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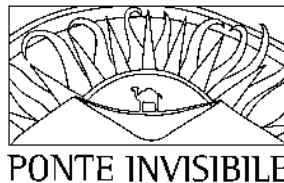
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SOMALILAND'S SEARCH FOR RECOGNITION

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This dhaxalreeb issue contains the following two essays:
A brief history of the "Somali Union": what is the way forward
The Changing Political Landscape in the Horn of Africa

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A brief history of the "Somali Union": what is the way forward²

Mohamed Obsiye

Introduction

The former Republic of Somalia has been haunted by a problem called 'Greater-Somalism'. Greater-Somalism is a politically motivated drive to unite all Somalis and Somali territories under a one-nation-state. It started in the 1940s as a movement to counter colonial powers and gained much popularity in the 1960s. It looked attractive, because, in addition to the cultural nationalism, it also had religious and moralistic sentiments, that all Muslims are brothers and sisters and therefore should unite; even more so when they share a common language, creed and culture. It was based on the view that Somalis have everything it takes to form a one-nation-state, and its credo quite simple: to bring all Somalis under one nation and one flag by consent, and if necessary by coercion. It was well captured by Dr. Abdirashid Ali Sharmarke in his statement:

Our misfortune is that our neighbouring countries, with whom, like the rest of Africa, we seek to promote constructive and harmonious relations, are not our neighbours. Our neighbours are our Somali kinsmen whose citizenship has been falsified by indiscriminate boundary 'arrangements' (quoted in Lewis, 1963:151)³.

Dr. Sharmarke, the very person who verbalised in the best possible way Somalis yearning for unity was unfortunately assassinated in 1969. Nonetheless, his legacy in respect of Greater-Somalism lived on though it never had the same connotations nor a driving force of his status and his eloquence. It is still active today and despite the unilateral dissolution of the Union by the Republic of Somaliland in 1991, it has still many proponents. One of the main arguments for Greater-Somalism by those who still campaign for re-establishing the Somali Union in post-Dr. Sharmarke era is to disappoint Ethiopia, a country which they think has always sought to prevent Somalia from having an effective and strong national government. Somalis, they argue, cannot afford to be divided because of the eminent military threat, which Ethiopia poses to their existence. Based on moralistic sentiments they further argue that, in the vicinity of Christian Ethiopia, Somalis need to do everything to have a strong unified Somalia.

The central concern of this article is that the Union of Somalia was founded on the false dream of Greater-Somalism based on language, race, culture and religion criteria. It argues that the Somali Union simply existed, not because of intrinsic values of its nationhood, but because of its 'Cold War Client' status. The article raises serious questions about whether there was a nation-state in Somalia in the first place, and considers how the unswerving search for Greater-Somalism masked Somalia's vulnerability as a nation-state.

2 This article is part of an ongoing work the author is doing on the process of political thought formation and nation-state building in Somalia and Somaliland.

3 Lewis, I. M. (1963) 'Pan-Africanism and Pan-Somalism', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 1, pp 147-161.

The Fragility of the Somali Nation-State

Ever since the formation of the Union in 1960, the former Republic of Somalia was an archetypal 'Cold War Client State' receiving aid from the Soviet Union in the 1970s, and after Somali broke ties with the Soviet Union in 1977 from the US in the 1980s (Gundel, 2002)⁴. According to Weil (1993)⁵ with a per capita income of \$80, Somalia in 1970 was the sixth poorest country in the world. That figure has risen to \$150 in 1976. With the war against Ethiopia a year later, things got even worse, the country fell on flat face and in 1990 the per capita income was estimated at \$120. In an elaborated paper Menkhaus (1997)⁶ outlines how the whole edifice of the Somali national government infrastructure was a bloated cartoon polity swelled and over-aided out of proportion by readily available 'Cold War Funds'. He argues that after Israel, Somalia received the highest international military and economic aid per capita. Clearly, Somalia was not unique in receiving foreign aid. The uniqueness in Somalia's case is that apart from the military power which made the Somali Military Government and its predecessor Civilian Government to build one of the strongest armies in sub-Saharan Africa, the rest of the international aid disappeared into bottomless perils in Mogadishu with no signs of improvement in the hinterland, a situation which earned the country the label of 'the graveyard of foreign aid'.

It is only because of the prevailing world political system that the Union of Somalia lasted for 31 years. Ordinary citizens and even those in power wrongly believed in Somalia's strength lied in its military capability and its homogeneity, which both proved to be two false premises. The situation changed in latter part of the mid-70s when armed to the teeth with Cold War weapons and filled with Greater-Somalism sentiments, Siyad Barre's Military Government invaded Ethiopia under the pretext to liberate Western Somali territories. Chanting Kani galbay ku kale mooyee (Somali for 'this war is over, which one is next'), the Somali army captured town after town. Siyad Barre's backers, particularly the Soviet Union, disagreed with his irresponsible war expedition, a situation which led for Somalia to break ties with the Soviet Union in 1977 and with that the military aid stopped. Within a few months it proved that Somalia's military government could not sustain the war, telling its army, as Jon Snow⁷ jokingly but tellingly put it, that 'the country run out of fuel' and Somalia's military might was left stranded in the heartland of Ethiopia.

Humiliated, some of the defeated army Generals returned to Somalia to take revenge on their commander-in-chiefs, Somalia's tried and tested (and often failing) version of 'Public Inquiry'. Bringing the war back into Somalia, they attempted to overthrow the irresponsible government, which sent them to an un-winnable war, and when they failed to topple the government returned to Ethiopia for a better preparation, forming in 1978 the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). This was followed by the Somali National Movement (SNM) in 1981. Somalia regained its 'Cold War Client State' status when the US stepped in 1980. Still mistakenly believing in its military capability, the government replied in kind to the war brought by the incoming army Generals, killing its own people.

4 Gundel, J. (2002), The Migration-Development Nexus: Somalia Case Study, International Migration Vol. 40 (5)

5 Weil, R. (1993) 'Somalia in Perspective: When the Saints Come Marching', Review of African Political Economy, No. 57.

6 Menkhaus, K. (1997) 'U.S. Foreign Assistance to Somalia: Phoenix From the Ashes?', Middle East Policy, Volume 5.

7 Jon Snow, presenter at London based Chanel 4 News Television speaking at a fund raising event for a girls school in Buroa, Somaliland at the School of Oriental and African Studies in 2009.

However, the opposition meant business this time. SNM fighters calling ‘Faqash way tagaysaaye sii tukhaantukhiyaay’ (Somali for ‘The Somali army is defeated, all it needs is tipping over’) intensified their war against Siyad Barre’s army. The United Somali Congress (USC)⁸, formed in 1989, answered these calls emanating from the then North (now Somaliland). It did the tipping over which also coincided with the end of the Cold War era, exposing Somalia’s fragile state structure. As the final phase of the war intensified and brought to the doorstep of Siyad Barre’s government, a group called the Manifesto visited USC’s leader, General Aidid, begged him to halt the war to which the General reportedly replied ‘it is too late to halt a war which started in Zeila now the frontline has reached Avizioni (in Mogadishu)’ forcing Siyad Barre to flee the town in the most undignified way ‘in the last functional tank’ as Peter Pham⁹ put it.

When the first false premise on which Somalia’s national government was based, i.e. foreign aid dried up in the early 90s, the Somali state structure simply imploded, the country descended into Hobbesian war of all against all and like an attention seeking child Somalia turned its deadly weapon against itself. For a long time Somalis were the sole victims of their imploded nation-state. But the result of this long post-Cold War negligence is that Somalis have not only made their country dangerous for themselves to live in; they turned the strategic location of their country into a strategic problem to the international commercial maritime transport. Now the international community has to once again come to rescue Somalia, this time, from itself: women and children seek protection behind AMISOM troops from their own fellow Somalis; the Transitional Federal Government for its troops and police force from their fellow Somalis; and Somali business community for its sea cargos from its own pirate boys. If the language, race or religion argument makes any sense it would have explained how this war of all against all in most of Somalia continues unabated.

The December 2010 Djibouti Conference of Somali Scholars

Djibouti was the first Somali territory to opt out of the Union. It had closely studied the unfolding saga of the Union in mid 1970s and took what every reasonable Somali thought was a political miscalculation. But Djiboutians preferred to take a leap into the unknown than join a wobbly Union. It paid off. Against all expectations Djibouti thrived and its people are now well-placed to come to the rescue of their fellow Somalis who loved each other to death. It has in December 2010 hosted a conference of Somali academics. Proudly standing in front of about 60 the participating Somali scholars, President Ismail O. Guelleh instructed them to brainstorm about Somalia’s problem and come up with a workable solution. Ironically, like no other leader, President Guelleh knows well that Somalia and Somaliland would have been better off had they gone separate ways. He also knows well that restoring the Somali Union is a foregone conclusion. The founding fathers of the Republic Djibouti had predicted that accurately. It would not be surprising if someone claimed that the President was humming ‘wax la waayay Waydow ninkii waalan baa u dada’ (Somali for ‘only the insane looks for the impossible’) as he was tasking the scholars with the impossible work of finding a solution to the ‘Somali’ complex problem. Impossible insofar as the solution is Union-based. Unfortunately, they shied away from thoroughly debating or even

8 For brevity only three factions are mentioned here. There are many more factions including the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) as well as none-affiliated individuals and general public who helped end Siyad Barre’s rule.

9 Peter Pham, Somalia’s New Prime Minister: Not Quite What the Doctor Ordered, accessible at: http://www.hiiraan.com/op2/2010/oct/somalia_s_new_prime_minister_not_quite_what_the_doctor_ordered.aspx

considering a two-nation-state solution to the Somali drama. That might have been more productive. Instead, there was more of the same *deja-vu* scholarly debate that had no practical relevance for resolving the perennial 'Somali' problem. Understandably, settling the Union drama by dissolving the unity is painful, but as appears from Somalia's turbulent history, there is a pressing need for those genuinely concerned about the plight of the 'Somali' people and the stability of the Horn of Africa to consider the hitherto neglected and painful option of the two-nation-state solution.

The Pandora Box Argument Against Dissolving the 'Somali' Union

It remains unclear as to why the scholars avoided to discuss a no-Union-approach which the very country that is hosting them has adopted. However, the majority of those who indulge in Greater-Somalism oppose the Republic of Somaliland's statehood argue that dissolving the Union will open a Pandora Box, i.e. that Somalia will disintegrate into smaller clan-based entities. But they fail to see why this fashionable Pandora Box argument they invoke had failed to materialise when Djibouti decided to stay away from joining the Union in 1977, the year Somalia's military government sent its troops on a costly expedition trip into Ethiopia. Similarly, they fail to see why Ethiopia failed to disintegrate into smaller entities when in 1993 Eritrea ceased to be part of Ethiopia. On the contrary, the one territory that would have followed suit, the Somali inhabited region, integrated further in the Ethiopian federal system by removing from their flag the five pointed star against a blue background (Somali identity) which symbolised their aspiration to join the rest of Somalia and replacing it with a she-camel (their regional identity) against a yellow background (Ethiopian identity). Further, no one is holding hostage the aspirations of the South Sudanese people by invoking that the rest of Sudan will fall apart if they [the South Sudanese] opt for separate statehood. It is, therefore, unclear as to how and why dissolving the Somalia-Somaliland union would this time around lead to further breakdown of the region.

New Directions

The victorious USC without consulting their partners in the war installed a transitional government supposedly meant to run the Union. That was the defining moment for Somaliland's history. Ordinary people in Somaliland became suspicious about how serious their partners in the Union were about the Union. More importantly, people in Somaliland realised that Somalis were not and still are not psychologically and institutionally ready for a centralised government and that a Union is something that they could ill-afford. Traditional leaders from Somaliland took the matter into their hands from the SNM generals in 1991 and decided that the restoration of colonial borders, and not the restoration of the Somali unity, was the way forward.

The dependency on foreign aid continues to-date with all the fifteen plus peace conferences Somalis have seen since the collapse of the central government in 1991 were all funded by donor nations. The argument that the frantic search for reestablishing the central government in Somalia is, according to this view, simply because there is the illusion of foreign aid bonanza of the Cold War magnitude will resume once more (Menkhaus, 1997). But many observers begin to understand now that the Somali homogeneity, if not a problem in itself, failed as a unifying force. The Somali irredentist idea was too ambitious while the norms and values of modern state were still alien to the Somalis who are unable to curb in their 'Somaliness' sentiments. Somalis are not psychologically prepared to be united for the sake of it. Nor are they willing. The blind search for a one-nation-state for Somali speaking people in the Horn will surely only prolong their suffering.

No wonder that now the stand of some of the international community is shifting towards the realisation that the likelihood of re-establishing a sustainable unified central government in Somalia is next to impossible. To many who are genuinely concerned about the plight of the people in the Somali peninsula it has become clear that the problem of the loss of the Union is secondary to the problem of whether a nation-state can indeed be built on the much invoked linguistic, creed and culture and religion criteria. If that were the case we would have seen a one Arab nation-state. It has not happened in the Arabia peninsula, neither can one expect it to happen in the Somali peninsula. For, there are many people who fit the criteria, but are perfectly happy with having other nationalities than Somali. Uniting all Somalis under a one nation-state, an idea that is still current in the former South (now Somalia) is and has been 'a political stalking' which Somalis need to review. It does not hold. For, if Dr. Abdirashid A. Sharmarke had been troubled by Somalis whose nationality were falsified about 50 years after his eloquent statement on Greater-Somalism, his own son, Mr. Omar Sharmarke, proud of his dual identity and nationality as a Somali-Canadian, was in 2009 appointed as TFG's Prime Minister. Mr. Omar Sharmarke is part of a new generation whose identity and nationality is hyphenated and whose acquisition of foreign nationalities is brought about by the very ideal which Dr. Abdirashid A. Sharmarke stood for: Greater-Somalism. Greater-Somalism led to civil war, to refugee crises sending Somalis around the globe and finally to the dissolution of the Union. The important lesson one can draw from this development is that ethnicity and national identity are separate factors which are not sufficient nor absolutely necessary for the building of a nation-state.

Now, contrary to the popular view that the South dominated the North, or that the pre-1991 Mogadishu-based semi-literate government systematically oppressed people from the North, which to some extent is of course true, the former Somali Republic's problem is the unthought through plans to unite all Somalis, whilst this lineage-based people have never known any form of a central authority. The union came generations too early and as the situation currently stands a two-state solution is the best way forward.

The Changing Political Landscape in the Horn of Africa

Mohamed Obsiye

This article offers a reflection on the recent developments in Somaliland's foreign policy and the changing attitude of the international community. For a long time there has been a complete disassociation between a country's ability to discharge its sovereign responsibilities and its claim to a sovereign status (Herbst, 1996-1997)¹⁰. The international community's continued support to give legitimacy to a non-functioning state, so as to preserve non-existing integrity is like refusing to perform an essential amputation for the sake of bodily integrity. As Herbst had argued about thirteen years ago the repeated attempts by the international community to revive Somalia's nation-state, despite the overwhelming evidence that such a nation state has never worked nor will, should be replaced by recognising that a more viable state structure can better be created if what Spears (2004)¹¹ calls 'the polity scale problem' in Africa is seriously considered. Spears, like Herbst, suggests that the emergence of Somaliland, as did its predecessor Eritrea, or the South Sudan's nation-in-waiting will soon do, is precisely a reflection of that process of scaling down the prevailing state structures in post-colonial Africa.

It appears that the international community is now beginning to realise, in the best interest of world security, the political developments in the Horn of Africa should be accepted on their merits. That means that if in the past the international community has fallen for the de jure status of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), it is now paying attention to the de facto developments in the region and with restoring Somali unity dream becoming virtually unobtainable, the international community is recognising Somaliland for its achievement in the areas of democracy, peace and stability. The changes in the way in which the international community engages with Somalia and Somali coincide with the peaceful presidential election and transfer of power in Somaliland in August 2010. They also coincide with the new foreign policy which Somaliland has adopted which, in addition to the maturing home grown democracy, is making it difficult for the international community to neglect.

Over the past couple of months Somaliland's foreign policy and the shifting positions of Ethiopia and Djibouti have made headlines, as did the US Dual Track Policy towards Somalia and Somaliland which similarly has generated much discussion. The new Somaliland administration welcomes these changes knowing that they will have profound implications for their search for political recognition. Somaliland's forcefully articulated and deftly executed foreign policy has been instrumental in the change of position of both the above regional countries. Somaliland's new foreign policy is intended to move the country beyond its established reputation for being a stable, peaceful and democratic country, but a country that is serious about its aspiration for full diplomatic recognition. It is focused on establishing bilateral relations, a half-way house to full membership of the free nations, and is already making headway in attracting bilateral relations. Whilst it might be naive to put a timeline to this process, it is, nonetheless important to

10 Herbst, J. (1996-1997) 'Responding to State Failure in Africa', *International Security*, (21):3

11 Spears, I. S. (2004) 'Debating Secession and the Recognition of New States in Africa', *African Security Review*, 13(2).

point out that Somaliland's recognition, a hitherto moving target, is more than ever before a matter of when and not a matter of if. And even if it does not achieve that goal, i.e. international recognition which has become a national obsession, for Somaliland to deal bilaterally with the international community is according to Somaliland's FM, Dr. Mohamed Omar an achievement in itself. Bilateral relationships are expected to attract the country the much needed developmental assistance to boost their economic growth.

Economic growth, job creation and attracting international and Diaspora investment have become a central concern of Somaliland's new administration. In this respect, the country's new foreign policy, reflecting these aspirations, found partners, if coincidental, in Djibouti and Ethiopia. The latter two countries were for some time concerned about the image of the Horn of Africa which has been tarnished by bad publicity caused either by mad-made disasters like wars displacing millions from their home and livelihoods, or by natural disasters like draught and famine which were exacerbated by ineffective management causing much human suffering. Ethiopia and Djibouti, with their development initiatives, are committed to improving the living standards of their population, whilst at the same time they aim at transforming and restoring the image of the region by addressing the multidimensional poverty facing their people, tackling security concerns, and establishing regional trade links. Dr. Omar, shares and envisions these developmental goals. He wants Somaliland to be a key player in the envisaged Horn of Africa by attracting international investment for the country's untapped natural resources and cashing in its strategic location.

Embroiled in the formation of yet another cabinet, these developments could not have come at a less fortunate time for Somalia's TFG. Even though a new cabinet is now approved political disharmony among the TFG institutions is an ever present nightmare. Nonetheless its official line towards the US Dual Track Policy is that this new policy undermines the integrity of Somalia, as though there is anything to undermine, and even much less impressed by the changed position of Ethiopia and Djibouti. In an interview with the BBC on 22nd November 2010, the newly appointed Prime Minister Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed (Farmajo) was extremely cautious about commenting in any indepth on their intended relationship with Ethiopia, Djibouti and Kenya. PM Mohamed instead emphasised strengthening their relationship with countries like Uganda and Burundi, the Arab World, the EU and the US. So what has changed for PM Mohamed (Farmajo) to be so vague about their relationship with Ethiopia and Djibouti? PM Mohamed (Farmajo) may have more in mind than merely avoiding to comment on his intentions regarding his government's relations with Ethiopia. He may have found it difficult to swallow the diplomatic headways which Somaliland is booking in its foreign policy, particularly relations with neighbouring Ethiopia and Djibouti, and think that the best way to respond to their shifted positions is to ignore them altogether. He may also just be expressing the views held by some sections of the Somali Diaspora suggesting that Ethiopia, as Somalia's arch enemy, is only out to keep Somalia downtrodden in a political mess, and the only way to show their disappointment for Ethiopia's political involvement in Somalia is through low profile diplomatic relations, if not an outright confrontation.

Although it might be premature to talk about how the bilateral relations between Somalia's new government and Ethiopia will develop, one thing is certain: Somaliland is not taking too much of an interest in the TFG's discomfort with the new political developments. After President Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud (Silanyo) and his Foreign Minister Dr. Mohamed Abdillahi Omar visited Ethiopian and met Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, in an official press release¹² PM Meles Zenawi 'confirmed that Ethiopia

12 http://www.mfa.gov.et/Press_Section/publication.php?Main_Page_Number=5501

would extend its support to Somaliland in the areas of security, peace, trade and communication, among others'. Here PM Zenawi more than ever before hints that Ethiopia will play an active role in facilitating the process of searching for diplomatic recognition. But it is not only Ethiopia that diplomatically sides now with Somaliland. Djibouti appears to have changed its position too; it may not be the first country to extend a full diplomatic recognition, but it has become the first country to extend a full diplomatic reception to President Ahmed Mohamed Mohamoud (Silanyo) on his official visit to the country in early November 2010.

Armed with the new impetus, renewed interest and change in the political landscape in the Horn of Africa, Somaliland is now firing on all cylinders in its search for full international diplomatic recognition. In addition to the delegation led by the president to the UK, a parliamentary delegation from Somaliland is touring major European countries to showcase their achievements, strengthen their links with European parliamentary institutions and rally support for enhancing their achievements.

Now the question arises what kind of relations does Somaliland intend to enter with its former partner of the union? The contemporary politics Somaliland stands for is one that recognises being a Somali does not give one political leverage in all Somali-speaking territories. A national identity does not necessarily have to be forged out of such shared commonalities. Given that states are not naturally given but politically constructed on agreed upon principles, there is no reason to doubt that people sharing common language cannot form separate nations. Djiboutians did that. It is what Spears (2004) calls 'the absence of common national consciousness' that in addition to the polity scale problem similarly plagued contemporary African nation states, with the former Republic of Somalia being a classic example. Such national consciousness has never taken root in Somali-speaking territories both during pre-colonial and after independence.

President Mohamoud (Silanyo) knows that too well. In a speech on 26th November 2010 at Chatham House, London, he reiterated that the search for full political recognition is at the heart of his government. Outlining his vision of the region, he stated that they want to see peaceful Somalia. Clearly, peaceful Somalia is in everybody's interest, not least because of the security concerns it raises, but more so because as Bryden (2004)¹³ argues 'an Ethiopian-Eritrean' solution to the Somalia-Somaliland problem might look attractive.

Having said that, President Mohamoud (Silanyo) did not hide his conviction that restoring and respecting colonial borders is in the best interest of the region, suggesting that the Great Somalia dream is now a 'once-upon-a-time' fairytale aspiration that needs to be archived, and indeed already archived by Somalilanders. He reiterated that the declaration of the Republic of Somaliland in 1991 marked the end of an epoch characterised by the hopeless dream of uniting all Somali-speaking people and territories under one nation. If we are to learn anything from history, he meant, it is that the 31 years of the Republic of Somalia were costly and disastrous. Echoing the changing world views towards Somalia, President Mohamoud (Silanyo) had a word of advice for that country. According to the President, Somalia can only emerge from the mess it is in if, and only if, its leaders stop relying on the externally-driven approach to reconciliation and peace building.

13 Bryden, M. (2004) 'Somalia and Somaliland: Envisioning a Dialogue on the Question of Somali Unity', *African Security Review*, 13(2).