



The Gulf Crisis:

Why Somalia should take a Critical Distance

Key Policy Messages

1. Majority of Somali people share the common stand that the country should remain neutral in its position regarding the Gulf crisis. However, despite taking a neutral stand, majority of Somali feel that government actions are pro-Qatar puts into question its neutral question.
2. Somali people are calling for the federal and state government to handle the Gulf crisis carefully. The people are deeply concerned that the crisis will negatively affect the country.
3. The population express concern that the crisis may affect the relationship between the Federal state and member states thereby affecting the political and security progress the country has made. The crisis may also affect the country economically since the country depend on external aid for this operation. Furthermore, the crisis may affect business and trade and availability of good thereby affecting the lives of the common people.
4. The people call for the regional authorities to respect the responsibility of the central government to handle Somali foreign affairs matters as provided by the Somali provisional constitution. At the same time, the people call for the central government to ensure meaningful consultation with the regional states concerning on foreign affairs and development decisions it makes.
5. Overall, Somalia should focus on its political, economic and security challenges and avoid any external interference that may affect progress in these areas. The country should therefore follow and demonstrate a policy of neutrality and mutual respect of all current and potential development partners. Internally, respect of the constitution and the laws of the country is paramount to avoid any action that can destabilize the country. Together, the central government and the federal member states should cultivate an environment that strengthen relationship with all development partners.

1. Background

In early in June 2017, the governments of Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt cut ties with Qatar in the worst diplomatic crisis to hit Gulf Arab states in decades. The four countries accused Qatar of supporting terrorism and destabilizing the region and imposed trade and economic restrictions on the country. Qatar quickly denied the accusation saying they were baseless and unjustified and refused to implement the demands that the four countries put to resume relations.

Following this, other Arab and African governments cut ties with Qatar, including Yemen, Maldives, Libya, Senegal, Djibouti, Eritrea, Comoros, Gabon and Niger. The Turkish government however decided to side with Qatar. Just two days after four countries severed diplomatic relations with Qatar, Turkey's parliament passed a bill that saw a large number of Turkey troops deployed to a Turkish military base in Qatar. Turkey also facilitated trade arrangements to compensate Qatar for the economic losses



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Early in June 2017

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June 2017

Somalia announced its neutral state on the Gulf crisis.

resulted from the conflict. Other states in the region decided to be neutral and instead advised the countries involved in the conflict to resolve their differences through dialogue.

On such state was Somalia which announced its neutral state on the Gulf crisis in June 2017 despite arrival of high level delegations from both sides of the conflict with the hopes to influence the government to join their side. Before the crisis, in February 2017, soon after Somali president “Farmaajo’s” election, an official trip to Saudi Arabia led to a pledge of 80 million dollars to the government. This was greatly appreciated by Somalia because it came at a time when the country face economic challenges especially with decreasing support from the European Union, one of Somalis long term donor. However, before this pledge was fulfilled, the Gulf crises erupted and Saudi Arabia delayed releasing the money promised expecting Somalia to cut ties with Qatar. In September 2017, President Farmajo paid another visit to Saudi Arabia and received a pledge of 50 million dollars in aid from Saudi Arabia although the gesture did not change the Somali government’s decision to remain neutral in the Gulf crisis.

The neutral stand taken by the government puts Somali in a difficult position given Saudi Arabia influence on the foreign policy of the Horn of Africa government. It is not the first time that Riyadh has urged horn of Africa governments to side with Saudi Arabia. In 2015, Saudi Arabia convinced all Horn of Africa countries, except Ethiopia, to endorse its coalition against the Houthis in Yemen, who are supported by Iran, its political arch rival. In early 2016, when Saudi Arabia broke relations with Iran, Djibouti, Sudan and

Somalia also followed suit.

In addition to external pressure, the Somali neutral stand has also faced challenges from within. In the months of August and September, the member states of Puntland, Hirshabelle, Southwest and Galmudug announced they were breaking from the Somali government’s position of neutrality, citing their strategic relationships with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The member sates also cited the lack of consultation and raised questions on the roles and responsibilities of the federal states regarding foreign policy decisions. This presented a challenge to the Somali government on the interpretation of roles and responsibilities within Somalia’s federal system. Article 54 of the Somali Provisional Constitution allocates the sole responsibility for foreign affairs to the central government, but Article 53 notes that the central government should consult the federal member states “on negotiations relating to foreign aid, trade, treaties, or other major issues related to international agreements”.

Over the time, other developments have taken. The Parliament of Hirshabeel impeached their President and a new president has been elected. In Galmudug, the vice president and the Speaker of the parliament disagreed with their President's decision and supported the Federal Government neutral position.

What has happened since the Gulf crises erupted indicates that the conflict is important to Somalia and can have negative political, security and economic impacts if it is not handled well. It is therefore necessary to better understand the situations to provide the insight required to guide Somalia position.

In August and September

Puntland, Hirshabelle, Southwest and Galmudug announced they were breaking from the Somali government’s position of neutrality.

2. Study Approach

880

Number of respondents engaged in five cites - Mogadishu, Kismayo, Garowe, Baidoa and Adado.

To better understand the position the Somali government should take regarding the Gulf crisis, the Somalia Institute for Development and Research Analysis (SIDRA) carried out a policy briefing study in five of the major cities of Somalia (Mogadishu, Kismayo, Baidoa, Garowe and Adado). The study collected data through public surveys and key informant Interviews. For the public interview, 166 respondents were engaged in each city and a total of 830 respondents completed the study questionnaire. 50 key informant interviews were conducted in the five cities. These data were complemented with media analysis and discussions with opinion leaders.

3. Results

2.1 What is the best way Somalia should address the gulf crisis?

69%

Number of study respondents believed that Somalia should be neutral.

The study sought to get an opinion on the best way Somali should address the Gulf crisis. Majority of the respondents, (69%) believed that Somalia should be neutral, 21% felt that Somalia should take a side, while 10% felt that Somali should keep a distance from the issue without being neutral or taking sides. Of the respondents that feel that Somali should take side, 65% believe that Somalia should side with the Saudi alliance while 35% believe that Somali should side with Qatar. Somalis have had a great concern on the way the Federal Government has handled the Gulf crises. 61% believed that the Federal Government's neutrality is not a genuine but rather a pro-Qatar stance while 25 % felt that the decision is genuine. 14% didn't have an opinion.

The key informant interview also addressed this question. For the interviews, these were the suggestions made:

- Neutrality is the most appropriate way to deal with the Gulf conflict.
- The Somali government's behavior shouldn't seem to be sided and the actions on the ground should clearly demonstrate the country neutral stand.
- Losing any side of the parties involved in the Gulf crisis is not desirable considering the current situation of the country.
- Consultation with the different Somali regional states is important to achieve a unified vision and at the same time resolve regional differences and concerns.

61%

Number of study respondents believed that the current Federal Government's neutrality is not a genuine.

75%

Number of study respondents urged that the crisis would affect Somalia.

2.2 Impact of Gulf crisis on Somalia

Public survey respondents were asked if they believe that the crisis could affect the situation in Somalia. The majority, (75%) urged that the crisis would affect Somalia while a small number (15%) thought it would not affect the country. 10% of the respondents however did not know whether if the crisis would have any impact on the country. Those who answered that the crisis would have an impact were further asked what kind of effect it may create. Almost half (48%) said that the impact would be political while about a third (32%) believe it would be economic. The other 19% believed that the impact would relate to security.

Key informant discussions in the impact of the Gulf crisis on Somalia revealed the following:

- The crisis would have various impacts including political, economic, security and trade.
- Already, most of the federal member states in Somalia disagree with the central government on the issue of the Gulf crisis. This is already a sign that the crisis will have a political impact. In a way, the political differences in Hirshabeel and Galmudug are a result of the Gulf conflict.
- The mistrust between the regional states and central government because of the Gulf crisis can create political instability that can harm Somalia.
- The central government relies heavily on foreign aid. If it loses support from either of the gulf allies, this would create economic burden to the government.
- Armed forces may take advantage of the political uncertainty created by the government taking side in the crises.

67%

Number of study respondents stressed that foreign affairs should be exclusively handled by the central government.

- This would cause security threat in the country.
- Somali import business and local market goods is dependent on the Gulf States, especially Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. If the government takes side and the conflict is prolonged, Somali people lives, business and trade will be negatively affected.

2.3 Differences between central and regional States.

The public survey explored the perception of the respondents on the decision made by most of Somali regional states to side with Saudi Arabia led coalition. Majority of the respondents (67%) stressed that foreign affairs should be exclusively handled by the central government while slightly over one third of the respondents (33%) thought that the central government should consult the regional authorities on this matter.

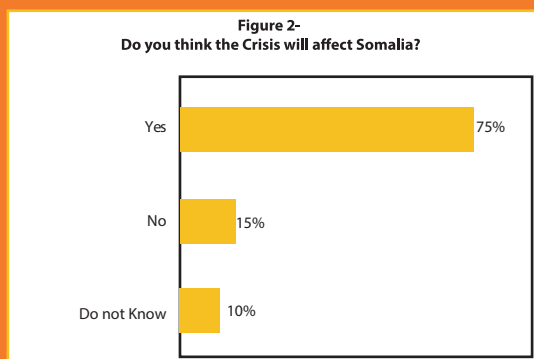
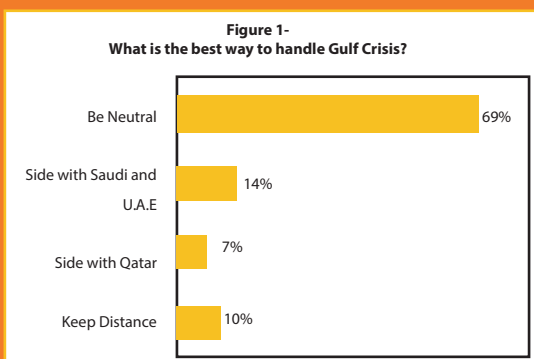
The survey further interrogated the reason for the regional authorities taking a different

stand from that of the central government. Various reasons were cited. A third of the respondents (31%) believe is it due to regional authorities concerns of their development projects, 27% felt that the regional authorities were "pressured" by the Saudi and its allies, 24% believe it was because of "lack of consultation" between the central and regional government while 18% felt it was due to lack of clarity in the constitution on the roles of the two levels of government and the division of power between them.

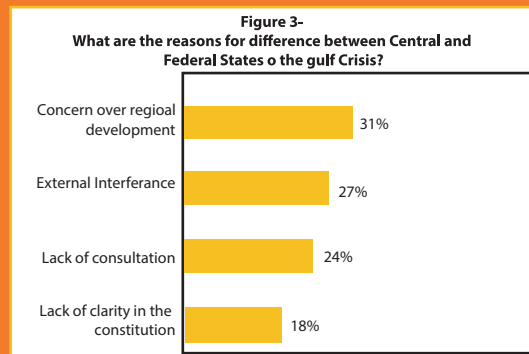
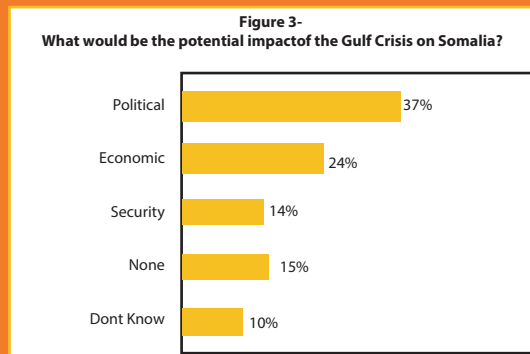
The public survey also explored the impact of the differences between the central government and local authorities caused by the gulf crises. Slightly more than half of the respondents (54%) felt that this difference could create a political turmoil while a fifth of the respondents (20%) believe it could cause a constitutional crisis. 18% felt that the different could create crisis in the constitutional bodies of both the federal and regional governments. The remaining 8% felt that the different could cause insecurity in the country.

54%

Number of study respondents felt that difference could create a political turmoil



Study data showing: Best way for Somalia to handle Gulf Crisis (Figure 1); Will Gulf Crisis affect Somalia (Figure 2); Potentail impacts of the Gulf Crisis on Somalia



Study data showing: (Figure 3); and Reason for difference between Central and Federal States on the Gulf Crisis (Figure 4).

The difference caused by the gulf crisis between the two levels of government was also addressed in the key informant interviews. The following points were made:

1. The federal government should exclusively handle the foreign affairs as stated by the constitution.
2. The protection and consideration of regional authorities' interests, especially their development projects, should be given due consideration by the central government when taking foreign affairs decisions.
3. Engagement in the gulf crisis may cause political crises between the central government and regional authorities, and internal conflict within the central government authorities, which may delay in the country resettlement and rebuilding process.
4. The political impact of taking sides in the gulf crisis will affect the progress made by the newly formed administrations. In these new states, this may lead to armed opposition groups taking advantage of the situation to ruin these states.

4. Conclusion

The study clearly found out that the Gulf crisis would have negative political, economic and security impact on Somalia if not handled well. It is important that the country handle the crisis carefully to minimize the potential negative impacts. The political, economic and security threats that can arise from this crisis can easily reverse the gains made by the country in the recent past.

The study exposed Somali's underbelly on two fronts. The continuing conflicts and disagreements between the Somali national government and the federal member states due to ambiguities in some sections of the

provisional constitution; and the delicate balancing act of a weak Somalia state on the ethos of nation-building; in charting its own course under the influence of powerful external forces.

The study found out that the Somali people would prefer the country to take a neutral position. Somali should be consistent in demonstrating this position in its actions with the international community and in engagements with the different countries involved on the conflict. This position should be presented by the Federal government, which is vested with foreign affairs

ABOUT SIDRA

SIDRA is a registered independent, not-for-profit Research and Policy Analysis Think Tank based in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia.

OUR VISION

Somalia, in which social justice prevails and inclusive economic growth benefits all and improves the well being of all people.

OUR MISSION

A centre of development and research that generates relevant and original knowledge for dynamic policy environment support, institutional capacity development and alliance

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responsibility in the constitution. However, the government should be clear on this stand and avoid actions that put into question in its neutral position.

To achieve the neutral position, the regional states should respect the foreign affairs constitutional responsibility of the Federal government. However, the study found that the Federal government should continually consult with the regional authorities

especially on matters that have direct impact on the development of the regions. This consultation is critical for unity and solidarity of the whole country.

At this point in time, Somalia has urgent development concerns and should continue to work with all its development partners on equal terms without interference to side with one or the other group.

5. Policy Recommendations

From the analysis done and the results presented, the following recommendations are made by the study:

1. Somalia is just emerging from more than two decades of conflict. The country is at an inflection point and is making good progress addressing the many political, economic and security challenges it faces. This study therefore strongly recommends that the country should promote a policy of mutual respect and engagement of all its development partners without taking sides in political differences within the region and elsewhere in the world.
2. In accordance with the provisions of article 54 of the provisional constitution, regional states should comply with the federal government in relations to foreign affairs management and other activities that are exclusive the responsibility of the central government. Additionally, clear implementation modality should be defined and followed by both the central government and the federal states.
3. The central government should ensure meaningful consultation on issues that are relevant to regional states, including the development projects in their areas and ensure that the interests of the regional states are protected and are not compromised by any decision made by the central government.
4. Somali government should be careful of any external interference. Such interference can negatively affect internal affairs and lead to tension that could pull back the country to the internal conflicts that it has risen from.

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