness to permit certain **regional presidents to extend their**

**mandates** without public consent, reportedly in exchange for political backing, has drawn sharp criticism. These backroom deals risk setting dangerous precedents and weakening Somalia's already fragile federalism.

- **Neglect of Anti-Corruption Measures:** Despite promises of reform, corruption remains rampant — particularly in the sale of public lands, government contracts, and informal taxation. The president has largely looked the other way, even as public frustration over unchecked profiteering grows.
- **IDP Mismanagement and Forced Evictions:** Mogadishu has seen the **largest evictions of internally displaced populations (IDPs)** under this administration. Many of these vulnerable citizens were forcibly evicted without proper planning or alternative housing, deepening humanitarian and urban crises. These are people who ended up in informal camps through no fault of their own — victims of conflict, and state collapse.

## **A Word on the Opposition and the Broader Political Class**

It must also be said: Somalia's political dysfunction is not the fault of one man. The **opposition leaders** — many of whom have previously held senior offices and **failed spectacularly** — continue to jockey for power without offering credible visions or national solutions. Their criticism often rings hollow, driven more by ambition than accountability.

Somalia does not need recycled politicians; it needs principled leadership across the spectrum — leadership grounded in public service, not personal gain.

## **Constructive Recommendations**

Looking ahead, President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud — and any future leaders — must prioritize the following actions:

1. **Hold National Elections On Time:** While *one-person, one-vote* remains aspirational, **Somalia cannot afford indefinite delays**. Elections — even imperfect ones — must be held on time, through any legitimate and

inclusive mechanism available.

2. **Establish an Independent Judiciary in Mogadishu:** At minimum, the federal government should create a **functional and independent court system in the capital**, where it has full authority. This will begin to restore public confidence in the rule of law.
3. **End Inhumane Evictions and Plan for Urban Displacement:** Evicting poor families without any plan for relocation or support must stop. These citizens are not criminals — they are survivors. A **national housing and urban development policy** is urgently needed.
4. **Invest in True Reconciliation:** Somalia's greatest wound remains unresolved: the lack of meaningful reconciliation between clans, regions, and generations. **Reconciliation is not a side program — it must be the foundation** of any durable peace or development strategy.
5. **Support and Elevate Selfless Leaders:** Across ministries, regional states, city governments, and civic sectors, Somalia needs **leaders of integrity**. Leadership must become about service, not status.

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## **Conclusion: A Legacy in the Balance**

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud's second term has been one of both **gains and contradictions** — one that moved Somalia forward on some fronts while leaving core fractures unresolved. His administration has shown that progress is possible — but also that it is fragile and easily undone by old habits.

He had the rare chance to learn from the past. Whether his leadership leaves a legacy of transformation or lost opportunity will ultimately depend on what comes next — not just from him, but from all of us.

Somalia's future will not be secured by slogans, military might, or international deals alone. It will depend on whether we — as a people — can forgive, reform, and rebuild together.

**Let this be the generation that chooses reconciliation over revenge, justice over expedience, and unity over power struggles.**