

# International Crisis Group Report<sup>1</sup> on Somaliland: An Alternative Somali Response<sup>2</sup>

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## I. Introduction

The International Crisis Group's (ICG) most recent report on the Somali Republic deals with developments in the Northern region (Somaliland). It narrates what the informed knew all along: (a) that peace has been restored in most of the North for the past decade while the rest of the country, particularly Mogadishu and the southern third, are mired in violence; (b) that some semblance of constitutional order and administrative structure is in place; (c) that most of the public refused to accept naked force as a political instrument to deal with political problems; and (d) that corruption is pervasive among the political elite. Conceptually, the ICG report is divided into three parts. First, it provides a brief review of Somali political history. Second, it sketches the evolution of the region since the collapse of the Somali government in 1991 and the declaration of the region's breakaway status from the rest of the country. Finally, it focuses on three elections organized in the last three years, in order to buttress the claim that the region deserves to be recognized as a sovereign country. **This information raises pivotal questions about the profile of the region as well as the fate of the Somali people. Together, these two points invite a timely, wide, and thoughtful debate among Somalis and others concerned.** After serious cogitation upon the details of the document, we submit that the Report presents important points for the international community to come to the aid of the people of the region to consolidate their communal achievements—particularly in the areas of stability, economic

advancement, and institution building. **However, the Report fails to clinch the argument for international recognition of a new sovereign Somaliland state in the Horn of Africa.** The rest of this critical assessment elucidates this proposition.

At first blush, it is important to register that we were born in and are of the northern region of the Somali Republic. Self-consciously anguished by the current circumstances, we are, therefore, cognizant of the obligations incumbent upon us with regard to the promotion of the well-being of our communities, particularly Gabileh District. Moreover, as scholars, we have collectively dedicated 35 years to sympathetically understand the inner workings of Somali society, discern the great challenges of the age, and proffer possible remedies. That spirit and sense of belonging move us. Our strategic thinking, however, is informed by the profundity and appropriateness of this Somali adage: *“Si xeege ay xeege u noqoto ilkuhuna u nabad galaan”* (roughly, Play fierce hockey yet protect the teeth!). Sadly, we are of the opinion that the ICG Report sketches a political history replete with errors, misinterpretation, and omissions, and bedeviled by an untenable characterization of entire communities (all too negative or positive). In addition, it ends with recommendations that the Report’s analysis does not sustain. Ours, then, is an exercise in ideational counterfoil to the Report. To be sure, there are numerous possibilities for contestation, but, given the preliminary nature of our contributions, we limit our engagement to the following six categories:<sup>3</sup>

- History and Memory
- Unification
- Democracy, Leadership, and Politics of Corruption
- Collaboration with Military Dictatorship/Clanist Sentiments
- Declaration of Sovereignty
- A Word on the Report’s Conclusion

We will end our position with **alternative** recommendations that at once enthusiastically accent the legitimate needs of the people of the region and preserve the promise of a civic future that Somalis of all regions could build **together**.

## II. On History and Memory

**A.** The histories of the Somali Republic and the region are complex, and, consequently, no brief document, and particularly one with a different focus, should be expected to do justice to it. Nonetheless, there are important historical benchmarks that are unavoidable in any serious discussion. For instance, the ICG Report barely touches on the effects of colonialism and the Ethiopian annexation of Somali-inhabited areas. The first can be indicted at three moments: (a) the destruction of Somali life and property during the twenty-year Dervish resistance;<sup>4</sup> (b) the disregard of strong pan-Somali sentiments during WWII and, later, in the Northern Frontier District (NFD) of Kenya; and (c) the deep social and economic deficit left behind by the British Protectorate.<sup>5</sup> This last point is critical to underscoring the dearth of human capital, one that would disadvantage the North in the ensuing competition for the highest posts on the morrow of postcolonial time. For Ethiopia, suffice it to register the old and still continuing marginalization of Somali-inhabited areas and perpetual intentions to undermine any strong Somali national state.

**B.** The ICG Report makes a less than accurate and fleeting remark on the admittedly controversial but heroic and extremely ennobling legacy of Sayid Mohamed Abdille Hassan. Unlike colonial mischief of dividing the natives into friendlies and rebels, the Sayid, on the whole a prophetic poet unparalleled in the annals of Somali literary creativity and courage, is the patron saint of Somali nationalism (*Soomalinimo*).<sup>6</sup>

**C.** The Report never mentions the glorious work of the Somali Youth League (SYL), the only nationalist movement that had a presence in all Somali lands. Here, also, the Report misses the fact that regional pre-independence parties in the North, such as the Somali National League (SNL), the National United Front (NUF), and the United Somali Party (USP), all subscribed to the first principle: the unification of British and Italian Somalilands.

**D.** The Report fails to call attention to the historical point that Northern Somalis were highly significant to the success of the SYL delegations to the United Nations in New York—led by the late Abdillahi Issa and, later, by Abdirazak H. Hussein—where they pressed for indepen-

dence. More specifically, Northern Somalis in Paris, London, and New York subsidized the expenses of the SYL nationalists.

### III. On Unification

A. The Report insinuates that the North was cheated because the Union Act was **not** properly and legally consummated. In the language of the ICG document:

[T]he precipitate nature of the unions had also left a number of legal questions pending. The two acts of union approved by the respective legislatures differed somewhat and no single legal document actually bound the two territories. The new national assembly recognized the error and passed a new act of union in January 1961, retroactive to the moment of independence, but some observers have argued that since the two territories were legally united, the new Act remained without force in the north.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to identify that the observers quoted in the previous sentence were consultants hired in 1992 by the regional administration in Hargeisa.<sup>8</sup> It is also noteworthy to contrast such a claim with what Paolo Contini, the chief legal advisor to the new Somali Republic, wrote in his book in 1969:

The decision to form a union was reached at a conference of Northern and Southern Somali leaders held in Mogadishu between April 16 and 22, 1960. A joint communiqué issued at the end of the conference announced it had been agreed that the two territories would be united on July 1, 1960; the new Somali Republic would be unitary, democratic and parliamentary State; the legislative bodies of the two territories would be merged into a National Assembly which would be set up 'in order to investigate and propose convenient solutions to the problems connected with the Administrative, financial and judicial systems now in force in the two Territories'; the United Nations would be asked 'to supply experts who may help in accelerating the integration of the two Territories'... . On June 27, the day after independence, Somaliland's legislative Assembly passed 'The Union of Somaliland and Somalia Law,' incorporating the proposed Act of Union previously sent to Mogadishu. Section 1(a) stated that 'The State of Somaliland and the State of Somalia do hereby unite and shall **forever** remain united in a new, independent, democratic, unitary republic the name of which shall be the SOMALI REPUBLIC. (Our highlighting.)

Contini adds:

There is no doubt that on the first of July a full and lawful union was formed by the will of the people of the two territories through their elected representatives. However, the legal formalities had not been completed in time...the matter was clarified seven months later by the adoption of the new Act of Union with retroactive effect as from July 1, 1960 for the whole of the Republic.<sup>9</sup>

The Union Act reads exactly as the Somaliland legislature wrote it. Another related matter the ICG Report misrepresents is how the constitution of the new Republic was developed. The fact is that Italian Somaliland, the United Nation's Trusteeship, had an earlier start in constitution making than the British territory. Despite this, there were consultations between the leaders of the two regions, and United Nations experts assisted in the endeavor. The draft constitution was given to visiting Northern leaders to review and make changes as they saw fit. The Northerners liked the document and added only two articles (88 and 89). These additions dealt with public employees and mandated the creation of an independent public service commission, points incorporated into the document. The new parliament vetted the draft constitution, which triggered public debate, particularly after the document was read, article-by-article, over the two national broadcasting stations Radio Hargeisa and Mogadishu. Then came the constitutional plebiscite in 1961. Nearly three-fourths of the Republic's voting population endorsed the constitution, with opposition limited to areas of the northern region centered on the Hargeisa, Burao, and Berbera triangle. This opposition accounted for nearly 52% of the northern region's voting population, but areas west of Hargeisa and east of Burao overwhelmingly supported the constitution, and there was a significant minority of voters within the Hargeisa-Berbera-Burao coordinates that cast an affirmative vote. The plebiscite marked the state's commitment to democratic rule, as it did not attempt to gerrymander the Northern vote in order to manufacture artificial support for the charter in the North. This approach was reinforced by the impeccable way the parliamentary and local election of 1964 was conducted. *Africa Report* characterized the election as free and fair.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, it would be the last election in which all contestants played by the rules.

**B. The ICG Report asserts that:**

These problems were exacerbated by the perceived southern domination of the new government. Mogadishu became the national capital, while Hargeysa 'declined to a mere provincial headquarters remote from the centre of things.' Somaliland, now known as the 'Northern Regions,' received just 33 seats in the new 123-member national assembly. The posts of President and Prime Minister were both held by southerners, as were the principal ministerial portfolios such as Defense, Foreign Affairs, Finance and Interior. The command of the new national army was overwhelmingly drawn...from the south.<sup>11</sup>

It is the case that Hargeisa initially became the regional capital of the North and, later, the headquarters of the northwest as the government honored a request from the people of Burao for their own regional authority. Further, it is accurate that the President, Prime Minister, and the most senior military officers of the Republic were from the South (the Minister of Defense was a Northerner, contrary to the claim of the ICG report—first Mohamed Ibrahim Egal, then Sh. Ali Ismail).

**The Report tells part of the story that is amenable to the claims of its authors, but a more comprehensive look at the facts conveys a different picture.** For instance, when President Aden Abdulle Osman was nominated for the interim period of one year, no other candidate came forward to challenge him. However, this changed when Osman ran for a full term the following year. Surprisingly, the only other candidate, who was narrowly defeated, was from the South as well. When Egal, the leading Northern politician, was asked to seek the office, he declined. Further, we think Northern political leaders could have made the case to increase the region's parliamentary deputies to constitute at least one-third of the total, due to the estimated population size of the area. The intervention was not made<sup>12</sup> and, subsequently, a golden opportunity was missed. On the ministerial appointments, Northerners occupied four of the thirteen posts. The key ones included the post of Deputy Prime Minister, Defense, Education, and Agriculture. Further, the Speaker of Parliament was also from the North. Moreover, what is unsaid in the ICG Report is that many of the paramount heads of ministries (top civil servants) were from the North. These included Finance, Education, Agriculture, Interior, and Commerce and Industry. Northerners also headed two pivotal agencies, the National Trading Agency and the National Relief Agency. Such was the general distribution of senior political and administrative posts of the first Republic.

One of the North's most senior civil servants noted that, "Prime Minister Abdirashid and leading ministers consulted senior Northern public servants on key matters, particularly on those that dealt with integration."<sup>13</sup>

#### **IV. Democracy, Leadership, and Politics of Corruption**

A crucial dimension of what haunts Somalis is the quality of leadership and respect for the law. There is no doubt today that the Somali Republic's first President, Aden Abdulle Osman, and his second Prime Minister, Abdirazak H. Hussein, were genuine leaders by any democratic measure. As one of the North's most skilled and senior former civil servants, Ali Said Arraleh, observed recently:

Aden was so strict with the taxpayers' money that he saved enough from the presidency annual budget to build a presidential retreat in Afgoi, while others were pocketing public money. For instance Prime Minister Egal used public revenue to build his private villa (Villa Baidoa) on the road to Afgoi. Prime Minister Abdirazak's respect for the law and his anti-corruption effort has no parallel in our history. His hands are absolutely untainted and the two are peerless as Somali leaders.<sup>14</sup>

This characterization of the two leaders is reaffirmed by the words of the Somali Republic's most independent journalist, Yusuf Duhul, who happened to be from the North. Duhul's monthly, *Dalka*, was singularly the most prestigious paper of the time and with a critical edge to boot. He had the following to say about the caliber of these leaders and the political rectitude and rules that governed their conduct:

One thing is indisputably certain. It had never even occurred to the Aden/Abdirazak team to look into the possibilities of applying the norms of Somali tribalism to the state, or its institutions and functions. One reason for such disregard of any such thought is that the applying of tribal norms and criteria to the state and its institutions would have been then a flagrant violation of the Somali constitution... Paradoxically, the principal targets of the *Dalka's* verbal violence were the governmental team of the first president of the Somali Republic, Aden Abdulle Osman, and his choice of Prime Minister, Abdirazak Haj Hussein—whose government is now accepted by all to have been the best Somalis ever had. *Dalka* itself was not oblivious, even then, of that fact. Stating it openly, however, would have been seen as despicable and venal... *Dalka* then noted...the

basic distinguishing feature of the...team was the fundamental factor underlying the political framework...consensual... . One of the results of such consensual approach was the removal of the need to resort to political violence. Hence, neither the government nor its opponents considered intimidation as an instrument to use in the political arena... . The advantage of this system of mutual tolerance...included...freedom from physical intimidation and from the resulting worry about their personal safety. Consequently, one of the common sights [in Mogadishu] of the period was to see Prime Minister Abdirazak Haj Hussein sitting in Juba hotel, sipping a cup of tea while dueling verbally with the critics of his government. He would, at the end, calmly walk, usually alone, to his house, situated a few hundred metres up the hill to the then Monopolio. An equally familiar sight of the period was to find the President of the Republic, Aden Abdulle Osman, performing his Maqreb prayers, beside his small Fiat, alone or with an ad hoc prayer gathering on the road side. There just were no reasons then for either of them to worry about his personal safety.<sup>15</sup>

The maturity of these democratic leaders and their resolute respect for the law and the sanctity of public resources led to the Somali Republic experiencing Africa's first democratic change of regime, in 1967. The next democratic transfer of postcolonial power in the continent would have to wait for 25 years (1992) and take place in Zambia! More relevant, it was such practice, the heart and soul of the system, **that allowed Mohamed Ibrahim Egal to claim the Republic's executive premiership.** There is no doubt in our minds that a historic experience of this type could happen again if peace and democracy were restored to the whole country. From our viewpoint, **this is exactly what the international community needs to encourage, rather than reinforce sectarian political tendencies.**

There were further changes during the tenure of the second republic (1964–67). The verdict overwhelmingly supports Duhul's assessment that the government of this period was the best the country had had since independence. Northerners held five important ministerial portfolios: Foreign Affairs, Defense, Finance, Agriculture, and Information. Moreover, Northerners took up nine of the top civil service posts in the country (out of sixteen). These developments demonstrate that the new Republic's leaders, despite their limited education and political/administrative experience, were very serious about genuine integration. The implied Southern monopoly of privilege is simply fiction.

One of the best examples of Somali democrats working for the collective interest of the entire nation (that debunks the conspiracy theory) pertains to the formation of the national air carrier, Somali Airlines. Its full story is yet to be told, but here is a snapshot of how it was established. We borrow, verbatim, from our essay in *Bildhaan*:

[Abdirashid, the Prime Minister, and Abdirazak, minister of public works] approached the U.S. Ambassador and informed him of the country's immense communication and transport problems...The two leaders specifically requested that the American government assist them in developing air transport. The Ambassador relayed the request to Washington and returned with a positive answer for the Somalis. The American offer was three completely reconditioned Dakota Planes, each with a capacity of 26 seats. Satisfied with the response, the PM delegated Abdirazak and the Ambassador to finalize the agreement. Soon came up the training of the pilots and ground crew for the incipient venture. The Ambassador indicated that the United States could not help in this regard. On his own initiative, Abdirazak approached the West German Ambassador (who had already given generous logistical support to the Somali Police Force), and requested that West Germany assist Somalia by training Somali pilots and ground crew. The Germans reacted affirmatively within a week, with the only condition that Germans set up the training program. The first key provisions of the agreement were that the trainees be instructed in English and, therefore, must have a secondary school certificate. Second, the Germans would conduct the examination to select the trainees.

The Ministry immediately advertised 28 openings (for pilots, mechanics, assistants, and other ground crew) on the national radio and in the daily papers. Once the language conditions for the trainees became public knowledge, many Southern political heavy-weights criticized the regime, and particularly Abdirazak, for favoring the North. He had audiences with them and tried to persuade them that the Germans mandated the examination's English requirement, and that he could not go against this if the country was to make progress in civil aviation. Moreover, he challenged them that there were Southerners who had studied English in the Egyptian Secondary School and other places and who should be able to compete for the posts. He warned that regional or family favoritism had no place in the regime's agenda, and national advancement would only take place when every citizen was given an equal opportunity. This was not sufficient to convince the Southern regionalists.

The Germans conducted the examination as planned, and, as it turned out, all but two of the successful candidates were from the North; the two Southerners were selected for the ground crew. As the entire class

flew to Germany to commence their studies, Abdirazak called in Northern critics to take note of the merit-based competitive process for the selection of the pilots—evidence that should fly in the face of sectarian rumors. He pointed out that had he been a regionalist, he would have automatically approached the Italian Government to assist in aviation development, a request that would have been met with enthusiasm. This would have disqualified all potential Northern candidates. Although some of the Northern critics recognized the fairness of the pilot selection process, the general public, now marooned in gossip and seduced by instrumentalist politicians, did not care enough to appreciate the import of the event.<sup>16</sup>

Another affair that was a testimony to democratic practice, the application of traditional consensus, and the rule of law at work in the Somali Republic was the way in which the government dealt with the foiled coup of 1961. Again, we lift from our essay in *Bildhaan*:

Several months after the new regime took charge of the nation's affairs, a small group of young Northern military officers attempted a coup in Hargeisa. This move surprised everyone including Egal who was the Minister of Defense, and Sh. Ali Ismail, another Northerner who was appointed to the post recently. The principal claim of the young officers, some who were trained in Britain, was that poorly educated officers from the South had been undeservedly given most command appointments. The initiators of the coup alleged they had the blessings of the country's military commander, General Daud A. Hersi. To say the least, this event shocked the regime, and General Hersi instantly denied the accusation over Radio Mogadishu. **Northern** non-commissioned officers immediately reacted to the General's announcement and moved against the coup instigator; the loyalists recaptured Radio Hargeisa and killed one of the coup makers. The Interior and Defense Ministers, the latter being Sh. Ali Ismail, immediately flew to Hargeisa. At the regional military command, they congratulated the loyalists and then convened a public meeting in the afternoon in which Sh. Ali Ismail made a moving speech. He castigated the fomenters of the coup and opposition in the North, but went too far by suggesting that the coup makers might be hanged. While some of the public seemed unhappy with what they considered a regime dominated by the "Majeerteen Abdis" (Abdirashid and Abdirazak), there was no sign that they supported the coup. Abdirazak spoke in a reconciliatory tone and told the gathered public that something unfortunate had happened, including the loss of an educated Somali, and it should be a warning to the entire nation. The two ministers returned and produced a report. This was in December 1961.

Many Northerners sought forgiveness for the plotters. A few went to the President to seek his intervention, but Aden responded that what they were asking him to do was not within his legal authority. Others approached the Prime Minister for clemency, while a few respected Northerners, such as Haji Basbaas, asked the Minister of Interior's good offices in the matter. In the end, the regime decided that it did not want to set a precedent for the extralegal treatment of the case, and, therefore, started making preparations for a trial. Northerners accepted the proposition that the case could be heard in a civil rather than a military court, and that non-Somali and British trained lawyers be found to defend the accused. The regime initially rejected the need for foreign lawyers, but the President persuaded his colleagues to honor this request as well. The Prime Minister was conciliatory and did not want the physical elimination of the accused, but Sh. Ali Ismail and a few other Northerners felt strongly that coup plotters should be treated swiftly and harshly. The final accord between the state prosecutors and the two British lawyers stipulated that the court procedure would be that of the North (Indian) but the substance of the law would be Southern (Italian).

Soon the funds collected by the immediate families and supporters of the accused proved insufficient to pay for the British lawyers. The state decided to cover the balance. As the case went forward, the criminal facts against the accused seemed immutable. However, the public prosecutor made a minor procedural error and the British judge quickly dismissed the entire case on technical grounds. There were celebrations in Hargeisa, but other Somalis felt that the judge was biased. In the ensuing cabinet meeting to discuss options, the Minister of Defense was among the angriest over the decision. With the recognition that the regime had the right to appeal the case, the Prime Minister consulted with the President and the two decided that the state should drop the case. Limiting its reactions to condemnation of the Judgment, the regime expelled the judge from the country, and the coup instigators regained their freedom and soon thereafter positions in the civil service. **This was the first time (and may be the last) in Africa's post independence that a sitting regime released coup makers without any retribution.**<sup>17</sup> (Our highlighting.)

Finally, the last democratic regime, 1967–1969, was led by none other than Mohamed Ibrahim Egal. If ever there was a need for definitive evidence to verify that the Somali democratic political order was open and competitive, the rise of Egal to the top executive post in the country clearly provides this. In addition, Northerners had three ministerial portfolios in Egal's government.

Corruption was not unknown among the Somali political elite, and the military dictatorship made it a code of conduct in the last decade of its life-span. However, there is enough evidence to show that the 1967–69 regime, particularly in the persons of Prime Minister Egal and the Minister of Interior, Yassin Nur Hassan, set new standards for looting the national treasury. Moreover, the ICG Report itself makes clear reference to how Egal's propensity toward personal appropriation of public resources became part of the conduct of his leadership and legacy for the Northern region.

## **V. Declaration of Sovereignty**

**A.** The breakup of a political community is not unheard of. On the contrary, there are moments when such an option is the most appropriate step to take. However, because it is such a drastic departure, it is imperative that those who promote/support this option are fastidiously deliberative, inclusive, and have a wakeful eye for the long-term consequences. The Report underscores the peculiar circumstances and ways in which the initial declaration of sovereignty of the new Somaliland Republic was made at the Burao meeting (p. 9). It is now common knowledge that intimidation, beefed up by armed Somali National Movement (SNM) fighters, was the declaration's midwife. The question arises, then, as to why the Report did not follow up this point and, therefore, opine the obvious illegitimacy of the act.

**B.** Another source of difficulty is the preparation and operation of both the 2001 constitutional referendum and the 2003 presidential election. In the first case, the Report says very little about the undue hurry with which these affairs were conducted and the fact that some important parts of the region did not vote at all. Second, the Report is oblivious to the contradiction between democratic politics and the absence of space for constructive dissidence on such a fateful issue. Here, we would like to note the brief incarceration in Hargesia, and subsequent deportation, of one of the region's most prominent citizens, General Jama Mohamed Qalib, solely for participating in the Somali Peace Conference in Kenya. As for the presidential election, it is ironic that, while the Report identifies gross procedural violations, including an instrumentalist remaking of the composition of the Supreme Court, it fails to follow that indictment to its logical conclusion—that is, remark on the magnitude of the damage to the democratic process reminiscent of the Abdirashid/Egal-led Somali elections of 1969.

## VI. On Collaboration with Military Dictatorship and Clanist Sentiments

A. A discernment of who collaborated with the military dictatorship and to what degree will be an important point of historical research and reflective conversation among Somalis for some time to come. The ICG document enters that fray by identifying two Northern communities as willing allies of the regime: the *Dir* (*Samaroon* and *Isse*) and the *Harti* (pp. 11, 28). Simultaneously, the *Isaaq* kin-group is presented as innocent sufferers. This is problematic. To begin with, all Northern communities had representatives in the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) and the Council of Secretaries. Consequently, the *Isaaq* had their share and maybe more, as the following, nonexhaustive list of examples confirms: Vice President Colonel Ismail Ali Aboker, Colonel Ahmed Hassan, Foreign Minister Omer Arteh Qalib, and Planning Minister Ahmed Mohamed Silanyo. Moreover, Egal himself, after finishing his internment, accepted an ambassadorial appointment to India and later became head of the Chamber of Commerce in Mogadishu. Most instructively, individuals of the *Isaaq* kin-group remained loyal to the Barre regime to its dying days. Here, it is well to remember that Mohamed Hawadleh Madar, the last Prime Minister in 1990, threatened the denizens of Mogadishu with a ruin similar to the one meted out to Burao and Hargeisa if they did not capitulate. Moreover, Omer Arteh became premier of Ali Mahadi's short-lived pretension. On the other hand, the windfall for the *Samaroon* and *Isse* and significant elements of the northern *Harti* was comparatively miniscule.

B. The Report fails to offer concrete evidence for selectively maligning some communities while exalting others. We argue that this history could be told differently. Our thinking, distilled from our extensive scholarly research and reading of Somali social history and political economy, is that the military dictatorship of 1969–91 was ruinous in the last fifteen years of its tenure and insensately destroyed individuals and communities **across the country**. The Northeast region (Puntland) was the first to bear the brunt of the regime's cruelty. However, the Northwest region (Somaliland), particularly the cities of Hargeisa and Burao, witnessed the greatest horror. In addition, during the entire period of its rule, the regime exploited the farming communities of the South, while many others lost their livelihoods. Understandably, the Somali public expected a second independence (*Goobanimo*) with the

demise of the dictatorship, but they were rudely surprised by the horrible turn of events. The population of the capital was the first to witness incomprehensible and large-scale killings and the expropriation of private and public property during the last days of Siyaad's order and immediately thereafter. The main culprits of this gruesome affair were a mixture of organized clanistic and freelance militias. As the country sank deeper into mayhem, the productive people of the Baidoa region, in the South, starved to death by the tens of thousands as a result of armed bandits' use of food as a weapon. It was the ghastly pictures of the victims that compelled former President George H. Bush to send American troops to save lives. The moral of this synoptic history is this: There is no place for privileged pain.

C. The Report neglects to expose the Somali National Movement's (SNM) ensnaring paradox—one it shared with other armed opposition groups—that at once mobilized its adherents through exclusive clanist appeal while publicly speaking the rhetoric of civic nationalism. Though one could rightly criticize the non-*Isaaq* in the North for not joining the resistance against the dictatorship, this Janus-faced identity of the SNM was a serious disincentive. Furthermore, the Report's interpretation of some events contains a number of statements that seem, even if unintended, to foment suspicion between the eastern and western communities in the North (pp. 28, 30). In this context, suffice to recall the clairvoyant warnings of one of the most distinguished poets in modern Somali history, Abdillahi Sultan "Timacadde:" "*Dugsi male qabyaaladii waxeey dumiso mooyaane*" (Clanism provides no succor; it only destroys!).

We end this segment with a brief but important comment on the poverty of the theoretical apparatus of the Report. It is hobbled by the greatest debility of an old paradigm of Somali Studies—that is, the attempt to explain almost everything in Somali life through a constant and single variable, the clan. Such a simplistic perspective,<sup>18</sup> we have demonstrated in our works and in a British Tribunal,<sup>19</sup> is incapable of depicting change and complex social mutations, let alone explicate them.

## VII. Conclusions and Recommendations of the ICG Report

1. The ICG Report postulates that a productive reconciliation between the North and South is a nonstarter. This is based on what the Report

construes to be the existence of a “mutually exclusive precondition for dialogue;” and an “incompatible perspective on possible forms of association and divergent paths of development.” **We disagree**, and the fuller articulation will be part of a forthcoming volume.<sup>20</sup> For now, we think a central concern of most Somalis in **every** region is this: How to imagine a civic unity and establish the correlate forms of democratic and human rights-based institutions, rather than exclusivist claims that could only be satisfied through further balkanization. The sentiment, it seems to us, exists for admittedly hard yet productive and recuperative national conversation.

2. Possible forms of association need not be limited to a preconceived “bilateral confederation.” We have **no** knowledge of any evidence to the effect that all people of the North have already agreed that “confederation” is the **only** form of association acceptable to them.

3. The claim that Somaliland has “laid the foundations of constitutional democracy” has some validity but it obscures this fact and a clinging possibility: the people of the South have already proven that they, too, can create an inclusive democratic order. Here, we recall the enviable traditions and practice of the first three Republics. The fact that the Southern Somali people are hostages to **armed political pirates**, for the moment, in no way forecloses their contribution to a national democratic future.

4. The Report asserts that a “new generation of Somalilanders” had already emerged which has “no meaningful memories of peaceful, united Somalia.” While this could be the case given the duration of national statelessness and divisive scheming, we hasten to add that this generation is not necessarily burdened by the brutality of the now extinct dictatorship nor are they incapable of rediscovering, if not envisioning anew, a republican and united Somali state. However, we identify two poisonous impediments to dreaming and acting on what could be: a deliberate inculcation of general hatred and chauvinistic “othering” and/or the absolute triumph of brigandish politics in the South.

5. The Report states that if Somaliland is ostensibly forced into being a part of the territorial integrity of the Somali Republic, then “the result could be the reopening of the Somali civil war.” We concur that no community should comply with forced political demands. How-

ever, we believe there is neither the capacity nor the wish by anyone to invade the region. Consequently, **we hold that this assertion is an alarmist tactic to bamboozle the international community to hastily endorse the main recommendation of the Report, i.e., the recognition of the North as a sovereign state.**

### VIII. Alternative Counsel for Northern Somalis

- *Full disarmament.* This will mean the persuasion of all the communities of the region to fully disarm at the **household** level by handing over guns of any kind. The open secret that most family units have small weapons is a ticking time bomb. Such a new move is an essential prerequisite for the elimination of the culture of fear and, consequently, a further flourishing of mutual trust, free discussion, and debate.
- *Deepening Democracy.* Whether at the regional level or the hamlet, democratic habits and their institutionalization are indispensable for virtuous civic existence. In addition to strengthening the legal rights of each citizen and community, freedom of the press and association are a *sine qua non* for an accountable power.<sup>21</sup> Here, particularly, dissent politics must not only be tolerated but treated as an *indispensable* witness to the exercise of authority, if not a vector of unpopular but possibly corrective suggestions or, better still, contemplative of hidden, even unutterable, ideas of constructive ramifications. Such is the mark of a strong and mature democracy.<sup>22</sup>
- *Leadership.* Without the availability of an educated talent fit for the vagaries of these complex times and the collective wisdom to identify and thrust it forward, any community is bound to wallow in the muck of mediocrity. This is a condition conducive to myopic politics, the reign of incompetence, and quick decay, if not stillbirth, of institutions. **Northern Somalis have a historic opportunity to bring forth the type of leaders who have a combination of critical intelligence, ability and valor to simultaneously concentrate on developmental strategies that address the life-enhancing indices of the people of the region and act as their broader brothers'/sisters' keepers.** The first task implies the challenge to build on the achievements of the region so as to make it into an even more inspiring model for the rest of the country; the second connotes abstinence from *retail politics* and, instead, the cultivation of national generosity

and solidarity with other Somalis, particularly in hard times, including assuming leadership of the whole country. Who can foretell that the situation might not be in reverse sometime in the future?

### IX. Counsel for the International Community

- *Development Assistance*: There is no denying that Northern Somalis deserve to be supported in their laudable efforts to respond to the pervasive poverty and brittleness of their existence. Workable ideas, appropriate technical expertise, and generous aid to upgrade local initiatives are some of the contributions the outside world ought to make. More than any other region in the Somali Republic, the people of the North have made the most vigorous progress to earn sympathetic and concrete international attention. That much is true and the ICG document rightly conveys it. But, and this is of utmost importance, such a warranted partnership **need not** lead to the recognition of a sovereign state. For, crossing such a rubicon could easily entice *lumpen elites* in other regions of the country to demand the same. Moreover, a dismemberment of the Somali Republic will not necessarily bring peace and progress but, on the contrary, would probably create the momentum for the break-up of other states in the Horn of Africa (see the Oromo and other liberation movements in Ethiopia). **It is worth remembering that the continent's enormous potential is already vitiated by, among others, the existence of, albeit juridical, numerous hapless states.**

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#### Notes

1. International Crisis Group Report, "Somaliland: Democratisation and its Discontents," *Africa Report*, No. 66 (Nairobi/Brussels, 28 July 2003).
2. The original response appeared on August 12, 2003.
3. Ahmed I. Samatar and Abdi Ismail Samatar, "Somalis: Africa's First Democrats?" This more extensive volume is in progress.
4. Said S. Samatar, *Oral Poetry and Somali Nationalism: The Case of Sayyid Mohamed Abdille Hassan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
5. Ahmed I. Samatar, *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality* (London: Zed Books, 1988), p. 46.
6. Abdi Sheikh Abdi, *Divine Madness: Mohamed Abdulle Hassan 1856–1920* (London: Zed Books, 1993); and Aw Jaamac Cumar Ciisa, *Diiwaanka Gabayadii Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan: Uruurintii Kowaad* (Mogadishu: Wakaaladda Madbacadda Qaranka, 1974) and *Taariikhdiisii Daraawiishta iyo Sayid Maxamed Cabdulle Xasan, 1895–1921* (Mogadishu, 1976).

7. ICG Report, p. 4.
8. The quotation is from a consultant's report, whose fees were paid by the regional administration. The report's original draft asserted that the original inhabitants of former British Somaliland were *Isaaq* and that "their territory" has a legitimate historical claim to sovereignty and hence statehood. B. Rajagopal and A. J. Carroll, "The Case for Independent Statehood of Somaliland" (Washington, D.C., dated 27 May 1992).
9. Paolo Contini, *The Somali Republic: An Experiment in Legal Integration* (London: Frank Cass, 1969), pp. 8–11.
10. The governing SYL party won 69 of the 123 assembly seats. *Africa Report* (Washington, D.C., June 1964), p. 19.
11. ICG Report, p. 4.
12. The population estimate of the North was about one-third of the nation.
13. Interview with Ali Said Arraleh, Nairobi, July 2001.
14. For an extended review of these issues, see Abdi Ismail Samatar and Ahmed I. Samatar, "Somalis as Africa's First Democrats: Premier Abdirazak H. Hussein and President Aden A. Osman," *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*, Vol. 2 (2002): 1–62.
15. Yusuf Duhul, "The Dalka Days," unpublished paper (London, 1996), pp. 2–4.
16. Samatar and Samatar 2002, pp. 40–42.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.
18. An example of a historically and culturally nuanced analysis of Somali tradition is Ahmed I. Samatar, ed., *The Somali Challenge: From Catastrophe to Renewal* (Boulder, Col.: Lynne Rienner, 1995). For a comparative work dealing with ethnicity and state building in Africa, see Abdi Ismail Samatar, "Leadership and Ethnicity in the Making of African State Models: Botswana and Somalia," *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (1997): 687–707. Also pertinent here is Lidwien Kapteijns and Mursal Farah, "Review of I.M. Lewis, *Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics among the Northern Somali of the Horn of Africa*," 3rd ed. (Oxford: Curry, 1999), in *Africa* 71, no. 4 (2001): 719–722.
19. Abdi Ismail Samatar, "Colonial Anthropology and Somali Identity in a British Tribunal," work in progress.
20. Ahmed I. Samatar and Abdi Ismail Samatar, *Somalis: Africa's First Democrats?*, forthcoming.
21. Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).
22. The recent establishment of an expansive cabinet consisting of 48 ministers and their deputies is ill advised. The region does not have the resources to support these make-believe political jobs.