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RECONCILIATION, PEACE-BUILDING AND THE INTRODUCTION OF THE DDR PROCESS IN SOMALILAND

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Introduction:

Brief History of Somaliland and the SNM struggle for the liberation of the country:

British Somaliland protectorate was established in the second half of the 19th century as a potential source of fresh meat for the British garrison across the Red Sea at Aden, a key naval coaling station on the route to India. The British colonial authorities entered into a series of agreements with the traditional leadership of the clans of the area so as to legitimize their colonial ambitions over the area. As early as 1989 the British colonial authorities had been confronted with vigorous resistance of armed and political nature. With the emergence of the political parties in the second half of the forties, the struggle for independence took momentum.

Somaliland gained its independence in 26th June 1960 and merged with the Italian Trusteeship of Somalia on 1st July 1960 to form the Somali Republic. The unification of Somaliland and Somalia had been predicted not on the promise of a bilateral treaty, but rather a multilateral one in which the three remaining Somali territories would also ultimately be incorporated. In 1963 the British awarded independence to Kenya, including the mainly Somali-inhabited Northern Frontier District (NFD) disregarding their pledge to respect the findings of an independent commission that an overwhelming majority of the people in the NFD sought unity with Somalia. In 1964 and 1977 Ethiopia and Somalia fought their major military action over the disputed Somali-inhabited region of Ethiopia, in which the might of the Somali armed forces was shown to be unequal to the task of annexing the territory. In June 1977 Djibouti gained its independence from France and declared its self an independent Republic, hence the total collapse of the pan-Somali state or dream.

The nascent Somali republic was soon in difficulty at home. In a short period of nine years of parliamentary civilian rule (1960-1969), the country's experiment with western democracy proved poorly adapted to the clan-based nature of Somali politics and was soon corrupted. With a popular discontent growing all over the country, the President of the country was shot in 15th October 1969 by one of his bodyguards in Laas-canood. On October 21st, 1969 General Maxamed Siyaad Barre, the commander-in-chief of the army seized the power through a bloodless coup.

Siyaad Barre and his Supreme Revolutionary Council's warm welcome by the Somali people at large and popularity has not lived long. To the discontent of the people on the civilian administrations, in his first years of rule Siyaad Barre introduced and implemented policies that matched the aspirations of the Somali people. But subsequently the situation has been getting worse to the detriment of the Somali people.

In brief Siyaad Barre's dictatorial military regime that ruled Somalia through a ruthless reign of terror for almost 21 years could be characterized by the following:

- Introduction of the banner of “Scientific Socialism” which won the backing of the Soviet Union that also assisted in the build up of a formidable army,
- Establishment of the notorious oppressive institutions such as: The National Security Service (NSS), The Security Court and others,
- To get a total control all over the country, the regime has not spared any aspect of Somali private or public identity, such as: culture, family life, traditional authority and social organizations, religious beliefs were all denounced as anachronistic or subversive and targeted for reform,
- In the background and behind the scenes, a subtle and highly manipulative exercise in corruption and clan politics was beginning to take shape,
- Nationalizations swept all over the country and because of the double-standard policies of the regime, a close relative was appointed as the Manager/Director of each institution,
- Initiation of the Somali-Ethiopian war of 1977-78 which marked a watershed for the regime, for the Somali people and the state they had fashioned for themselves less than two decades previously,
- The massive human influx of refugees that by 1981 constituted 40% of the national population, and about 400,000 of that number in the north,
- Degradation of the northern citizens to aliens in their territories of birth and the promotion of the refugees to first class citizens which created tensions between them,

With these and with its uncountable violations of the basic human rights of its citizenry, the people resorted to a popular uprising to topple the regime of Siyaad Barre. To this effect the SNM was founded in London on 6th April 1981 after an endless chain of consultations among the northern people mainly in the triangle of: Somalia, Saudi Arabia and Britain. The SNM launched a protracted popular war on the regime that went on for a decade (1981 – 1991) and came out victorious in liberating the northern regions in the first week of February 1991.

Since its inception on 6th April 1981 in London, the SNM sought the establishment of a democratic regime and by-and-large respected democratic principles in the management of its internal affairs. The SNM leadership’s practice of collective decision-making and its dependence on popular participation in mobilizing the war effort paved the way for subsequent Somaliland administrations to government by consent. In connection to this statement, Ibraahin Meygaag Samatar, a leading figure in the SNM hierarchy had this to say in his paper entitled: “Light at the end of the tunnel”: “If self-reliance, internal democracy and resolution of problems through dialogue and compromise are the characteristics that today differentiate Somaliland from Somalia, it is because these qualities were learned and practiced by the SNM in the heat of the struggle for liberation.”

Pre-liberation preliminary reconciliation initiatives:

In its last days of the liberation war, the SNM has been closely following and monitoring the course of events in the country. By the end of 1989 nascent defunct liberation movements have been mushrooming all over Somalia, taking arms against the despotic regime of Siyaad Barre. Having closely watching these developments, the SNM has been counting the last days of the regime. It was obvious to

the SNM and it has been a top priority in its policies that reconciliation and peace building among the Somali clans who took adverse sides in the decade-long civil war was more imminent than ever before. Departing from this conclusion, the SNM initiated its reconciliatory efforts well over before the liberation of the country. These reconciliatory efforts that started just months before the liberation of the country from the yoke of the repressive regime of Siyaad Barre targeted two fronts:

Eastern Front:

Though mainly the adverse forces of the regime and the SNM fought the war of liberation, yet the Somali clans had been divided in supporting one of the contestants. The Isaaq clan mainly concentrated in the central regions of Somaliland has been an ardent supporter of the SNM, while the non-Isaaq clans in the eastern and western regions of Somaliland fought for the regime. To avoid a bloody aftermath, the SNM through its sub-clan supporters arranged reconciliatory meetings with the eastern clans who were mainly supportive to the military regime. Two major SNM sub-clan supporters succeeded in signing a ceasefire and peace agreement with their adversaries. These successive peace agreements were finally concluded at the SNM HQs in "Balli-gubadle" with the arrival of a big delegation led by one of the most distinguished traditional chiefs: Garaad Cabdiqani Garad Jaamac. Representatives from both the Central and Executive Committees signed a peace and cooperation agreement with the delegation of Garaad Cabdiqani by the first week of September 1990. These successive peace agreements had their impact in the course of events of the war. Because of these pre-arranged peace agreements, the SNM invading forces in early 1991 had never gone beyond the Isaaq inhabited areas, an endeavor that saved many lives and sowed the seeds of mutual respect and brotherhood between two fraternal clans.

Western Front:

The SNM has not spared any effort to carry out the same reconciliatory initiatives on the western front. These endeavors continued up to the late hours of the war of liberation. Up to the last days of the war, a delegation of the Council of Elders with prominent leaders from the community of Borame had been engaged in a chain of talks and correspondences between the two sides. The main target of these communications was to reach an agreement with the community before the SNM invading forces come out of Berbera and turn to other towns. Both the SNM and the Council of Elders were decisive in their reconciliatory efforts to prevent an attack by the SNM forces on that town. Unfortunately these attempts were not successful at the end, but yet the subsequent invasion of the SNM proved minimum in both human and material damages.

Reconciliation and Peace-building in Somaliland:

Berbera Reconciliation Conference: February 1991

In the early days of February 1991 most of the Northern regions of the former Somali Democratic Republic had been liberated by the SNM. The SNM has succeeded in evicting any retaliatory reprisals against those clans that had been supporting the former regime and if any casualties had happened the damage has been minimal more on the human aspect than the material one. Soon after the liberation of the country, the SNM

appointed a comprehensive Preparatory Committee to arrange a preliminary ceasefire and reconciliation conference of all clans in the port town of Berbera.

The Council of Elders (*Guurti*) took the responsibility of peace making and running the meeting, which was sponsored by the SNM. This meeting established a formal ceasefire, fixed a date for a bigger conference of the Elders to be held in Burco two months later to be followed by an SNM Central Committee meeting and appointed a Preparatory Committee to prepare the ground for such a conference of prominent clan elders and leaders from the North to be held in Burco between 27th April and 18th May 1991. In addition to this, the Berbera conference called for the cessation of hostilities, for the promotion of peace and for the resumption of exchange of trade and socio-economic activities.

Burco Conferences: May 1991

The Grand Brotherhood Conference of the Northern Clan Elders:

This grand conference attended by most of the distinguished representatives of all the clans of the northern regions of Somalia was convened on 27th April 1991 and was rounded up on 5th May 1991. More than twenty *Suldaanno, Garaaddo and Ugaasyo* (titled traditional leaders) representing all the clans called upon Burco. The clan delegations also included other participants from other sectors of the society such as artists, intellectuals, military officers, delegates from the Diaspora and business people who provided most of the financing. The following conclusions of the conference were passed to the subsequent SNM Central Committee meeting for endorsement:

1. The Northern regions should stand by themselves without any relations with the South,
2. Islamic Sharia Law should be introduced in the country,
3. The security of the country should be well sustained,
4. A Northern Administration (Government) should be established,
5. All clans should be equally represented in all government structures,
6. Peace-building and reconciliation efforts in Sanaag region should be encouraged and consolidated,
7. SNM combatants should be given a priority in the recruitment of government employees,

2nd SNM Central Committee Meeting:

These draft conclusions of the Elder's conference were passed to the subsequent 2nd SNM Central Committee meeting which was held soon after the elders Conference. Having prepared its own agenda incorporating the Elder's conclusions, the SNM Central Committee meeting continued for a period of almost two weeks. The SNM Central Committee agreed upon the following:

1. Endorsement of the Elder's conclusions,
2. Restoration of the Sovereignty of Somaliland and returning the country back to its legal status of 26th June 1960,
3. Declaration of the formation of the Republic of Somaliland,

4. Formation of the government of Somaliland,
 - With the Chairman and Vice-chairman of the SNM becoming respectively the President and Vice-president of the Republic,
 - Enlargement of the Central Committee of the SNM with non-Isaaq members to serve as the Constituent Assembly,
 - A transitional two-year rule by the SNM and the accommodation of the non-Isaaq communities in the government structure during this period,
5. Reconciliation of the warring parties to the conflict,
6. Continuation of the peace-building process,
7. Initiation of a separate reconciliation process for Sanaag region,

Although these agreements in Burco remain the cornerstone of the peace and stability that prevails today in Somaliland, yet it has not settled or done away with all differences: it simply terminated active hostilities and created a common political framework. Reconciliation and peace building efforts relentlessly continued all over the regions and districts.

These reconciliatory efforts were successful in neutralizing the potential for violent clashes between the Isaaq and their clan counter-parts but did not succeed in resolving the latent tensions within the SNM and the Isaaqs. A year later armed clashes took place both in Burco and Berbera. SNM factional groups started fighting because of their subjective narrow group interest motivations that had no realistic reflections on the facts on the ground. Such armed conflicts between the SNM factions were intentionally given a clan nature by their instigators, a fact that could hardly be seen on the ground. These armed conflicts looked clan-like on the surface, but deeply were factional and because of narrow group interests.

In the resolution of these armed conflicts the same double-standard tactics were used. First, a meeting between the political warring factions was arranged in Hargeisa. 30 representatives attended it from both sides: The government and the opposition. This meeting known as "*Kulanka*" (meeting) paved the way for the conclusive mediation efforts to be carried out by the clan elders through the Council of Elders. They agreed on a reconciliatory elder's mediation conference to be held in the town of Sheikh.

Sheikh Clan Elders Conference: October 1992,

Here, it is important to emphasize the fact that all these post-liberation civil wars were among the SNM political factions getting a limited support from their respective clans. This gave a confidence to the non-Isaaq clans and proved to them that neither the SNM nor the Isaaqs had a hidden agenda against them. This fact engendered the non-Isaaq clans to come to the rescue of their brothers in organizing ceasefire and reconciliatory meetings. The clan elders of Borame who were later joined by all the other clan elders initiated these meetings.

This meeting took place in the town of Sheikh attended by leading representatives of the supposedly warring clans and a mediation clan elders committee. Resorting to the traditional and religious ways of conflict resolution and using all the cultural mechanisms, this conference resolved the following:

1. Fixed assets taken during the war must be returned to owners from both sides,
2. Militias should be withdrawn from the battlefield,
3. All roads must be cleared from armed militias and be opened for traffic, especially the road between Berbera and Burco,
4. Prisoners of war must be exchanged,
5. A reconciliation Conference should be held in Borama within a short period of time,

Borama Elder's Peace and Reconciliation Conference: January-May 1993,

In connection with the resolutions of the SNM Central Committee meeting in Burco in May 1991, the transitional period of the SNM administration was 18/5/1991 – 18/5/1993. Already as the Sheikh Conference rounded up its sessions, the expiry date of the transitional period was approaching. The SNM Central Committee held the legislative powers and it failed to convene a Central Committee in order to set the date for the 7th Congress of the SNM scheduled in April 1993, to decide on the course of events of the country. Because of this vacuum created by the SNM leading organs, the Council of Elders took the lead and their proposed Reconciliation and Peace Conference turned into a national conference where all issues related to the establishment of a functioning government were resolved.

The 1993 Borame Conference has been described as the watershed of peace-making and political development in Somaliland (Farah 1993). The conference overseeing the peaceful transfer of power from the SNM to a new civilian administration also concluded deliberations in inter-clan fighting. After five months of highly participatory consensus-oriented deliberations, the Borame Conference resolved the following:

1. The peaceful transfer of power from the SNM interim government to a *Beel-based* (community) system,
2. Election of a civilian President, Maxamed Xaaji Ibraahin Cigaal and a Vice President, Cabdiraxmaan Aw Cali Faarax,
3. Adoption of a National Charter which served as a working Constitution for Somaliland for the period of 1993 – 1995,
4. Adoption of a Peace Charter for the clans of Somaliland which laid down the provisions for peace agreements to be mediated by the Council of Elders (*Guurti*) and set out methods and procedures for conflict resolution, demilitarization and disarmament. It was intended to serve as the basis for efforts towards peace-building and state-building during a further transitional period of two years,

These were the main national conferences held in the name of conflict management, reconciliation and peace building but the efforts towards this field far more than that. A chain of regional, district and/or sub-clan conferences held throughout the country contributed much to the success of these national conferences.

Introduction of the DDR in Somaliland:

The Peace Charter adopted in Borame in 1993 served as the basic document for the demilitarization and demobilization process carried out later. This process, a unique one

which could hardly be compared to other similar processes elsewhere, was characterized by the following:

1. There was neither unified government army nor a unified opposition one,
2. There were over thirty military groups scattered throughout the country without a unified central command and they acted independently from each other,
3. Each military group had no centralized single command,
4. Existence of these military groups was situational: increasing or decreasing due to the course of events,
5. These military groups were of diverse nature and composition, mainly: Ex-servicemen, Ex-SNM combatants, Clan militias, a wide cross section of the society who in one way or another succeeded in getting small arms,
6. Lack of an efficient central authority capable of insuring the rule of law throughout the country,
7. Existence of diverse circles of influences or power with divergent interests and motivations,
8. Total absence of logistical/technical support from the world community,

Despite these facts, the uniqueness and peculiarity of the demilitarization and demobilization process in Somaliland also lies in the fact that the course of events does not match the typical stages prevalent elsewhere. Normally in most of the countries, demobilization takes the paths of: encampment, registration, disarmament, discharge and the re-integration stage. In the case of Somaliland, the sequences were the following: assembly of armies (encampment), remobilization (integration into the army), and registration followed by the re-integration process. For those who demobilized themselves the curve was shorter: registration followed by re-integration measures. On top of that the diverse army groups are not also at the same demobilization stage at any given time.

How the process developed and the subsequent course of events is another story to be related by Cali Maxamed Yuusuf (Gurey), who was leading the National Demobilization Commission (NDC) in it's first years of commencement.

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