

**Somaliland, not Somalia:
What a unity!
A tale of five countries and not two**

“Baroor-diiqdu meydka waa ka badh,
Bagaanad is-lahayn biyaan qubay,”

Heello Qaraamiga ah.

“Grieving with the mourners is half the funeral,
How great that you could not show any sympathy?”

Classical (Qarami) Somali song.

It was early on the disreputable day of October 21st, 2010 that I tuned into the BBC at 7.00am. They have been covering a press conference held by Johnny Carson, the American Undersecretary of African Affairs. Mr. Carson was talking about the Obama administration’s new ‘double track’ policy towards the Somali dilemma: supporting the TFG while dealing with the peaceful administrations of Somaliland, Puntland and the central areas of Somalia without recognizing them as separate entities. After the press conference, the BBC organized a brief debate convened by Mohamed H. Hussein (Shiine) between a woman from Somalia, Sadia, whose only first name I was able to catch and Anis Abdillahi Essa, a strong advocate for Somaliland.

Mr. Carson used the term ‘Somaliland’ to refer to the Republic of Somaliland in his press conference, while our sister Sadia insisted on using ‘The Northern Regions’ in reference to Somaliland. Embarrassed for Sadia, Mr. Anis requested from his sister to at least follow the American Under-secretary in using ‘Somaliland’ in her communiqué. In response, Sadia staunchly refused by stating that she will never in her life utter the word ‘Somaliland’, but will continue using the term ‘The Northern Regions.’ The standard of hatred, animosity and bitterness has reached such a level and this discouraging, while scary scrutiny is not restricted to Sadia alone, but is at least shared by most of the Diaspora and the TFG who are envious and resentful of the victories scored in Somaliland.

This is far from a benevolent or compassionate human response to a successful story of some of your brethren, much akin to a neighbor who has put his house in order while steering clear of your side of the fence. In contrast to their diasporic counterparts, Somalia’s local population has shown their admiration of what is going on in Somaliland. The despair and the grief they have shown on the death of President Egal is something unforgettable. This was followed by the joy they demonstrated after the recent successful transfer of power between two popularly elected presidents, the likes of which neither Somalia nor Somaliland has ever seen.

Why such an acrimony? Why not appreciate the gains scored by your fellow Somalis to salvage a part of the greater Somali region from havoc and disastrous wars? Why not appreciate and make use of the rich experience they have accumulated in finding solutions to their differences through peaceful dialogue and the Islamic/traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution. Why is Somaliland not given the chance to take part in the international and regional arena where the dilemma of Somalia has been discussed for the last two decades? Are they not the brothers with whom we shared the same Republic for almost thirty years of unification? Are we not the closest to monitor and sense their inner feelings and preoccupations? Why we are not offered at least an observer's status in such efforts? I admit that the authorities of Somaliland were too busy focusing on the reconstruction of their own nation at the initial stages. But, one should not undervalue President Egal's offer of hosting a Somali reconciliation conference that was undermined in 2000.

This is a brief account of the realities on the ground of two countries divorced from one another, yet locked together by a prejudiced world public opinion and injudicious antagonistic Somali view points. It is not only the people of Somaliland who seceded from the rest of Somalia; the reality is that the people of Somalia and the subsequent so-called governments have cut the country into two parts. For Somalilanders, 18th May is the day they officially restored their sovereignty. The fact is that Somaliland was cut off from Somalia long ago. 18th May marks only the date that our people have reached a verdict on their self-determination.

Somalis in the South and the world at large talk about the war in Somalia for the last twenty years and the fact remains that in Somaliland the civil strife started in 1981 and ended in 1991. This is **ten** against **twenty**. This is the reality. The first ten is not accounted for, but the other twenty is counted and this makes Somaliland a separate entity. Let us ask ourselves the one million dollar question: **Which is the country where a devastating civil war has been going on for the last twenty years in the Horn of Africa?** The answer is simple: Somalia and not Somaliland. In Somaliland, we are not talking about wars instead we are talking about the noble and cherished accomplishments we share with the developing world using our meager resources and mechanisms of conflict resolution. At certain instances the world recognizes this and Mr. Carson in his press conference has admitted that Somaliland has realized a successful presidential election unlike many other African countries. He went to the extent of congratulating former president Dahir Ra'yale Kahin for the peaceful transfer of power. On the other hand, two groups of international electoral observers declared the presidential elections of 26/6/2010 to be credible, free and fair.

On 18/10/2010, Mr. J. Peter Pham a columnist of the World Defense Review wrote:

“...The Siad Barre regime had ignominiously fled Mogadishu – the old despot riding out of town in the last functional tank he possessed – and the erstwhile Somali Democratic Republic had descended into chaos with the exception of Somaliland in the northwest, which seceded, proclaimed the restoration of its former sovereignty, and has since developed a stable polity which earlier this year as I reported here at the time, held multiparty elections which met international standards and led to a peaceful, democratic transition.”

For a decade, 1981-1991, the then northern regions of Somalia (now Somaliland) has been a military camp run by despotic and ruthless generals like the dishonorable and infamous Mohamed Hersi Morgan and Mohamed Hashi Ganni. The land and the people have been completely cut from the other regions of the country. People lived under constant merciless orders of curfews and systematic searches and violations of their basic human rights. Rampage and robbery, theft and rape, were the order of the day. The oppressive army and the supporting units from the refugee camps were given the license to do whatever they liked to the civilian population of these regions. Cities had been leveled to the ground. Hundreds of the fleeing population sought refuge in Ethiopia. None of these atrocities has ever been mentioned at the time of their occurrence and Somalia was seen as peaceful both by the regime and the majority of the Somali people. The talk of the day remained the organization of the regional football tournament in Mogadishu stadium while Sado Ali was singing her sarcastic song of the redundant tournament and stating that the ‘Brown’ machine gun was the one conducting the games.

The term ‘Somali unity’ could not be applied to the union of 1960 by the two newly independent regions of British Somaliland and Italian Somalia. Such a unity was defined by the will and wish of the widely expressed opinion of the Somalis in the Horn of Africa, inhabitants of: Somaliland, Somalia, Ogaden, Djibouti and the NFD. This cherished dream at its time was enshrined in the blue Somali flag with the five stars. Somaliland did not unite with Somalia because of sheer love for Mogadishu or the south, but was rather in search of the Greater Somalia comprising the five regions. It was not the end. Instead the unification has been the means to search for the five. Djibouti was the third to be independent and it opted for a separate republic for which it had the right and every region including Somaliland has the right to stand on its own as a sovereign state. The ‘Somali unity’ of the fifties and sixties was defined as such. If we want to redefine ‘The Somali unity’ under the prevailing conditions, then it is not for one region – i.e. Somalia – to unilaterally reach a decision on the issue. It is for the Somalis to reach a verdict on how ‘The Somali unity’ of the current situation should be redefined if at it is worth of being raised. That irredentist dream of greater Somalia is a forgone conclusion. Djibouti is an independent republic. The Somalis in the NFD seem to be happy with the speedy integration they are making with the broader Kenyan society and nation. A strong reconciliatory effort is currently well underway in Ethiopia with the fighting liberation movements of the ONLF and the UWSLF finally entertaining the idea of

making peace with the Ethiopian federal government. This is a very promising and encouraging endeavor by both Somalis and their counterparts in the Horn. Somaliland is part of such a wide and hopeful move for a lasting and genuine peace in the Horn of Africa. We have every right for the self determination of our people. The sovereignty of Somaliland is irreversible and the ineffective articles by the poor refugees in the Diaspora cannot turn the tide.

There are no other alternatives. There is no 'sacred Somali unity'. Sanctity has no place in politics. Instead it is something correlated to religion and the sacredness of God.

Let us look a little deeper into why Somaliland made the union with Somalia in 1960:

1. Because of a wide inter-regional Somali belief of creating a Greater Somalia by uniting the five regions represented by the five point white star on the Somali flag;
2. Because at the year of independence and union of 1960 Somaliland has been the hub and the heart of Somali nationalism as Mogadishu and the south plunged into a complete tribal and clan business since 1956, when the AFIS (local administration) was introduced as general M. M. Ibrahim, Liqiyato has stated in his book: *"...The Somali Youth League (SYL) has diverted from its mission of independence and the unification of the Somali territories that it has been pursuing for the last fifteen years. Among the ranks of the SYL a clan controversy that has divided its membership has started. The unity in the search of independence has been undermined and the people lost confidence on the leadership of the SYL."* (Page, 131);
3. This obliged Somaliland to take the lead with the historical responsibility of unifying the Somali territories, starting with Somalia. Somaliland did this with courage and sacrifice and with the reluctance of their Southern brothers who were infected with the Daarood versus Hawiye deadly campaigns and feuds. Mogadishu was not as jubilant as Hargeisa on the eve of the respective festivities of 26th June and 1st July 1960. During these celebrations, Hargeisa and the whole former British Protectorate of Somaliland was jubilant and triumphant with the entertainment of the festivities provided by the 'Walaalo Hargeisa Band' who played hundreds of patriotic and celebratory songs. In Mogadishu on the eve of independence and unification not a single song was played apart from the rich repertoire of nationalist songs replayed by the visiting 'Walaalo Hargeisa Band' who travelled by a land rover from Hargeisa on the 27th June 1960 to entertain their brothers in the south which was void of songs and music for the glorious events. Almost the majority of the songs and literature composed on the topic of Somali independence and unity were exclusively composed and played in Hargeisa.

4. The union was realized with Somalia taking a lion's share in all the leading positions, but Somaliland was not interested in gaining positions but was looking forward to the realization of the golden objective of looking for the other three regions which it paid a high price for their liberation specially the Ogaden war.

Such a costly and most probably alien idea of 'Somali unity' has been the disaster that has torn the Somali fiber into pieces, which proved difficult to mend again. The Somali people wherever they are, has never benefited from the so-called 'Somali unity,' which has been exploited by clan administrations since the independence and the unification of the two regions. In 1960 it started with a clan manipulation that was running the affairs of the country to their narrow clan and group interests until 1969 when Siad Barre took the power and distributed all the national and regional positions to his family and collaborators. Up to now the state of affairs of Somalia remains the same, and those who are advocating for 'Somali unity' are simply day dreaming. It is a foregone conclusion. It is already too late - dead. The advocates of 'Somali unity' are nothing more than the blood suckers and parasites of the Somali people, and they remain in a state of futile nostalgia waiting for an opportunity to gain their false ranks again. That will never happen and it has been written this time with an indelible ink, blood. Everybody should be happy with what his region or district offers to him. That is the end of a highly centralized so-called Somali unitary government whose perpetrators are power thirsty to succumb the national wealth to their narrow clan and group interests as has been happening for the last five decades.

References

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