

Once Upon a Mujahidin

By Roobdoon Forum

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As is known, in mid 1970s, Saudi Arabia had the ambition of regime change in Mogadishu, as an antidote to the Soviet (USSR) influence and communism/socialism represented by Siyaad Barre. Considering themselves as an ally and partner in spreading of “democracy”, the Saudis requested from the United States to diminish the Soviet influence in Somalia.

The Americans were aware of the Saudi fears and confirmed that the Soviets were stockpiling long range missiles in its new naval-support installation at Berbera, northern Somalia. And to counter the Soviet menace, the Saudis proposed to the US a plan to expel the Soviets from Somalia. That plan was, according to *The New York Times*, to offer a financial and military aid to Siyaad Barre – i.e. the Saudis will give “economic aid promised it by USSR and the US would furnish Somalia with arms also promised it by USSR”. However, this plan to defend the Saudi backyard from the Red Army retreated into oblivion, after receiving a lukewarm reception from the United States.



Seeing itself as a regional power of balance and the guardian of all Muslims, mischief-making Saudis adopted a new design, more sinister than the previous plan. They sought hard to bring Somalia into chaos through any possible means. By late 1970s, Saudi Arabia was already abetting various Somali factions and this was partly derived from the American wish.

One of the armed rebel groups that buffeted throughout northern Somalia, the Somali National Movement (SNM), was in fact midwived by Saudi Arabia. One of the founders of this movement was Somalia’s former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Hassan Adan Wadaadiid, one of Saudi Arabia’s errand boys.

Despite its name, the Somali National Movement has been led by clannish elites and chiefs of the Isaaq clan and they were trying to prove their ownership of what was then the British Somaliland, the whole northern regions of Somalia.

The Mujahidin of the Horn of Africa

Securing that the Saudi petrodollar is in the pipeline, the SNM rebels based their military operations in Ethiopia, which has a disputed border that stretches of one thousand miles with Somalia – i.e. the rebels were able to buy cheap Ethiopian weapons arsenal with Saudi money.

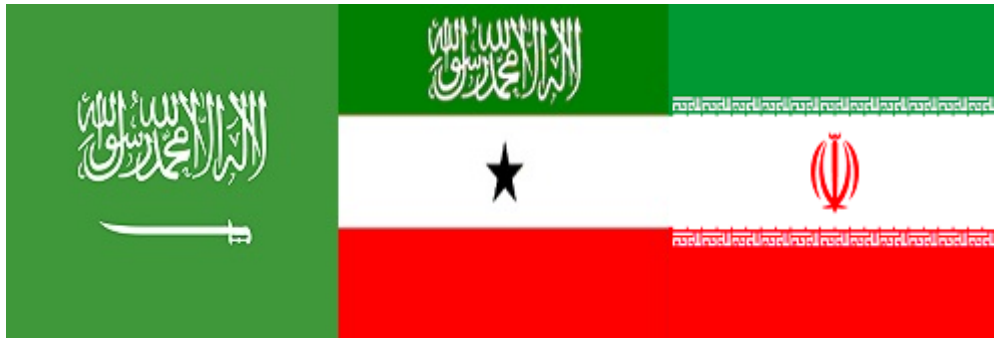
In early 1980s, the rebels began their hit and run campaign against main towns in northern Somalia, destroying villages and their water wells. These clan-based rebels emulated the Afghan guerillas of the 1980s, who were fighting against the Soviets. They called themselves the “Mujahidin of the Horn of Africa”.

In most of their press statements, the Mujahidin of Horn of Africa have never missed the opportunity to express condemnation to what they called “the treacherous plots of the Zionist Israel”, the archenemy of the Arabs. And after such statement, the Mujahidin would conclude their press briefings with a strong deep appreciation to the governments (mainly Saudi Arabia) who have extended a helping hand to their armed struggle and hoped that the Saudis will not just continue to send money but increase it.

Moreover, in these statements, the SNM leaders used to address of themselves as Mujahidin, liberators, and keepers of the Sharia (Islamic Law) – a distinct combination that marks to themselves as true Muslims under the banner of Islam. Beside their core principle (declaring other Somalis as *Munaafiqiin*), the Mujahidin also referred to other Somali factions as evil-doers.

After a decade of warfare, an entire region of Somalia was laid to waste, followed by the fall of Siyaad Barre regime in 1991.

As soon as they took over Hargeisa and its environs, the rebels announced that they seceded from the rest of Somalia and introduced the Sharia (Islamic Law) in the areas under their control. They swiftly adopted a flag for their enclave. The flag is the merger of two flags – that of Saudi Arabia and Iran. A weekly-published paper, *al-Mujaahid*, became Hargeisa’s most circulated paper. It seems now that the clannish rebels designed this theological statement just to appease Saudi Arabia and to depict themselves as of having a Wahhabiya-enthusiast outlook.



From left to right: Saudi, Somaliland, and Iranian flags respectively.

The proclamation of adopting the Sharia and having a flag that is featuring in the *Shahada* would be a potent force to attract the support of other Gulf regimes. After all, the House of Saud has long ago crafted a plan to take advantage of the pre-existing clan disputes in Somalia to spread their political and religious understanding, which is a Hanbali-based Wahhabiya – in a region where the majority of the people are the followers of Shafi’i (*Shaafici*) school of Islam.

No Secession Can Avoid a Counter-secession

Like the Arab monarchies that base their legitimacy to rule from their clan status and claim to trace their family tree back to the Prophet, the secessionists also declared that they are the “Durriyah” and thus descendants of the prophet’s Banu Hashim clan. In the egalitarian nomadic culture of Somalia, however, rule by birthright is inherently objectionable.

Therefore, since the main vector of the secessionists was the supremacy of the “Durriyah”, it led to the awakening of the other clans in the region. The marketing of one clan birthright supremacy in a nomadic society is in fact tantamount to a bid to promote problems and civil strife. It has infuriated the already volatile grazing lands along borders between clans.

Subsequently, the brazen interventions of the clan politics in Somalia by the Saudis did not yield good results. That is, for the Saudis, their goals of promoting Wahhabi teachings have never grown in stature inside Somalia. For the Somalis, the renewal of Saudi Arabia’s secret romance with the armed groups in Somalia is a real source of concern.

The Mujahidin U-turn

Saudi Arabia's understandings of Somali clan politics has matured. Their blatant and blunt bankrolling to the SNM rebels has illuminated this new reality. By mid 1990s, Saudi Arabia ceased to support and to encourage the clan-based Mujahidin, leaving them with no other choice but to turn coat. The leaders of the secessionist Mujahidin who were so enraged by the Saudis' deceit, started to focus their anger on staining the Saudi regional policies.

Soon they began to bring their sole specialty and skills into a new political equation: making a U-turn and taking a clear stand towards the House of Saud. Through their leaders, the secessionist enclave (Somaliland) openly denounced Saudi Arabia and jumped on to the "war on terror" bandwagon.

From mid 1990s, more layers of the Mujahidin of the Horn of Africa mischief were revealed.

The first layer was an attempt to establish secret ties and back room deals with Israel, so that both sides can coordinate their "war on terror" activities. In his correspondence, the breakaway Somaliland leader, Mohamed Ibrahim Egal (1993-2002) stated that Somaliland and Israel were now on the same page, as far as the Islamic fundamentalists are concerned. In December 1995, *The Indian Ocean Newsletter* leaked information about this secret communication between Somaliland's leader and Israel. The *Newsletter* wrote:

According to [Somaliland] president, "Discovering that Eritrea is not interested to act as an Arab satellite", both Riyadh and San'a as well as Khartoum are "now directing their efforts to force Somaliland to forfeit or withdraw its independence with the intention of installing a pro-Islamic Somali state under federal Somalia". This indicates he places Saudi Arabia and Yemen in the same camp as fundamental Islamic states such as Iran, Libya or Sudan

In a bid to resist this pro-Islamic pressure which he suggested could "adversely affect the national security of the state of Israel", president Egal called for Israeli cooperation and hoped that he would be able to obtain Israeli aid and military in military equipment and counter-espionage experts, support in organizing a referendum in Somaliland around the end of the 1996 or early 1997, humanitarian assistance, and rehabilitation aid, as well as development aid counsellors and experts on petroleum and mining operations.

Firstly, the Israelis took Somaliland leaders by surprise when they deliberately leaked this letter to the media. Although Israelis know that pragmatism is a part of

politics, they are also aware of, however, that these leaders cannot be trusted, no matter how many incentives and pledges were offered. And the turncoat Mujahidin of the Horn of Africa is not without pedigree.

Secondly, the Israelis know that eloping is still very popular and practiced in Hargeisa, but they have no more desire to play the role of mistress in the region. They are fed up of secret meetings, late night phone calls and anonymity-based relations. They are now demanding from any entity in the region seeking to court with them to be public.

Furthermore, Somaliland continued oscillating between opposing spheres. Again, they found another emotional and nostalgic one, which serves them to forge an imagined cultural identity. The secessionists want to control the future of the people in the northern Somalia by rewriting their past. Ironically, the nostalgia of rewriting of their clan pedigree feeds them on another nostalgia aimed at altering the history of other clans in the region.

Good Morning Commonwealth!

“We are a lost child of the Commonwealth and we have to be taken back,” says the breakaway Somaliland party leader, Faysal Ali Warabe, while giving a press briefing to the media in the conference hall of Speke Hotel, Kampala, Uganda. The aim of the self-styled leader’s visit to Uganda, in May 2004, was to persuade President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda to sell Somaliland to the Anglophone Commonwealth.



It would be a thought-provoking to refer past events and to cite miserable statements uttered by the self-styled Somaliland leaders, whether it was the result of their political ignorance, malice or false convictions. To do so, the following will demonstrate how openly the memory of the colonial past was revived and misused in Somaliland:

The chief proponent of this political acrobatism was none other than the former Prime Minister of Somalia, Mohamed Ibrahim Egal (1928-2002). He used his political skills to construct some fallacious statements that created confusion in the minds of many northerners.

He classified the birth of the Siamese twins, Somali Republic, on July 1, 1960, as the work of sentimental irredentists who believed in *Somaliweyn* based on myth.

In a telephone interview that he gave to Ed Timms of the *Dallas Morning News*, Egal said:

The unification of the nation under one flag was an emotional thing ... We had different colonial experiences ... We became different people. Our ethics were different, our attitude to work was different, our attitude to women was different. I came to realize the gap between us, that there was no hope of ever coming together.

In 1996, Peter Smerdon of Reuters, a white journalist, visited Hargeisa for assignment, just to find himself confronting a large group of noisy people who were pretending to be nostalgic for life under British rule. Peter reported these remarks:

“Are you British? I’m a Somali scout,” shouts an old man, white whiskers quivering with anger on Hargeisa’s sand-swept main street. “Where’s my money? You owe me a lot of money.”

“I fought for the British in World War Two. Now, if you would just take my photograph and publish it in the London papers, I am sure the generals will recognise me and pay up.”

In early 2004, members of the British parliament, representing three political parties in the House of Commons, made an evaluation trip to Hargeisa, the bastion and the seat of the breakaway administration of “Somaliland. They were received at the airport, with a warm welcome, by a cheering crowd; which reminded the delegates their former loyal subjects who used to wear their most colourful dresses to such occasions. These joyous crowds were carrying posters with a picture of the Queen Elizabeth II, in which its headline reads: ‘The Queen, our mother’.

The parliamentarians were not surprised with the assembled crowd and their show of loyalty to the Queen. Firstly, one of the core values of becoming a member of the Commonwealth is acknowledging the British Monarchy as the head of Commonwealth nations. Secondly, the delegates were well aware of that the secessionists were in desperate situation and needed to use all the leverage that they can possibly muster to attract recognition.

Posing as someone longing for situations of a bygone colonial era has become, for the secessionists, the practice of identification in which imagined traditions come into play. This is how the identity of northern Somalia was presented by the secessionists in Hargeisa. Yet, it is a common knowledge that in Somalia, there are no deep traces, linguistically or culturally, of colonial (Italian and English) traditions.

One notices, however, that the staged expressions that is being played on the streets of Hargeisa may be translated, by some observers, as though Somalis in the north are genuinely longing for the restoration of colonial yesteryears, when Somalia was under the occupation of the British and Italian colonial powers. Others may simply see it as a desperation tactic that arises out of dissatisfaction with the present and uncertainty about the future of Somalia.

In 2002, the secessionist took a new but creative measure to mask the one-clan-based rule in Hargeisa and to silence their critics. They selected a non-Isaaq to become their leader, Dahir Riyaale Kahin, who became the leader of Somaliland (2002 – 2010). The vanguards of the secessionist, mainly their numerous websites, started to disseminate that Somaliland has moved from one-clan rule to tenure system.

However, Dahir Riyaale couldn't change the veneer and outward appearance of the one clan-based administration. In 2010, the Mujahidin reshuffled the cards, and Somaliland was back on track with the one clan-based rule.

It is not easy to miss the “wild cat” remarks that every new leader of the secessionists unabashedly proclaimed, since the days of the Mujahidin. In 2007, four British MPs visited Hargeisa again. After long diplomatic talks, Dahir Riyaale started to throw, as usual, a bundle of Mujahidin firewood to burn the brains of the MPs and to appeal to their hearts by telling them that “Somaliland people felt that a more closer affinity with the British than with the rest of the Europeans ... and we therefore expect you to help us.”

In this context, by leaning himself towards the United Kingdom, Riyaale speculated, foolishly, that the MPs might assume that he is sincerely conveying a message that the people of Somaliland, as a whole, want to be forwarded – this is another glaring example of how ambitious the secessionists can be chasing their illusion of splitting families and clans for the sake of clan supremacy.

Hargeisa's never ending charades, which has now turned into a sense of inferiority complex, is indeed a big embarrassment for a country that has been independent for over a half century and has no traces (culturally) of colonial foot prints.

The reason behind their pretense and their claim that they are different from the South and have been influenced by the Anglo-Saxon work ethics must be seen in part in their attempt to secede from the rest of Somalia – an effort that will not succeed without the will of the majority.



Lieutenant Lloyd of Maidenhead, an English master at Sheikh [British boarding school], talking to students during “break” in what was then British Somaliland in July 09, 1945.

Nevertheless, separatists’ emphasis on the specificity and difference of the northern regions of Somalia from the rest becomes a “cause-game” (i.e. to restore lost colonial culture), hence to forge a clan enclave.

Many clans in the North (Somaliland), though, view these separatist endeavours as a safety valve for the many years of frustration and civil wars that Somalis are experiencing. They just see the separatists’ tactics of dishing out misinformation as a weak attempt to balkanize Somalia.

If Hargeisa leaders would have stopped of themselves, seeing that their propaganda atmosphere was utterly worn out, and instead make strenuous efforts to convince their cause (secession) to all the clans in the north (Somaliland), they would probably have materialized by now their goals that have eluded it for 24 years.

As soon as the dust of these theatrical political schemes has settled, the secessionists have found out that they didn’t convince the British government to recognize the breakaway enclave. British government’s response to the self-styled Republic of Somaliland was simple and concise: “British government does not object to recognition of the self-declared state of Somaliland, but it is not essential that the UK be the first to announce such recognition.”

Bonsoir La Francophonie!

The aspiring secessionists have no longer the appetite to poise themselves as an ally with Great Britain, who generally used to defend the interests of Commonwealth countries. Instead, they found themselves in a situation of political ambiguity and flux, and thus foolishly invented another new political acrobat.

They asked to themselves, again, what is the quickest path to international recognition?

French, the language of “love and wine”, has become the answer and the new niche in their struggle for recognition.

To convince the world to recognize Somaliland, they now seem to believe that they have a plausible way to at least find one country that recognizes their “Somaliland” project, keeping in their mind for taking advantage of the cultural rivalries between the Anglophone and Francophone spheres.

The secessionists have embarked on this new project, after encouraged by a dwarf-sized Francophone neighbor that is trying to bunch above its weight in regional affairs. To convince their supporters, Hargeisa leadership started commending the French language for the excuse of bilingual communication with their brotherly neighbor, Djibouti.

Djibouti sees itself as having the prime geostrategic value in Africa, for it is the home of many foreign military bases, including United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) and France. This barren and arid salt territory also believes that it will become the Francophone Hong Kong of the Horn of Africa.

On ascending to power in 1998, the president of Djibouti, Ismail Omar Gelleh, emerged as a major behind-the-scenes player in the clan conflicts inside Somalia that followed the collapse of the Central Authority in 1991. Ismail Omar Gelleh, who is like the desert rain frog that wants to be fatter than an ox, endorsed the failed Arta peace conference for Somalia in 2000. Moving more boldly, he deliberately takes sides in the upheavals that are sweeping in Somalia. He pumped hundreds of thousands of dollars into Somalia to create tensions between Somali clans – i.e. creating an Irir confederate clan family Vis-à-vis Darood clan family. The ambitions of this tiny Francophone country know no bounds.

Hargeisa leadership therefore made a new choice that welcomes Djibouti as well as France’s long campaigns to defend the “language of Moliere” and protect French-language culture against the onslaught of the English, the “language of Shakespeare”.



France's President Francois Hollande arrives to attend the second-day of the Elysee Summit for Peace and Security in Africa, in Paris December 7, 2013. REUTERS/Thibault Camus

Hargeisa authorities have heard the oft-repeated rallying cry from the French president and the secretary general of the francophone organization. They know that cultural imperialism has not gone out of fashion in France.

Just two years back, the 2012 Francophone summit in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, France's President Francois Hollande arrogantly lauded his superiority feelings by saying, "Speaking French also means speaking about human rights, because the rights of man were written in French".

Adding injury to insult, Africa has its share of zealous French language watchdogs. Many Francophone African leaders shared these French cultural superiority feelings with France. They still look up to France as motherland and they continue to do things the way they have been doing.

Abdou Diouf, former president of Senegal, who was also the second Secretary General of the Francophone Organization (January 2003 – December 2014) said that "the future of the French language is now in Africa". He added, "By 2050 there will be 715 million French speakers in the world, of which 85% will be African". Was he telling the truth? Hargeisa elites probably know best!

Also, Omar Bongo, former president of Gabon, once said, "(Francophone) Africa without France is like a car without a driver. But France without Africa is like a car without petrol."

Therefore, Somaliland separatists are currently betting on the “language of human rights”, and trying to promote and spread the French language in their small enclave. They voluntarily enlist themselves as foot soldiers in the French war on Anglo-Saxon pre-eminence.

That is, they don't mind to be a Francophone: speak French, think like Frenchmen, and bend their sympathies, without choice, towards France.

Secessionists' new aim is, for that reason, in line with France's foreign policy.

Despite their clan conflicts and the different views on central authority, there is no denying the language that these antagonistic Somali clans share. And definitely, the glue that binds them is the Somali language. This common language that most Somalis who inhabit in the Horn of Africa share is not, like the English, Italian or French language, an accidental benefit of colonization.

So, taking up English or French as a language of administration in parts of Somalia is not easy, since the Federal Constitution clearly stipulates that Somali is the official language.

It was in 1972, when the Somali government adopted Somali as the main and official language of the country. The result has been that Somali became the administrative language. Last month, the Somali Federal Government in Mogadishu, though wobbly, reiterated the continuation and use of the Somali language in all sectors of the government. “We need to protect and promote our language. From this point on, all internal documentation should be drafted in Somali, rather than another foreign language,” says the President of the Federal Republic of Somalia.

Somali language is an important platform and development of the Somali identity and culture. The secessionists' cultural ambiguity and praise for the cultures of the Union Jack and Tricolore will not suffocate and cease, the proud Somalis, to promote Somali and appreciate their culture.

To the secessionists in Hargeisa, however, identifying Anglophone or Francophone cultures is just a political acrobaticism in which they perform to construct a fiefdom called Republic of Somaliland or La République du Somaliland; whichever tongue that bears fruit first, for that matter, is their ancestor.

Roobdoon Forum

Email: roobdoon2000@yahoo.ca

Related article-news, and pictures

Edna Adan promotes French language and culture The Indian Ocean Newsletter November 14, 2014

While visiting Somaliland on 6 November, the French ambassador to Kenya, Rémi Maréchaux, met the former Foreign Minister of Somaliland, Edna Adan Ismail. He spoke with her about the opportunity to create an Alliance Française (French language and culture school) in Hargeisa. Edna Adan Ismail speaks fluent French and represented the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Djibouti from 1991 to 1997. She is the director of a hospital in Hargeisa and of a university named after her, where French is taught.

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France to improve "cultural ties" with Somaliland February 24, 2008

French diplomats who visited Somaliland earlier this week had disclosed that they were interested in improving cultural ties with Somaliland through the French speaking community here.

Thierry Choinier, 1st Secretary at the French embassy in Djibouti, told the Somaliland Times that a number of projects including the development of the teaching and learning of French language in Somaliland will be implemented with French support.

Besides the Association for Franco-phone Somalilanders, assistance will also be given to institutions that have already shown interest in offering courses in the French language such as the Nuradin private school and the University of Hargeysa. The activity plan also includes provision of text books in French.

According to Mr Choinier, the association for French speakers will be the focal point where those who are being trained in French can meet and learn from those who speak French and had already experienced French culture.

Choinier who was accompanied by the embassy's Cultural Attache, Dominique Mondoloni, and the Director of the French Cultural Centre in Djibouti, Maurice Brouard, said that they were also interested in supporting local cultural activities.

"Our aim is not only to develop French language-based culture but our involvement is also a way for developing Somaliland's local culture as well," he said.

The only French connection with Somaliland has until recently been the involvement of a group of French archeologists in the Las Geel rock paintings.

During their visit, the French diplomats were asked by the Somaliland minister of Culture to transmit their need for further support in archeological digs to Paris.

Asked to comment on Somaliland French relations, the 1st secretary of the French embassy in Djibouti said "I think that there is a step by step improvement and as I told the [Somaliland] minister of planning when we met this morning at the ministry of Foreign Affairs, our present visit is not the end but rather the beginning of a long term French engagement with Somaliland. Another new step worth-mentioning is the fact that Somaliland's new representative to France Mr Mohamoud Salah Nur [Fagadhe] was recently granted a visa by our embassy in Djibouti."

The bulk of French speaking Somalilanders has traditionally been made up of veterans who returned to Somaliland after serving in the French army.

Mr Choinier pointed out that the French cultural centre in Djibouti will serve as a bridge for cultural cooperation with Somaliland.

"The centre may contribute by organizing French language courses for trainees or instructors from Somaliland. It may also provide resource persons or technical expertise to back up the Somaliland activities or help in the establishment of new schemes," he concluded.

During their visit, the French diplomats held discussions with various officials in the Somaliland government.

Source: The Somaliland Times website, Hargeysa, in English 23 Feb 08 .

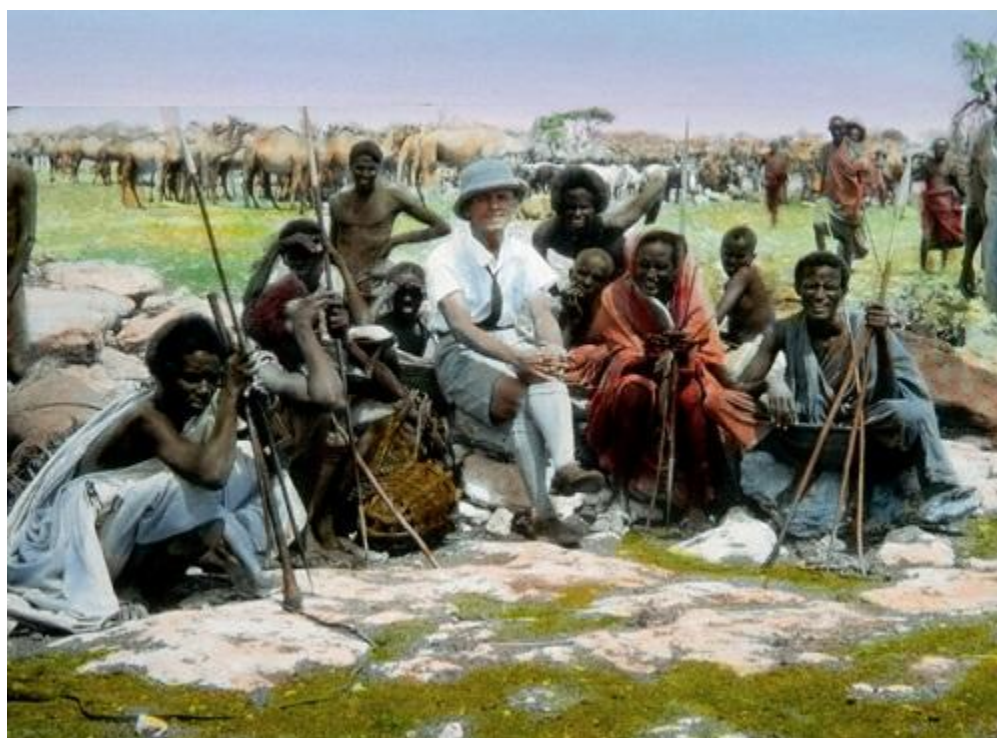
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In early November 2014, French Ambassador to Kenya, Rémi Maréchaux, met the breakaway leaders of Somaliland and have discussed with them about the promotion of the French language in the region.



The Duke and the Duchess of Gloucester visit to Somaliland in 1958. Location: Sheikh, Somaliland



Camel and cattle herders pose with a Czech "tourist" in Benadir, Somaliland, in 1920s.



Protesters march together and confront French soldiers, armed with rifles, during riots in Djibouti caused by a falsified referendum produced by the French government stating that a majority of voters had voted to continue French colonialism. The manipulated results of the vote were achieved by the arrest of opposition leaders and the expulsion of the Somali population. Pictures taken in March 22, 1967.