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## **THE MAJOR ISSUES OF INCOMING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOMALILAND**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Republic of Somaliland which is located in the Horn of Africa with the approximate population of 3.85 million is a self-declared state that announced its secession from Somalia in 1991. Since then, the republic has been fighting for the full independence and international recognition as well. Perhaps, the case of Somaliland is vague and unknown to many people. This study therefore attempts to discuss and shed the light on the major aspects related to the issue, especially the major issues of incoming presidential election in the Republic of Somaliland. The study also provides a brief historical events of Somalia from its establishment till the secession of Somaliland. The study as well gives the details of the activities of all the governments of Somaliland from its Separation till date. Therein, the main characteristics that distinguish one government from the other, such as their achievements and their lapses have been analyzed. The study likewise focuses on some predictive scenarios of Somaliland forthcoming presidential election to be held on November 13, 2017. Lastly, the study emphasizes the role of tribal affiliation, vote buying and the interest of international organizations in influencing the forthcoming presidential election in particular and the general political affairs of Somaliland. The primary pattern of this study is chronological in nature, where the related issues are discussed sequentially. It starts the discussion with the historical brief of Somalia from its establishment till the secession of Somaliland, followed by the activities of Somaliland government from its separation till date, as well as some predictive scenario of Somaliland incoming governments.



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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Republic of Somaliland is a self-declared state with the lack of international recognition. Somaliland is situated in the Horn of Africa with a territory claimed to have an area of 137,600 square kilometres, and approximate population of 3.85 million according to statistics of the Ministry of National Planning. It is bordered by the Republic of Djibouti to the northwest, the Gulf of Aden to the north, northern Somalia to the east and Ethiopia to the west. Somaliland is a semi-desert region with the average of 500 mm rainfall in the northern highlands, 50-150 in the coastal areas and 300-500 in the southern and western areas. It has four climate seasons which are characterized by drought and desertification from time to time, as a result of recent global climate change. (African Development Bank, 2016).

The region is known as the land of incense, and its political history was formed since the era of Pharaohs, when the Queen Hatshepsut visited the place. However, the nature of its geographical and geo-political strategy emerged since early stage of Islam, when it became a haven and a safe place for the Muslim emigrants during the first and second emigration to Abyssinia prior the general migration to Madinah. Islam spread peacefully across the region through the Arab merchants and marital relationship between the both parties. The feature which has distinguished Somalia from all other African ethnics in general and from eastern Africans in particular. (Centre for Policy Analysis, 2017).



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Seven Islamic Mamluk Sultanate were formed in this region together with the Ahmad Green's movement, as stated by Arab Faqih in his book "Futuh al-Habashah". Somalia fell under the British conquest after the full withdrawal of Ottoman Caliphate from the region and entire Horn of Africa in 1884. The conquest that resulted from the greedy and egoistic decision of European colonial powers at Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. Somalia later got its independence in 1960, which led to its amalgamation with southern Somalia just after fourth day of the independence. Somalians subsequently realized the absence and the lack of political achievement in that unity, besides the differences in culture and civilization towards the administrative, constitutional and educational systems as well as the language problem, all which were resulted from different colonial masters. Hence, these political and social gaps gradually and continually increase between 1960-1969, and those three civilian governments were unable to find any effective solution to the problem, until it escalated to become an acute and chronic political saga. (CPA, 2017). The situation became worst with the emergence of military government between 1969-1991, which created more political crisis and distrust between Somali people, especially Somaliland and southern Somalia.

## **2. THE STAGE OF AN INDEPENDENT POLITICAL TRANSITION**

Somali National Movement was formed in Saudi Arabia in 1981 to resist the persecution and injustice of Mohamed Siad Barre's government, but unfortunately after



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a short period from its formation, the founders of the movement moved to Ethiopia to form the first armed wing of the movement from the land that is known with its perpetual enmity to Somalia. So, it became the second Somali armed group that took Ethiopia its headquarters. Moreover, the role of Ethiopian President Mengistu Haile Mariam in providing Military facilities to the group in order to break Mohamed Siad Barre's power was notable, Barre who almost overthrown the Mengistu government during 1977 war before the intervention of Soviet Union and Cuba. (Abdurahman M. Ahmed, 2012).

The movement entered into several though military combat with the military government between 1982-1991, the period during which the northern region turned into military bases and the cities became unlivable, the situation that led the majority to unwilling migration to refugee camps in Ethiopia. Therefore, the biggest part of the country became paralyzed, when the infrastructures and other main facilities were not available, and the military government of that time was unable to provide any political settlement along with its military trend. After several hit-and-run military operations between the government and insurgents, the southern and northern insurgents were able to collaborate and team up for the downfall of the military government. Thus, the Somali National Movement conquered and took control of the current Somaliland, where they forced General Mohamed Farrah Hassan Aidid to leave the capital city Mogadishu in 1991. (Somalia, 2012).



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Consequently, Somali National Movement announced its separation and independence from Somali on 18/5/1991 and formed its government consisted of both senatorial and parliamentary board headed by Abdirahman Ahmed Ali Tuur, the leader of the movement. While the people of Somaliland warmly and happily received the decision, the transitional government in the south presided by Ali Mahdi Muhammad strongly denounced this unilateral decision. The new government faced a lot of internal problems, such as economic, educational and infrastructural problems, besides the proliferation of arms, armed militias, landmines and the return of refugees from Ethiopia. The new government as well encountered the armed conflicts and tribal rivalry over power and limited resources which were mainly the tax revenues from the ports, airports and customs. (Somalia, 2012). The government put extreme effort to gain the attention of international community, Africa, Arabs, Europe and America on the issue of Somaliland, but it is unfortunate that no any of those organizations give attention to the call, probably due to the geo-political situation of that time i.e. downfall of Soviet Union in 1991, the first Gulf War, changing of Ethiopian system of government with the downfall of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1991. The tenure of Abdirahman Ahmed Tuur was actually characterized with poor and weak administration, which led to the adoption and endorsement of early election in 1993 by the senate.



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### 3. THE STAGE OF BUILDING GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

The board of senate conducted the early presidential election in 1993, during which Muhammad Haji Ibrahim Egal was emerged as the president after his victory over the incumbent president of that time Abdirahman Ahmed Ali Tuur. The new president inherited many outstanding issues, which need a quick and radical solution, such as the unification and rehabilitation of Somali National Movement militias, formation of national unified army and police and creation of economic resources rather than relying on assistance and support from the international organizations. Anyway, the tenure of Muhammad Egal can be divided into two stages as follows:

**First stage:** The period which was characterized with tough and volcanic tribal problem, where the president encountered the problem of armed conflict between two parties among the Somali National Movement militias in one side, and the tribal conflict on the power and resources in another side, all which took the first three years of his tenure from 1993-1997. Fortunately, the president was able to resolve all the problems one after the other, and succeeded as well in printing the national currency and international passport, beside taking control of local economic sources, such as port, airports, borders and customs, all which paved the way for the building of government institutions. (Barnes, 2015).

**Second stage:** This period was characterized with the institutional building between 1997-2002, during which the various government institutions and infrastructures were



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established, such as ministries, banks, system of education, regulation of the prison, works and civil servants, system of tariff and agencies and unification of the tribal militias to form national arm forces and police. Hence, the whole territory became under the sovereignty of the government with the extension of the big number of military forces all over the border areas under the republic. President Egal focused on the firm establishment of his government on the ground, the focus which arose the grudge of his political opponents, thus they demanded for the republic elevation and its freedom from the regional and international political isolation. Accordingly, Egal quickly sent his diplomatic delegations to African Union, League of Arab States, Western Europe and United State of America in order to persuade those organizations for the recognition of the republic, but unfortunately, the response was not up to the expectation, where the republic was only authorized to open its diplomatic offices in some African, Arab and European countries. (Barnes, 2015).

Moreover, one of most important achievements of President Egal was the introduction of the first constitution for the republic. The move that elevated the republic from presidential decrees and traditional legal system of Somalia which is known as Xeer (al-Hīr) for the reconciliation between the tribes of the region following the proclamation of the independent republic. The constitution which gained the endorsement of about 97 % of the citizens in 2001 referendum to become the only legitimate constitution that stated and specified the features of the Republic, its independence and its geographical limits. However, as a result of corruption in several sectors of the government, there were some voices from the remnant of dissolved



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Somali National Movement, some veteran politicians and new political figures requested for the time limit for the presidential tenure which was formerly absolute unlimited. (Somaliland Constitution, 2001).

In late 2001 president Egal declared the multiparty system in the country in order to shift from the tribal system of government to the multi-party system, the declaration which started with the official announcement of his party (ADOB). Consequently, other opponent political parties foolishly registered a great deal of parties in the name of political openness. Nevertheless, considering the demography and population of the country all the parties were eventually screening by National Electoral Commission into three parties: ruling party (ADOB) headed by president Egal, (KLMY) headed by Ahmed Silanyo, (ANT) headed by Faysal Ali Warabe. According to the electoral committee's agenda, gubernatorial election had been given the priority, followed by parliamentary and presidential elections. Suddenly, at a sensitive time when the country was preparing for the gubernatorial and presidential elections in 2002, Egal died in South African hospital from a short period illness. Accordingly, with the unanimous of the senate and parliament, as well as the provision of the constitution vice president Dahir Riyale Kahin was appointed as the transitional president.



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#### **4. FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL ARM FORCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE EXPANSION**

Politics of Somaliland entered a new political dimension after the demise of president Egal and emergence of his vice who belongs to the province of Udle (Burma), and at the same time belongs to the Somali intelligence service as the head of the state. The political rivalry repeated itself between the ruling party and the opposition parties, hence the new president surrounded himself with the Somali intelligent officers. President Dahir succeeded in building National Arm Forces, Intelligence Agency and annexation of the disputed province of Las Anod between Somaliland and provincial government of Puntland, beside his great contribution to the success of 2003 fair presidential election, where he gained his victory over his veteran counterpart Ahmed Silanyo, likewise, his effort in 2005 towards the success of gubernatorial election, as well as parliamentary one in 2007. (Sad al-Sadi). During his reign, Somaliland experienced some developments, where the economy relatively moved forward as a result of the huge number of local merchants from Arab and Western countries who invest in the country. Therefore, the level of construction such as luxury restaurants and giant villas increased, in addition to the improvement of the level of education, where preliminary syllabus and curriculum were formed, and both government and private universities were prepared to take the undergraduate students from the both public and private secondary schools.



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In terms of foreign politics, the government of President Dahir knocked all the diplomatic doors of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), so his Foreign Minister Diali chose Addis Ababa as headquarters in order to gain the support of some African countries that had sympathy for the secede of Somaliland from southern Somalia.

In 2005, and for the first time in the history of Somaliland politics, president Dahir delivered a speech at the House of Lords of the United Kingdom, in which he analyzed the issue of Somaliland, and he as well met in Washington, the representative of US foreign affairs for African affairs. However, both London and Washington advised the president to begin the settlement by negotiating and persuading southern Somalia to accept the secede and then tabling the issue before the African countries. Generally, the era of President Dahir marked the prestige of the state, strengthened security and diminishment of the tribal affiliation. Lastly, in 2010 presidential election was held, in which the three major political parties (Ruling Party, Justice and welfare party and Peace, Unity, and Development Party) participated. The result of the election was in favour of al-Taḍāmun party under the leadership of Silanyo. So, peaceful transfer of power has been the political scenario of Somaliland since its establishment.



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## **5. POLITICAL transparency and negotiation between Somaliland and South Somalia**

President Ahmed Silanyo is a veteran politician who graduated from the famous British School of Economics. He joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Somali civil governments in 1960s. The president set several goals in his political agenda, such as free primary education, political transparency, paving the way for negotiations with the central government in southern Somalia, fighting corruption and freedom of the press. He has succeeded in changing of the former shilling currency in some southern regions, expanding capital city Hargeisa and Berbera airports, renovating some old ministries and constructing of the new ones. During his regime, the link artery road between the second capital city Burao and Sanaag city which is about 240 kilo metres was constructed. Moreover, considering the suffering of the citizens for education and the expansion of private schools, which majority of the citizens could not afford enrolling in them due to expensive school fees, the president made free preliminary education among the first decisions, in order to eradicate ignorance that always lead to violence and give learning privilege to the generality of the citizens. (IRIN Africa).

In addition, the three years contract for the management of the Berber port which was awarded to Dubai International Port Company in 2017, as well as UAE Military Base in Somaliland, all which endorsed by majority of the senate and parliament, can also be considered as Silanyo achievement. Even though, the political opposition condemned the agreement due to the lack of transparency in the term of the contract between the



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both parties, i.e. 19% for Ethiopian government, 16% for Somaliland, while 65% went to Dubai International Port Company. (IRIN Africa). Although, the government guaranteed the citizens that the agreement would bring global investment and job opportunities for the workers, however that was not the reality. Surprisingly, the company has also signed similar agreements with the regional governments in southern Somalia, which created a big concern among the people, employees and workers in Berbera port.

Indeed, one of the most remarkable accomplishment of Silanyo government was the initiation of negotiations with the federal government in southern Somalia to reach mutual political agreement on outstanding issues between the both parties, the move which has been neglected by ex-Somaliland governments. The first meeting between President Silanyo and Southern Somalia Prime Minister of the transitional government Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed was in 2011 in Dubai under the mediation of UAE. The meeting that paved the way for several other meetings between both parties in Britain and Turkey between year 2012 - 2014, where the issue of the unity, secede, security cooperation, and others were negotiated. However, the both parties were unable to reach any remarkable solution, probably due to their fear of future political consequences, fear of their people and loss of their trust in them. Actually, Turkish and British governments tried enough to put the barriers that prevent from reconciliation between both parties aside, but unluckily all attempts made were futile, since each party insisted on its positions and no one gave any space for concessions. (CPA, 2017).



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The major shortcoming of Silanyo government was a rampant and drastic spread of corruption in the government sectors, which weakened the effectiveness of the government. Although the President repeatedly proclaimed the fighting against the corruption in several occasions, he also changed the number of the officials and reshuffled the ministries several times, but all brought no solutions. Recently, Somaliland currency has lost its value against the US dollar, which has caused an astonishing inflation that has affected the majority of the citizens in having their daily basic human needs, especially the middle and poor classes. Consequently, the people highly demanded for radical solution to the problem from the government, but the government only adopted several theories to solve the crisis, such as the using of Somaliland shillings in all local financial transactions, local currency conversions, payment of customs duties and tuition fees. Whereas the private firms and companies for money exchange are the main sectors that dominate the control of all financial activities, therefore the government could not found an effective solution to end the rampant inflation. President Silanyo eventually gave up his candidacy for the second time presidency for Musa Bihi Abdi due to his health condition.

## **6. PREDICTIONS OF THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION**

Incoming presidential election to be held on November 13, 2017, for which the three major political parties will be contested: ruling party headed by the new presidential



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candidate Musa Bihi Abdi, opposition party *al-Watan* headed by Abdulrahman Mohammed Abdullah and *Adalah* party which is headed by Faisal Ali. Currently, Somaliland has been shifted from the system of election by which the tribal elders used to decide, to the direct election by the people since 2003. Likewise, the National Elections Commission has applied modern electronic systems to prevent rigging and manipulating of the election, for which the total number of 704089 citizens have been registered. (Somaliland voter card).

Incoming president will surely inherit a lot of outstanding internal issues, such as administrative corruption, inflation, unemployment, water scarcity, poor health services, improvement of all basic services, rehabilitation of security forces and police. According to the political agenda of the three parties, there will only be a little political and economic change, which cannot bring Somaliland out of depending on foreign aid.

On the other hand, Somaliland presidential election coincides with a critical time of a tough disagreement between Somali federal government led by Mohammed Abdullah Farmajo and the other five regional governments. Apparently, the five regional government are struggling to limit the influence of the federal government, while the federal government itself is striving to root out the jihadist groups from southern Somalia and extend its influence in the capital city Mogadishu and its territories. However, the federal government is under the threatened and pressure of the international conflict in Somalia, such as the bloodiest explosion ever in the history of Somali that occurred in the capital city on 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2017, from which more than



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360 people were killed and about 500 injured according to the statistics of health centres and hospitals in the capital Mogadishu. (Jowhar). So, the political scenario of the federal government seems to be more difficult and complex than many local and international political analysts think. The scenario which was partially revealed from the internal closed files that were opened during the Regional Government Conference held in Kismayo in October 2017, where the power of the federal and provincial governments was mixed up, as the legal and constitutional problem were raised, all which the President himself did not expect that level of opposition. (Golaha Iskaashiga, 2017). Somaliland has repeatedly expressed the concern about the growing role of the federal government, however the political analysts believe that the federal government's influence in the Somaliland election is limited.

Any external political change is expected to create a kind of change in Somaliland elections, it may rather change the entire political equation. Hence Addis Ababa Government is closely watching the events in Somaliland. Ethiopian Prime Minister has met the candidates of the three political parties in Addis Ababa at the beginning of October 2017. However, Ethiopia herself is going through a critical political stage, where political analysis confirms that the Oromo national revolution or Ethiopian nationalities that oppose the government might take a new dimension which likely to lead to the similar revolutions of other nationalities, or lead to the dissolution of the federal government which will result from the resignation of the Parliament President from his position in the beginning of October 2017. Likewise, the present situation of



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Ethiopians reveals their strong fury due to the tax increases, loss of Ethiopian currency's value against the US dollar and the increase in unemployment.

On the other hand, Turkey has established a military base in Southern Somalia in an attempt to expand its military influence in Somalia, the attempt that comes as a part of its military expansion plan in the Middle East. The Turkish move coincides with a two-year effort by the United Arab Emirates to expand its own influence as well in the Horn of Africa by establishing military bases in the Horn of African countries, such as Djibouti and Eritrea, especially obtaining approval for the establishment of a military base in the Republic of Somaliland which declared a unilateral separation from Somalia in 1991 and took Hargeisa as its capital. As a result, The United Arab Emirates has been closely monitoring the movements of the parties and upcoming election as well, in order to maintain its interests in Somaliland. In this course, UAE government has met the candidate of the ruling party Musa Behi and the candidate of the opposition party in the beginning of September 2017. (Golaha Iskaashiga, 2017).

The importance of Somaliland also comes from the transformation of Berbera port to an alternative logistic way to reach Ethiopia, which will contribute to the cancellation of the monopoly of Djibouti port for the ships movement, as well as being the port only one on the southern coast of the Gulf of Aden. More so, Somaliland is also of a great importance due to its geographical location, which links the continents and overlooks the Arabian Gulf, the Middle East, the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab Straits, beside the huge natural resources and oil reserves according to the statistics of European and



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American oil companies. (Golaha Iskaashiga, 2017). However, some Western analysts mention that the UAE is striving to weaken all the harbors of the Horn of Africa, starting from Eritrea to Somaliland and Southern Somalia. Therefore, many parts of the Horn of Africa will be the dumping grounds for toxic waste from the UAE, as it is planning to build an atomic energy soon and looking for some remote areas to bury its waste.

Finally, according to Yalla African Journal, the former US diplomat of Somali origin Abubakr Arman reportedly that has been said in a statement that, the ambition of the United Arab Emirates also comes to tackle the Turkey's growing presence in the region, which is seen as a strategic threat to its British and American allies. According to the journal's comment: "Turkey is one of the major effective players in southern Somalia through its large-scale projects, such as building of hospitals, roads, and provision of scholarships to thousands of Somali students." (Golaha Iskaashiga, 2017). Although, Turkey has paid little attention to Somaliland, where it only opened a consulate and an office for the Tika charity.

In reference to the importance of the region, its geopolitical strategy and the extent of international competition in the region reveal its importance. According to some reliable reports, Russia has offered Somaliland to build a military base in the port of Berbera in exchange for its recognition of Somaliland, but the government of Silanyo turned down the offer because of the pressure from Britain and the United States of America.



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Somaliland next presidential election will be entirely different from the previous ones in 2003 and 2010. There will be fierce competition between the three candidates. More so, there will also be an international and regional attention towards the election, as some influential Gulf and African countries are competing on influencing over the next president. However, it is apparent that the future of Somaliland requires skills in accurate reading of the internal political reality and putting the issues in order. In this case, there are three scenarios to chart the future of Somaliland:

1. Provision of a radical solution to the recurrent ethnic differences: Although the tribal conflict in Somaliland has faded in recent years as a result of rigorous efforts made by the Senate, however, it is still considered the main threat to the security and stability of the region. Chiefly, the ethnic differences revolve around the fertile lands, wells, the construction of a new village in the common pasturage areas. The fire of that strife has always been ignited by the opposition politicians and the conservatives in order to influence the general political situation. Obviously, there is no strong national strategy to avoid these serious threats. Hence, the next President and his government must develop a clear strategy for the management and containment of ethnic conflicts in order to prevent their aggravation and avoid their negative effects, particularly violent conflicts over wells and pastures. However, the situation can be managed through the re-evaluation of the issues and just re-portion of the disputed areas between the conflicting parties. Hopefully, ethnicism can be eliminated by peaceful means as well as the activation of military functions to prevent people from sliding into violence. (Somaliland Press, 2017).



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2. Provision of the future strategy for the development of the basic services: Somaliland lacks some basic amenities, such as drinkable water and sanitation, which leads to the death of many people from simple diseases, when there are not enough competent doctors to treat them. Although the main threat is inflation that threatens the lives of thousands of citizens, and as well threatens security and stability. Unfortunately, the past governments have given little attention to resolving this recurring crisis. Moreover, one of the main problem that needs a quick solution is the education sector, where the number of qualified teachers is low and there is no modern curriculum that is in line with recent developments. Likewise, the unemployment from which the young people in general are suffering, and the new generation in particular, where hundreds of young people die in the desert of Libya and the Mediterranean Sea looking for a better life and job opportunities. If the next president and his government do not give enough attention to these issues, it will definitely affect the fate and the existence of the country. (Somaliland Press, 2017).
3. Foreign Policy: Somaliland is a politically locked and isolated country that has no international political influence, whereas it is treated as an integral part of Somalia. All the efforts that have been made by the governments, including the outgoing one, to gain international recognition are futile due to the lack of good organization and experienced political experts that are good at understanding foreign policy. The features of Somaliland foreign policy are not yet clear. At the same time, there is not any future vision on the ground. The political process is moving like a lame



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duck, while poverty and political isolation are hitting every aspect of life in the country. Perhaps, the objectives of the foreign policy of the state are to protect the national security, preserve the survival of the state and its continuation, strengthen the local and international prestige and status of the state. However, for the accomplishment of these goals, the codified means must be applied by the state foreign policy. (Somali Commentator, 2017).

In conclusion, perhaps the stand by obstacles after the election are the most prominent characteristic distinguished the political landscape of Somaliland in the upcoming presidential election, most of which have instigated by the political decision makers, especially candidates who seek by all means to win, even at the expenses of the people and the best interest of the country. Apart from political polarization and the desire of the neighbouring countries of Africa and the Arab to influence the advocacy of some of the candidates affiliated to them, the political agendas of the three candidates do not give positive indicators to move the country from the current political situation to the next level. (African news, 2017).

According to the views of the political analysts, there might be unexpected result from the election, but the candidate of the ruling party Muse Bihi is expected to win, because he is a candidate from the ruling party where he finds financial and logistical support from the local media, as well as other facilities. On the other hand, the candidate is facing a deep rivalry within the party, especially from the powerful politicians around the President Silanyo, in addition to the lack of reassurance of the main tribes in the



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Republic. Actually, tribes in Africa in general and especially in Somaliland are considered to be an influential factor that determine the victory. Nevertheless, Bihi's political agendas are limited to the completion of his party's former program and the reform of the administrative, political, economic and educational problems that emerged in the late time of President Silanyo.

On the other hand, some analysts say that the opportunity of the opposition party headed by Abdulrahman Mohammed Abdullah to win the next presidential election is high, due to his diplomatic experience, and the recent support of some strong and influential politicians. (Abdiwahab A., 2014). However, the tribal influences that change according to the political circumstances and interests also needed to be considered. Abdulrahman political agendas appear to be confined to tackling inflation, improving the army and police situation by increasing their salaries, solving the issues of the eastern and western regions, as well as applying justice in the division of the resources.

Lastly, it is difficult to predict the victory of a particular candidate because of many local and global complications. Despite the moving of the country from the clan system in power to free and fair elections, tribes still play a key role in the victory of the candidates. Likewise, the buying of the votes is also an essential part of the process. Some political analysts believe that the victory of the next candidate is linked to his wisdom and skill in dealing with the tribes of the region.



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