

Somalinimo: Essential for the Somali Nation; Inconvenience to Others

By

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“Washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful not to be neutral” ...

-Paulo Freer

Preamble

The purpose of this paper is to place the agonizing political situation in Somalia in proper historical and geopolitical context. Thus it will attempt to show how the prevailing societal dysfunction has in large measure its roots in the manipulation of foreign actors that have ceaselessly promoted corrosive influences. And that circumscribing (if not the full stamping) of those influences, which are very much linked to crucial moments leading up to the present disastrous state of affairs, hold the key to meaningful change, for the better, in the long suffering country.

Background

Somalia never had it easy in its history. In antiquity, the ancient Egyptians knew the Horn of Africa nation as the Land of Punt (or Punit). They also referred to her as their ancestral land as well as “The Land of the gods”. The Greco Romans, that regularly traded with about a dozen or so towns, along the Gulf of Aden and at least one on the Indian Ocean coast, called the Somali peninsula the Far Side (as opposed to Arabia Felix). They also called the region the “Land of Spices”, as the region had been, since times immemorial, the premier source of the highly sought-after resins such as Myrrh and Frankincense, among others. As for the region and its people, various narratives attest to the land as a tough place populated by hardy but resilient folk given to enterprising ways—not unlike the present-day Somali stock.

In modern times, however, the country had suffered one of the most egregious bouts of European Colonialism, following the infamous scramble for Africa that began towards the waning years of the 19th Century, CE. The English, the Italians and the French all had arbitrarily carved their own swathes or “Somalilands” out of the contiguous territory inhabited by the virtually homogeneous and socially integrated Somali people.

Even the socially underdeveloped, neighboring country of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) got into the act. She had been allowed by the said Europeans to participate in the foregoing grand larceny on account of it being ruled by a fellow Christian king. Accordingly, an otherwise impoverished, would-be colonizer-king, namely Menelik II, had been ceded the huge Somali region known as Ogadenia, along with the Haud and Reserved Area sub-regions by the functionaries of the crafty British Empire (on two separate occasions in the 1940s and the 1950s). Kenya too (upon independence, 1963) was gifted the large Somali-populated region then known as the Northern Frontier District by the same British colonial authorities, which, at the close of the Second World War (in 1945), controlled the entire Somali Peninsula. This, in spite of a plebiscite a year earlier in which upwards of 86% of the population in that province had chosen to join with their brethren in the Somali Republic after independence (to no avail).

The whole wicked scheme of partitioning Somali territory into separate colonial spheres under various European-led occupation forces all but crippled the free flow of the nation's agrarian economic activities; alienated previously integrated communities from each other; and, in the process, created a mangled political map of the Somali Peninsula (the terrible consequences of which continue to wreak social and political havoc on the society to the present day—at the turn of the 21st Century, CE).

To be sure, the Somali people, for their part, were never willing victims. Nor did they take the colonialist-spearheaded, multi-faceted assault on their country lying down. For starters, the Dervish movement (1900-1920), led by the charismatic, gifted leader and peerless poet, Sayyid Mohamed Abdalla Hassan began to wage their epic struggle for national liberation at the dawn of the 20th Century. The movement's mode of operation was marked by uncompromising commitment to pursue a singular, overarching goal: national liberation. In that, it is safe to say that securing internal cohesion was not particularly high on their agenda. To the extent that national unity had already been despoiled by the colonial powers, the movement perhaps mistakenly saw this task as something that they would be able to salvage after winning full independence. So in their zealotry, the Dervishes over romanticized Somalis' sharing of certain key ingredients of nationhood, including religion, language, culture and ethnicity to the exclusion of other factors equally important for mobilization.

Still, the Dervishes' example of courage and uncommon valor in defense of the cause of liberty in the face of an unsympathetic, overwhelming destructive force had undoubtedly raised the consciousness of the entire nation, in ways that no other action could have achieved. To prove this point, Somalis have largely overlooked the fact that the movement's sweeping struggle against the foreign invaders took a severe toll on the society as a whole in terms of heightened instability and social displacement. What is remembered, though, through oral history and poignant, evocative poetry is that the Dervish freedom fighters faced up to the daunting challenge of fighting the mighty British Empire's colonial forces along with those organized on behalf of fascist Italy, and the for-ever-and-a-day belligerent Abyssinians. What is also significant is that the Sayyid's militia, after 20 years of relentless war, fought those supposedly superior forces from powerful countries to a virtual draw. This became the source of genuine pride among Somalis. And it was not until the Dervish movement had been assaulted in that 1920 aerial bombardment that destroyed their fortified, Taleh headquarters—in the first such attack on a liberation movement, anywhere in the world—that the white-turbaned legions finally disbanded. The disreputable attack from the air had pulled off the short-term goal for which it had been designed: to put the movement out of commission, as an organized fighting force. But, by that time the Dervishes' influence had already left an indelible impression and an enduring mark on the nation's collective psyche.

For the movement had already inspired a generation of Somalis to take up the cause of independence from colonialism, if only in more politically savvy ways. Indeed, it took only two decades after the destruction of the Sayyid Mohamad's Taleh headquarters, by Britain's Royal Air Force, for the SYL (Somali Youth League) to take the liberation banner and begin to organize another pan-Somali political movement that, within a decade and a half, led to the decolonization of two (of the five) Somali regions that were ruled by England and Italy respectively, in 1960.

The following nine years (1960-1969) of independence saw Somalis experiment with Western-style democratic governance, in what can be safely termed as its most rudimentary application. Real political discourse in the country essentially consisted of inter-clan and intra-clan jostling for power and influence under the guise of clan-specific political parties. Still, the society remained fairly open; the rule of law held sway for the most part; and, there were at least a couple of credible media outlets that operated very much independently.

It was after the October 1969 coup d'état that the country took a turn towards uncharted, if dangerous waters of military rule. The next 21 years of military dictatorship marked a period of conspicuous contrasts. In the early 1970's the ruling junta had demonstrated the temerity to instill a measure of discipline inspiring a burst of energetic nationalism that spawned the development of infrastructure facilities, were none existed before; and, the construction of new schools and institutions of higher education, hospitals and the like, especially in the nation's capital, Mogadishu. The Somali language was written, albeit in a Latin script, and instituted as the *lingua franca* for instruction and other official business. Incredibly, within a couple of years, the literacy rate shot up dramatically throughout the country. Meanwhile, the armed forces too developed into a professional organization, acknowledged as arguably the best fighting force in Sub-Saharan Africa. Those were the heady days.

However, due to the structural deficiencies inherent in military rule, and dictatorships generally, the above developments would not last. Besides, the foregoing improvements notwithstanding, the country had effectively become a satellite of the former Soviet Union, then one of the two superpowers (the other being the United States). Though the regime of the late President Mohamed Siad Barre pronounced itself an adherent of "Scientific Socialism", but for all intents and purposes, the ruling junta was toeing a diehard, communist line dictated by Moscow—a system that in effect denied all freedoms including religious practices along with independent thought to the otherwise indomitable Somalis. What is more, rather than keeping the clan *Jinni* contained as promised in military regime's early days, the ruling *junta* not only tolerated it, they began to practice its most base manifestations—a direct contravention of their stated public policy goal of advancing perfect egalitarian values. Alas, the end result of their double-dealing was nothing less than devastating to Somalia's prized social cohesion.

Throughout the 1980s the country was losing ground in all aspects of its socio-political and economic spheres. The corrosive practices of clan politics seeped into every facet of public life, in all regions, with deadly effects. Certain regions and communities were specifically targeted for cruel reprisals. The ill effects of unchecked bias of clan-centered politics, honed in the European colonial days of 'divide and rule', had by then metastasized into an aggressive cancer that eventually consumed the military regime. With that Somalia's image as a homogeneous nation and thus one of only a couple of countries that are naturally suited for the designation of "nation-state" in not only Africa, but in deed anywhere in the world fell victim to the resulting practice of badly skewed governance. Internally too the ensuing conflict found Somalia's unique status as a natural state wanting as mistrust between communities began to increase exponentially in direct proportion to an environment of heightened mutual suspicion and misrule. What makes this scenario particularly distressing is that the vaunted "homogeneity" had long been a source of pride among Somalis. For, its intrinsic value had been considered Somalis' ace-

in-the-hole—a bulwark against the types of intractable divisions that dog many countries in the world, especially Africa, where citizens of heterogeneous backgrounds, owing to their ethnic, religious and cultural differences continue to be at loggerheads despite the best efforts of their national governments. Oddly in Somalia, political problems stem from diametrical opposite impulses, where the people are united on shared *Somalinimo*; it is the government(s) that stokes division. As a result, the principal unifying fabric of *Somalinimo* seems to always hang in the balance.

Not surprisingly, the onset of civil war in 1991 and its bloody aftermath had badly shaken the once-cherished *Somalinimo* to its core. Soon thereafter, the country was wracked by the vagaries of wild-eyed politics of the primordial clanist mode, where, to paraphrase Aesop, they “hang the petty thieves and appoint the great ones to public office”; a scheme pushed largely by a cadre of self-interested urban elite and externally directed religious extremists. Yet incredibly through trade and travel the masses remained connected by virtue of the potent cultural unity represented by *Somalinimo* – an identity that had, over millennia, provided the nation with an enviable social cohesion.

The Current Situation

During the recent past years of chaos—in 1990s and much of the subsequent decade—savage civil war and warlord banditry took their toll in great expanses of the South. So did the extraordinary abuses of power by religious zealots who do not seem to value human life as sanctified by its Creator. But, the country as a whole is not necessarily facing an existential struggle as many pundits and would-be analysts repeat *ad infinitum*. What is new about the current feral environment in and around Mogadishu is that the rate at which Somali politics is undergoing an uneven change of fundamental nature is approaching fast and furious base. Needless to say, after years of instability, the way forward remains as murky as ever. For gone are the days when, just a little over a generation ago, crudely-managed spoils system at the national level was seen by many as an unmitigated catastrophe. Little did folks realize then that in place of such comparatively petty corruption, we would be witnessing the misshapen, bewildering political situation that is prevailing in the country at the present time. Little also did people consider that the agent-instigators of the current perennial chaos would be fellow Somalis intent on fulfilling a far-reaching agenda of unvarnished greed of the highest order. Some of the chief operators among that unhappy lot utilize an externally directed radical ideology that is widely believed to be distortion of Islamic tenets. Still others seek to not only parrot alien, Western ideologies but also seem to have swallowed the ill-advised “solutions” contained therein, hook, line and sinker. They then blithely regurgitate their subsystems to mechanically help advance the crooked ends for which those misguided solutions were put forth in the first place. Talk about ‘grass trembling when elephants fight’!

There has been, over the past number of years of disorder, robbery on a grand scale and mass killings of mostly innocent non-combatants. But to have had that calamity followed by bungling, moral midget regimes with uncanny knacks for celebrating ineptitude to the point of allowing the continued destruction of the remaining vestiges of civilization in the country’s historical capital, along with many of its inhabitants, leaves one utterly dumbfounded. So the fundamental question

remains. Who exactly is fanning the flames of discord and division in Somalia and in so doing actively working to prolong the country's ongoing tragedy? And to what end?

Clearly, the current agonizing political situation in the country goes beyond the infrequent quarrels brought about by the usual clanism-induced anxiety in times of scarcity and general insecurity. However, in the absence of a well-defined, distinctive Somali political system, clan-based or otherwise, at the national level, it appears that more and more the affairs of the nation are becoming increasingly under the sway of externally driven agendas. The proverbial 'elephant in the room' therefore is that seldom-discussed foreign factor, which has its many sharp fangs already sunk deep into Somalia's lean tendons (that precariously hold her skeletal frame together). Strangely, few if any seem to recognize with any degree of confidence exactly what or who would wake the nation up from the current stupor in which it appears even common sense is immobilized? In deed there is mystery as to who would inspire the Somali masses to simply refuse to become pawns in a deadly geopolitical game of chicken that more often than not seeks to separate developing nations from their own God-given resources through cunning and outright deception. Yet the consequences of inaction are as bad and unwise as certain reckless "political actions" (including mindless terror tactics and pirate activities) that would in all likelihood be counter productive concerning the nation's interests.

In times of uncertainty and confusion advantage goes to the organized. That is perhaps why Somalia's free wheeling but rich socio-cultural intrinsic values were—through deceitful means and intimidation—enticed to function as splinter groups, thus weakening the national will. It is not unlike the manner in which the advent of oil wealth amounted to net loss for Arab unity. For the end result represents more of a curse for the common people in both societies: 1) the subjects of the potentate-ruled enclaves in the Arab League, and 2) ordinary Somalis. Both are beset with social justice and governance problems. In the case of Somalia, the nation's strategic location, the virtual homogeneity of its population and her vast natural resources – the very assets that would under normal circumstances provide the predicates for strong national unity – have been made to work against that very proposition. There are indications that, in deed, the prospect of keeping the unruly Somalis engaged in state mutual hostility (bordering on 'mutually assured destruction' type scenario) appeals to some external actors, who as of this writing may well be wringing their hands in the off chance of peace breaking out somewhere in that ancient land. Occupying as she does an important piece of real state in the strategic Horn of Africa, Somalia is seen by few determined interlopers as a potential geopolitical prize—a territory ripe for fresh forays of exploitation. Hence the onrushing, thinly disguised foreign-led campaigns calculated to exacerbate matters in the hope of rendering the country's political situation pretty much stalemated and inoperable. The resulting near state of paralysis already sets the country up for a new kind of neocolonial manipulation and political domination. The tools of such wicked trade were perfected long ago in the developed societies of the West. But lately otherworldly field-tested apparatus' of instability are coming from a new quarter that is hitherto not known for undermining friendly nations. Such apparatus' include the introduction of a virulent ideology that self-identifies with but is peculiar to the widely acknowledged Islamic ethos of bringing about peaceful co-existence and universal brotherhood.

If the manner in which the situation Somalia is currently devolving into the politics of grievance is any indication, it is a matter of time before emerging powers such as China and India would

come out of the shadows and join the second scramble for Africa. And, as things stand, Somalia is shaping up to be a key battleground for that looming contest. As the maxim goes, ‘geography is destiny’. That is perhaps one of the reasons the for-the-all-too-real external threats to Somali unity that are by now clear for all who care to see (even if their threats only magnify internal tensions).

We already know from history that inter-clan and intra-clan animus in the Somali context has always had a limited shelf life. While simple quarrels sometimes degenerate into bursts of hostility, including physical engagements, differences are historically settled through the well-developed traditional Somali mediation and conflict resolution system that is codified in the oral tradition of the extant *Xeer Somaali*. Further, the periodic contests and occasional fights in the countryside, though eye-catching, could not fully account for (nor begin to explain) the years of internecine wars and endless conflict that have gripped the country of late. And so a durable kind of conflict within Somali polity that defies logic and tests all human credulity continues unabated.

The considerable ink spilled and the great deal of analysis expended on the present state of politics in the country appears thus far to be all for naught. It all boils down to predictable scenarios much like the legend of the seven blind men and the elephant (with each identifying the part he touches as representing the whole beast). What we are left with, by way of explanation, is that of the imprudent role assumed by the revolting politicians. As regards rationale of their wretched behavior, there are as many as there are commentators. For when it comes to politics Somali-style in a generation, constructive ideas are hard to come by. Consequently the current crop of politically active folks is quick to resorting to demonization of opponents. Some, especially the proponents of the *Ibisi* notion of *takfeer* (that inexplicably condemns Muslims with opposing views as “infidels”) seek even to physically eliminate their political adversaries. They view dialogue as sacrilege or worse betrayal of their fanatical agenda. It is with this kind of dismal ideology that sustains the fires that are scorching the Somali body politic. And it does not matter one whit to those aficionados inequity who or what ultimately gets burned in the brush fires that they surreptitiously set ablaze. If, in the case of Somalia, those fires happen to be consuming large parts of an otherwise vibrant society, their attitude would be: “so be it”, insofar as the warped cause they pursue beckons. But they would be well advised to contemplate the possibility that their sponsors’ now calm, tree-lined byways could soon be at risk of being engulfed by the very social infernos they so carelessly kindle. For once an arsonist sets place ablaze, it is no longer under his control. The wind and other natural elements take over. Thus, those stoking Somalia’s conflict have an opportunity and an obligation to stop their nefarious activities at the front end. The question though is: do they have the will and the good sense to do so? And who are these brazen mischief-makers anyway? Let’s examine the known behavior of some of the more calculating actors, namely the Arabs, the Ethiopians, the Kenyans, the Eritreans, AU member states and the West, including the US.

The Arab Factor

Soaring petrodollar revenues padding the already bulging burses of various Sheikhdoms notwithstanding, the Arabs are politically emasculated, and they know this in their bones. Their tribal-centered culture condemns them to hopeless division and atrophy in regards to progressive

ideas that could move their far-flung societies forward. Unable or unwilling to face that reality, they had, some years ago, latched on to using sloppy if dangerous tactics to challenge (more like goad) their geopolitical nemesis, namely the West, in particular the United States, for that block's offense of empowering their archenemy: Israel. Still, the hapless Arabs are in no mood to confront the US, Israel or the West in general directly for any number of reasons: economic interdependence, the lopsided military imbalance favoring America and her allies, and Arab states' historic, chronic disunity, to name but a few. Hence, the emergence in the Middle East of a new brand of politics based on a specious interpretation of Islam whereby the 'end justifies the means'.

Establishing moral equivalency with the tactics of Western imperial powers is a poor excuse. Yet, some of the wealthier Sheikhs seem to have settled on this schizophrenic course of action where most of their states officially maintain "normal" relations with ideological foes in the West, while influential members of their societies secretly sponsor fanatical, religiously-oriented movements that battle Western influence in various Muslim lands, especially in the periphery. They do this in the hope of setting geopolitical brush fires in faraway corners as the linchpin for war of attrition that they hope would in the long-run damage US interests, both politically and economically. The thinking goes that with the US weakened, the West as a whole will be set on a course of slow, irreversible decline that would in due time have the entire block wither in the vine.

The fundamental feature of this quest for conquest and control is indoctrination and financing of certain expendable, fringe forces that have been designated to do the Sheikhs' dirty work. Incidentally, those designated irregular forces are recruited from throughout the Muslim world, including poor and disenfranchised communities within the Arabian Peninsula, South Asia, North Africa and the Horn of Africa—in places where, due to economic challenges, there are no shortages of willing recruits. The common denominator for the resulting volatile environment is brainwashing, using the tenaciously intolerant *Salafi* doctrine. Add to the foregoing an ample supply of petrodollars and you have a combustible situation. Meanwhile, the low-level ringleaders and the foot soldiers for this remote-controlled struggle are—motivated as they are by that uncompromising form of perverse 'liberation theology'—on a steady death-march. That is how this peculiar campaign gains access to unlimited supply of human drones, eager to make the ultimate sacrifice at a moment's notice. The selected recruits are those that would gladly hasten to their demise to plunge into the *Jannah* (heaven) that they believe await them on the authority of their "spiritual" handlers. (Few of them even manage to negotiate a sum of money for their families before hastily departing this worldly scene). But does what this has to do with Somalia's political problems in Africa's Horn?

In the case of Oil Sheikhdoms, for example tiny Qatar—by no means the only one—Somalia is nothing more than a theatre for testing and perfecting their strange brand of deceptive struggle, which they wage stealthily under the banner of religiosity. The Sheikhs in such municipalities there are closely allied with the US (and the West) on two issues of critical importance to their fiefdoms: 1) economic and developmental projects, in particular the exploitation of their vast fossil-fuel energy resources; and, 2) containment of the expansion of Iranian Shia' fundamentalism in the region. But by their own other subterranean actions, the Sheikhs hold the US and the West as their ultimate ideological rivals in what they perceive as long-term struggle

between civilizations: theirs and that of the West—rather than promoting human civilization in accordance with precepts of The Book and Wisdom as taught by Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).

The above wrongheaded policy is precisely why certain sheikhdoms bankroll the fanatical extremists that are wreaking havoc in ‘holy terror’ in places like Mogadishu, where people and property are blown up on a regular basis. And, in the process, women, children, the elderly and the infirm are obliterated to smithereens as the cost of waging their shadowy struggle—a sort of collateral damage that strangely enough resonates with their counterparts in the West. As a result, countless innocent Somalis are being killed, mutilated and rendered homeless by those types of immoral, ideologically driven wanton actions by religious fanatics. And so it will go on for the foreseeable future: some Arabs doing what they can in this postmodern, geopolitical war of attrition—directing and financing dirty wars from remote palaces of their idle rich, while incidentally working doubly hard to be seen as reliable business partners of the West. The French philosopher Blaise Pascal was right when said, “Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction”.

Another leg of this two-legged stool concerns Egypt, the dean of the Arab League club and the home base of the radical Islamic theology. In the modern era, Egypt has had the dubious distinction of being an under-handed meddler extraordinaire in Somali affairs. Since the days of their gadfly leader, Jamal Abdulnasser in the 1960s, Egyptian operatives have been ankle-deep in Somali politics in a thinly disguised effort to set the country on collision course with the neighboring state of Ethiopia, with whom they expect to engage in a deadly contest over the waters of the Nile, in the not-too-distant-future. Such Egyptian interference in Somali affairs will not go away anytime soon.

To be sure, there are other troublemakers regarding Somalia’s long-lasting political fiasco, elsewhere in Africa. The African Union as an organization, for example, is duty bound to do what it can, such as it is. But others in the neighborhood, the Horn of Africa sub-region, are in this game to stir trouble for Somalia for their own selfish interests.

Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya and the African Union

As currently constituted, Somalia’s neighbor to the west, **Ethiopia** is an artificial, amalgamation of disparate nationalities that are held together by a religious and ethnic minority on the basis of brute force. The ruling Tigray/Amhara grouping views all things Somali through jaundiced lenses. The primary reason for their abiding enmity has to do with the bloody history of struggle between the two societies that goes back hundreds of years. To date, due to infamous concessions made to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) by European colonialists, that country colonizes the Ogadenia (Western Somalia) region. They hold the Somali citizens there in appalling conditions that recall the Apartheid period in South Africa.

Ethiopia’s current involvement in Somali “reconciliation” conferences and subsequently as the guarantor of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Mogadishu have proven to be a Trojan horse designed to penetrate Somalia to be able gain control the entire country under the guise of providing “peace keepers”. By all indications it appears that this hare-brained scheme is

doomed to failure. As a result of that country's longstanding failed Somalia policy, the ruling Junta is currently behaving as though in a panic mode.

Eritrea is another poor little country in the neighborhood that is ruled by a tin-honed dictator deeply involved in shenanigans that complicate the situation in Somalia. The tiny country is on war footing with all its neighbors, especially with their estranged ethnic and religious kinfolk—the ruling clique in Ethiopia. It is that terminal conflict with the rulers of Ethiopia that drives Eritrea's untoward involvement in Somalia's political 'theater of the absurd'. If they could manage to settle with their neighbor to the south, Eritreans should have no issues with Somalia. Their present interference is nothing more lame pursuit of the adage: "The enemy of my enemy is my friend".

Kenya is of two minds when it comes to helping settle Somalia's political fiasco. They know that they can derive huge economic benefits from a stable Somalia at its northern flank. But Kenyan politicians are also afraid that their country's negligence and mistreatment of their Somali region—the Northern Frontier Province—might catch up with them sooner rather than later in terms of (imaginary) reprisals, when Somalia gets back on its feet.

The **African Union** member countries constitute a 'poor man's club'. They can neither marshal the resources nor the political wherewithal to get sufficiently engaged to help solve the intractable political crises such as that of Somalia, without relying wholly or in part on Western largess and logistical support. Thus their ability to sustain even a skeletal peacekeeping force is often circumscribed. So, while largely harmless, they are not much of a help, either.

The West's Corrosive Influence

The West, especially the US, has a 'God complex', as though possessing the power of giving life or death. They are quick on the draw in foisting destructive fiscal and economic policies on developing countries, particularly in Africa in order to remake them in their own image. And, to insure the smooth operation of those often misguided policies they have created powerful institutions. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have over a number of decades been putting in place policies inimical to the interests of developing countries. They were specially conceived and developed to perform economic and fiscal interference tasks that have failed to provide appreciable benefits in social development, but instead led to more underdevelopment. The policies of these two powerful institutions, however, had been prescribing to African countries such as Somalia (before the onset of civil war in 1991) succeeded only in creating high inflation, fiscal imbalance and chronic indebtedness. In the case of Somalia economic failure came before the collapse of the political superstructure, which predictably followed soon thereafter. The disastrous 1977-78 war with Ethiopia and the splintering of the opposition along clan lines were contributing factors. But at the macro level the country was being smothered by the consequences of a widely-held belief in many quarters within the Western circles that "they know what is best for developing countries", and so they proceeded to dictate to these countries on how they should run their affairs, irrespective of what the empirical data may show. This is especially the case with regard to the Somalias of the world that may possess substantial natural resources within their territorial borders. In this context, Iraq and Sudan come to mind as the poster children for getting the short end of the stick (in what is clearly a creeping, neocolonial dispensation).

On the political side, democracy and human rights are the tools of choice that are readily wielded against any leader of a 'developing country' who does not willingly become a supplicant and a lackey. Anyone who resists this direction will at best find a torrent of highly placed articles and news reports denouncing him/her as the worse human being that has ever lived; and, someone who makes Adolph Hitler look like a mere school yard bully.

The infamous NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) are then let loose to do their multi-faceted dirty game, including siphoning the so-called foreign-aid moneys. From there they usually proceed to spreading half-truths and outright fabricated stories to discredit a target country's leaders and governance. They then go on the national news of their respective, "donor" country with flimsy accusations; they publish phony articles; and, they make themselves available for high level interviews and briefings including to the US Congress to make the case that such and such government does not comport with "civilized behavior" and therefore it does not deserve to be in power in so and so country. During these staged events, they often beg US lawmakers and senior government officials "to do something about the situation for the sake of humanitarianism, before it is too late", all the while seeming to shed crocodile tears to mask their own misdeeds and rampant corruption.

In the meantime, no one bothers to call these decidedly "bad Samaritans" to account for fomenting the untold mischief that they create in the target countries. It is widely known by the people of these "developing" countries that the NGOs create fully or in part the very awful conditions, which they so decry in the glare of the mass media. As always, they are quick to justify their known corrupt practices such as creating their own mercenary forces, dealing with the criminal elements in the country, spreading unfounded, negative stories through a sophisticated network of highly efficient propaganda machines. Their standard answer to any query is: "We are doing all we can in order to deliver critical supplies to people made destitute by instability borne of government inaction or bad faith, or both". Yet they expropriate much of the aid in question on broad daylight because they know that there would simply be no consequence for such malfeasance on their part.

All these plus other forms of subterranean spy activities provide countless 'body blows', (as in a mismatched boxing event) against a sitting government and moderate religious institutions so as to make way for the final knock out with the arrival of foreign troops that are almost always waiting in the wings. If that does not work, then the country is left to stew in its own juices (ala Somalia after the "Black Hawk Down" incident) for a long while, until it is fully cooked and done to stick the knife in, without the anxiety of having to face serious repercussions. Or, so the scenario goes!

The Missing Somali Solution

The external interferences referenced above have found their respective marks in large measure because non-sectarian Somalis have abandoned politics so as not to succumb to factionalism. And, its none other than these 'missing in action' Somalis who can, with God's help, save the Somali nation from becoming a poster child for the type of disaster that inevitably befalls those societies that neglect to reflect on their condition and take the long view of things. For such a

passive approach would not only take stock of reality as it exists in today's shrinking world, which is becoming more intertwined every day, but would fail to chart the way forward towards the realization of veritable progress in the future.

Sure, political clanism (or more precisely neo-clansim) with the whole host of social ills attendant to its administration is an undeniable feature of today's Somali polity—and, it remains the society's pain to this day. Yet, all Somalis would confess that the present Berlin Wall-like, emotional barrier that clan-based politics has erected in recent years is by no means insurmountable. In this context, the current fixation with factionalism should be seen for what it is—a passing phase brought about by those wishing to take advantage of the young nation's growing pains!

For a clear-eyed perspective, consider all the intrinsic attributes that have continued to unite the Somali people since times immemorial versus what is dividing its communities today. And, one would realize how ephemeral clan politics ought to be viewed in the scheme of things. As people sharing a unique culture and heritage, religion and ethnicity, Somalis have been known in most of the nation's modern history—going back perhaps 1,000 years or so—to have had transcended clan divisions, especially on crucial historical milestones. With right-acting leadership, Somalis from all clans had demonstrated time and again willingness to face great challenges in the defense of the common national interest and the dignity of all Somalis, as a race of people unified by no less than Divine Will.

For example, during Imam Ahmed Gurey's era in the 15th Century, CE, Somalis from various regions coalesced on the proposition of defending *Somalinimo*, and in so doing achieved much success against the ever so menacing attacks from the Abyssinians hordes. In parts of the Deep South, along the Juba valley, Somalis from many different clans have similarly been able to easily unite under the banner of *Ajji* during the 18th and 19th Centuries, CE to forge a common security regime. Virtually all Somali political movements of consequence, at the national level, prior to the collapse of the military regime, were organized across clan lines on the basis of the same cherished, if much bruised of late, identity of *Somalinimo*.

It is this powerful, unique, *Somalinimo* identity that needs to be restored to its rightful, lofty perch within the society. Fundamentally, what gives *Somalinimo* impetus is its Islamic character of working in the service of a just cause such as defending the motherland and national identity. But it is also rooted in very important, if enigmatic, ways in the glorious legacy of the ancient Cushitic civilization that flourished for thousands of years in Northeast Africa as well as in far-flung regions of the Asian subcontinent continent, among other places. With this understanding, Somalis will have come to appreciate their place in the scheme of things in a world where the unawares are increasingly marked for the most insufferable forms of the exploitation that have been condemned by right-thinking people throughout the annals of human history.

Conclusion

Almost all nations, throughout history, have experienced some form of foreign meddling and/or interference in their internal affairs. Invasions, colonization, quests for imperialism and domination by the powerful over the weaker nations continue to be an unhappy legacy of human

societies' points of intersection. So there is no reason to expect Somalia to be an exception to that general rule. However, in the case of Somalia, the mitigating historical factors have lately gone missing from the equation. The national spirit that typically works to countervail threats from without seems to have all but given way to the predictable connivances of the ever so intrusive, external incursions. The result has been internal divisions of major proportions that today threaten to split the nation asunder, into mutually suspicious and perpetually hostile enclaves.

During the colonial period, Europeans functionaries dubbed Somalis, "the Irish of Africa". This is because Somalis had shown themselves to be fierce defenders of individual as well as collective honor, and national identity, unwilling to accept slight—keenness to express their opinions about almost any given subject, no matter who disagreed. However, given Somalis' social unity and egalitarian ways, more analogous Europeans would have been the Germanic tribes before they were unified by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck (1862-90), while utilizing the practicality of *realpolitik* or the Italians prior to the *Il Risorgimento* or "Resurgence" of 1814-1861.

To day, the differences, though superficial in social terms, have grown wide to chasms in the political arena. Thus to resuscitate the sagging national spirit, Somalis need to look inwards for the answers that had eluded the nation for nearly two decades. This requires conscientious Somalis to be mindful of external manipulations that exacerbate deplorable internal conditions. In the past it would not have been necessary to remind Somalis to be vigilant or to ditch the nasty habit of depending on foreigners for many things that could be accomplished within the society. There was willingness to try even if efforts fell shy of whatever task at hand at the time.

The first and foremost task of the hour is political reconciliation. The factions need to make the decision to reconcile without setting preconditions or looking to foreign powerbrokers to manage their proceedings. Sure, the savage Ethiopian army does not belong in Somali soil but neither do the homicidal actions of the cadre of uncompromising, foreign-trained and directed militants who would justify cold-blooded murder on basis of a faulty theology. The current so-called government (or any "transitional rule" that may follow) should likewise realize that genuine reconciliation requires the widening of the political circle to accommodate all sectors of the society in a clear-cut manner. In the interest of true reconciliation, therefore, all parties should come to the negotiating table without distant patrons pulling their strings, from behind the scenes. In deed, it is high time that Somalis get serious about facing up to the challenge of solving country's political problems without the usual distractions that inevitably come with the workings of self-interested foreign filter. The time for bold actions in the interest of the indispensable spirit of *Somalinimo* that is embedded in the nation's time-honored moral fiber is now!

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