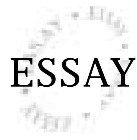

ESSAY

PEACE PROCESSES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

JOHN G NYUOT YOH

Conflict resolution processes must meet certain prerequisites and conditions. Unless the warring parties or the mediators meet, it will be difficult to find lasting and just solutions to the conflicts in the Horn (Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia, and Somalia). Most of these conflicts have ethnic or religious components and also have a lot do with the nature of the government institutions and the power distribution among the communities within these states. Identifying the main causes of the conflict and the issues involved in each country is a very necessary first step toward peace. Secondly, conditions have to be identified that would make the current peace agreements work. This includes identifying the specific problems faced by the parties involved; ascertaining the validity of the mechanisms through which the problems will be overcome; and planning how the agreements will be maintained. The knowledge that mediators have about the conflict is often as important as the actual meeting of parties at the negotiation table. This article also evaluates the peace initiatives underway in the Horn and attempts to identify the apparent reasons that prevented their implementation.

The Horn of Africa has long been a focal point of strategic interest to outsiders. In fact, for many centuries, the Horn attracted international attention for three main reasons: strategic location; religious and ethnic diversity; and agricultural potential.

Strategic location

Four important countries in the Horn–Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan–border two important waterways: the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. These two important waterways are trying to regain an important role in the international naval trade route system, especially now that some Middle Eastern countries, Russia and some Asian countries are opening up their markets to Africa after the end of the Cold War. Moreover, the emergence of Africa as a potentially lucrative market for Asian electronic technology, the discovery of oil reserves in Sudan; and the effects of globalisation in international trade, make the Horn of Africa an important nexus for Africa's 21st century economic ambitions. In addition, Sudan's oil industry potential, water reserves and agriculture potential will allow it to make it an important contribution to regional development once it attains internal stability. Ethiopia too, once its internal

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problems are resolved, has water reserves and human resources that, if properly used, would add considerably to the region's growth prospects.[1]

Diversity

The region also has incredibly diverse religious and ethnic groupings; a situation that calls for careful management. The majority of the Horn's citizens espoused Sunni Islam as their religion and most of them could trace their historical ethnic origins to Middle Eastern tribes. With religious radical politics reigning in the Middle East, it is likely that the Horn will witness, as has been the case in Sudan and some parts of Somalia, the rise of some Islamic radical groups trying to impose their version of radical Islam on others. The emerging latent rivalry between the Sunni and Shiite versions of Islam along the eastern coast of Africa might well pose a threat in some countries in the Horn where the numbers of Muslims and Christians differ widely.[2]

Agriculture

The third factor is the significance of the Horn's agriculture potential. Since over 80% of the Nile waters and its tributaries flow from the Horn there is a good chance of economic prosperity if the leaders in this region manage to place the peaceful resolution of its conflicts at the top the agenda. As a region, the Horn has the capacity to improve its trade relations with East African states such as Kenya and Uganda, and neighbouring Middle Eastern and Asian countries. This natural resource, much like oil, has the potential to cause yet more conflict but also to bring increased prosperity to the citizens of the region who rely greatly on income from small-scale farming.

Political structures

However, representative political participation and economic stability remain the two main prerequisites that the region has to pay attention to if it is to become an integrated part of Africa's economy. These two imperatives may well be addressed since African decision-makers are now putting in place strategic plans such as the 'New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)'. Some of the important elements for a system of genuine participatory governance on the continent are inclusive forms of governance where opponents become part of the political structures and processes; and the adoption of regional conflict resolution mechanisms and the need for strengthening regional organizations both in East Africa and the Horn.[3]

Discussing issues pertaining to war, peace, and development in the Horn of Africa is often problematic and requires a critical analysis of the situation in each country. What is often at stake is how to identify the mechanisms which individuals who are handling peace and war issues are equipped with. A thorough analysis of conflict resolution approaches in each country will facilitate a better understanding of how peace could be achieved or sustained in a volatile environment. The main political characteristics of the Horn might be summed up as follows: the boundaries of the region are not entirely settled. Somalia only recently appeared to accept its boundary with Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti. On the other hand, throughout its history, Ethiopia has been in dispute with Sudan over border demarcation, especially its south-eastern border. It was not until October 1956 that the two countries settled their southern border dispute. This, despite the fact that Ethiopia was never colonised, except for the Italian brief invasion. Somalia has always blamed the French, Italians, British and Ethiopians for frustrating its national aspirations for a stable state for the Somali people. European international politics in the Horn can be traced back to the colonial period when that region was divided among European colonialists. Finally, and more recently, the international competition for spheres of influence during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, also influenced the unstable character of the region.[4]

Prerequisites for peace-making in the Horn

There are crucial prerequisites for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the maintenance of

those peace agreements in the region that have already been signed. One prerequisite is that those trying to make peace should have a better understanding of the origins and the causes of the conflicts. They should be aware of, for example, which economic and cultural structures exist in each country; where the wealth is located; which communities or clans are more powerful economically speaking; what the cultural and religious origins of some communities are; and how that affects their position on the resolution of the conflict. Another important consideration when negotiating peace agreements is the power bases of the clans or ethnic groups (whether in terms of absolute numbers or military strength). Each community may also have external sources of support (whether from neighbouring or more distant countries) such as NGOs, former colonial powers or multilateral corporations and institutions). The communities' long-term strategic plans are also a factor to bear in mind, specifically with regard to the question of national unity in each country (that is, the sense of loyalty of the warring parties to the state; whether they all believe in the principle of co-existence in one country). Unless the basis on which peace agreements are defined is clear, and until the balance of power—whether economic, social or military—between the warring groups is identified, it will be difficult for a peace agreement in the Horn to endure and for resolution mechanisms to work.[5]

In order to evaluate the peace process in the Horn of Africa, the following questions will be asked, and applied to Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia:

- What are the 'peace and war' issues involved in each country?
- How could the current peace agreements in each state be made more workable? What are the problems that the parties involved now face? How could these problems be overcome? And how can these agreements be maintained?
- What are the peace initiatives that are already underway in the region?
- What are the apparent reasons that prevented previous attempts at a peaceful resolution? And how could they be overcome?

Djibouti

The civil war that erupted in Djibouti in 1991 was mainly triggered by two closely linked, but separate conditions. President Hassan Gouled Aptidon, who ruled Djibouti since its independence from France in 1977, decided to run, in 1993, for what turned out to be his last term in office. Supported by his Issa clan, he decided to isolate his opponents, imprisoning some and forcing others into exile. President Gouled's government also faced economic hardships that had forced many Djibouti citizens not from the ruling tribe to ask for formidable and important reforms.

The isolationist approach that the Djibouti government adopted against its opponents and the economic break down that followed seemed to have forced Afar tribesmen to take up arms. This move resulted in a civil war that started in 1991, with most of the opposition leaders using Paris, France, as their political base. A government military offensive in 1993 forced thousands of families to flee to Somalia and Ethiopia. It should be recalled that the population of Djibouti is about 60% Somali (of which the Issa constitute some 40%) and 35% Afar (of Ethiopian origin); both groups are Muslims.[6]

In 1994, as a result of political and economic pressure, the president accepted, in principle, that a peaceful resolution to the political (and military) deadlock should be found. Towards the end of that year the opposition responded positively and a mediation process was started and a peace agreement was signed in December 1994. Other subsequent peace agreements were also signed with some radical Afar rebels between 1997 and 2000.

The agreements that were concluded between President Gouled and the leaders of the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) resulted in the incorporation of the rebel leaders into the government. In 1995, Ali Mohamed Daoud, FRUD's chairman and Ougoure Kifle, the secretary-general of the movement, were appointed ministers of health and social affairs, and of Agriculture respectively. The 1994 agreement specifically stipulated that FRUD undertook to abandon armed resistance and transform

itself into a political party so that the former Afar rebels would share power with the Issa clan. The peace agreement between President Hassan Gouled and the Afar rebels represented an admission from the part of President Gouled that an "isolationist approach" to opposition demands was not the right way to resolve national differences.

It is to be mentioned that in 1992, Djibouti's voters approved a constitution allowing for a limited multiparty state. In 1993, Gouled was re-elected in the country's first multiparty elections, which were widely boycotted by the opposition. Ismail Omar Guelleh, the governing party candidate, won the 1999 presidential elections and became the second head of state since independence. The new president encouraged opposition participation in national politics. The idea that Djibouti is for all Djibouti was enshrined in the new constitution and paved the way for the opposition groups' feeling that they are part of the political process in Djibouti.

Opting for an inclusive approach to tackling political differences seems to have helped in bringing an end to the Djibouti civil war. This is an important lesson that the Somalis, the Eritreans and the Ethiopians should look into. The opening up of political participation to all the Djibouti opposition groups has facilitated dialogue and communication between the opposition groups and the ruling party. It is to be emphasised that this inclusive approach tends to work quite well in countries with homogenous religious and ethnic groups and to some extent in small countries. It would, however, be difficult to sustain such an approach or to make it work in bigger and more diverse countries like Ethiopia and Sudan. Nevertheless, it remains the best approach to the resolution of conflicts in war-torn African states where power-sharing dynamics are the main causes of the conflict.

Eritrea and Ethiopia: the escalation to war

Since coming to power in May 1991, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) tried to resolve internal conflicts of interests within the country through peaceful means. EPRDF is a fairly broad-based coalition of the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and other insurgent groups that helped to overthrow Mengistu Haile Miriam. Similarly, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) tried to draw the opposition groups within and outside the country into some sort of coalition. To understand the situation that led to the escalation of the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea over the Badme Enclave, and subsequent efforts by the OAU to broker a peace agreement between the two, one ought to look into the internal situation that existed in each country prior to the eruption of the war in May 1998. The two main factors that caused the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia are (a) sea access for Ethiopia and (b) ethnic politics in the two countries.[7]

According to the United States-brokered London Agreement of May 1991 between the EPLF and the TPLF, Ethiopia was granted access to use Assab as the main seaport for its international trade. Other important aspects added to that agreement were that, should Eritrea decide to amend any part of this agreement, including the use of the Ethiopian currency–the Birr–it had to inform Addis Ababa beforehand. In fact, it has been historically clear to the Eritreans that these were some of the conditions that the Ethiopian governments had insisted on being part of any settlement for the Eritrea problem. Other conditions for settlement of the dispute are, first, that should Eritrea secede, it should provide firm guarantees for Ethiopian access to sea; and, second, non-alignment of Eritrea, preferably through a defence treaty with Ethiopia to allay its fears.[8]

The issue of access to a seaport was not, however the only major catalyst in the eruption of the war. Rather, it was perhaps the Eritrean insistence that the border between the two countries must be demarcated and supervised internationally. Realising that the request was not in line with the agreements and the 'gentlemen's understanding' packages that the two leaders signed between 1991 and 1993, the Ethiopian leadership responded by trying to make the Eritrean leadership in Asmara revise their new stand through informal bilateral discussions.

That was a wrong approach, partly because Asmara was already at loggerheads with Djibouti; and at open war with Yemen; and Asmara's relations with Sudan were at a low point, all because of border disputes. Then came the introduction of the new Eritrean currency, the Nakfa, that, according to Addis Ababa, came as a surprise to Ethiopia, and with the two leaders, Meles Zenawi and Issaias Afewerki, in an openly strained relationship, a war erupted in May 1998.[9]

Another important factor in the war and the subsequent peace processes is that these neighbouring countries are headed by Tigrean tribesmen who speak the same language. Both leaderships fought and defeated the military government of Mengistu Haile Miriam, and settled the Eritrean problem by granting the Eritreans the right to self-determination, which they ultimately exercised through an internationally supervised referendum in April 1993. The decision by Ethiopia to let Eritrea go remained, by and large, a contentious issue in Ethiopia, especially among the Amharas and Oromos tribesmen. They charged Prime Minister Zenawi of granting independence to Eritrea simply because it was led by his clansmen. That accusation, although often denied by Zenawi and the TPLF, was often used by the Ethiopian opposition groups to criticise the TPLF dominated government.[10]

According to some academics, the 1998 border dispute represented a unifying factor and an opportunity that the Ethiopian government had to grab. Similarly, the Tigrean-dominated Eritrean government used the border dispute to unite the Eritreans, including the opposition groups, who were accusing Afewerki of compromising Eritrean national interests to please 'his cousins' in Addis Ababa. In the process, the two countries traded accusations that each was following an expansionist and sub-imperialist agenda by bullying and escalating the crisis to divert attention from its own internal problems. Each claimed the right of self-defence against external aggression. Indeed, both have chosen to portray the Badme border dispute as an issue of national integrity over which compromise was deemed impossible.[11]

The peace agreement that was signed by the two countries in Algiers on 12 December 2000 was a compromise necessitated foremost by the heavy human and material loss that both countries incurred. Secondly, it was an outcome of tedious bargaining and negotiation between the two countries; each trying very hard to outwit the other. And thirdly, Eritrea was perhaps pleased by the OAU mediator's decision to take the case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), a process that Eritrea had followed before with Yemen.[12]

The failure of peaceful resolution

Firstly, before 1998, the leadership in Eritrea and Ethiopia were convinced that peaceful resolution to any problem between them was the best option. However after 1998, and due to internal political pressures in each country as mentioned earlier, the same leadership groups felt that perhaps a decisive war would help their own state to achieve its goals or at least reunite the rank and file of its population.[13]

Second, it should to be recalled that internal instability–caused by pre-1991 ethnic and religious conflicts within the coalition of the rebel movements–was carried over into the national politics of Eritrea and Ethiopia even after the rebels defeated Colonel Mengistu's regime in May 1991. These ethnic and religious conflicts resurfaced soon after each rebel group took over the reigns of power in Addis Ababa and Asmara. In Eritrea, the Christian and Tigrean-dominated Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) has been accused by the Muslim dominated Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) of dominating the government and army structures in the country. The ELF also claims that the EPLF intentionally marginalized the Muslim population in Eritrea.[14]

In Ethiopia, similar accusations were made against Meles Zenawi by the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the All Amhara Peoples Organization (AAPO); the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, the Coalition of Ethiopian Democratic Forces; and the Amhara's Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (EPDM). All these opposition groups have consistently accused Zenawi's administration of favouring minority tribes (especially in the underdeveloped regions) and of intentionally isolating the

majority of Amharas and Oromos. In the east and the south of the country, radical opposition groups such as the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and Islamic Front for the Liberation of Oromia (IFLO) have been involved in military activities against the government. It is therefore important to note that the government in Addis Ababa was already aware of the existence of these internal tensions and problems when it went to war in May 1998.[15]

Finally, it seemed that the Eritrean government was adamant that its international borders be clearly demarcated and that unless Ethiopia accepted that point, the Eritrean government was ready to go to war, whatever the possible outcome. Ethiopia on the other hand, was not ready to accept the conditions that Asmara had laid down for Ethiopian access to the sea: that is, payment of taxes in return for the use of the port. Ethiopia was ready to go to war, even if it meant that it would lose access to the important port of Assab. Apparently, this willingness to go to war was also to take revenge on the Eritreans for what some Ethiopians like to refer to as the consequences of Eritreans' 'unfaithfulness' to the agreements they signed between 1991 and 1993.[16]

Lessons from the Ethiopia–Eritrea peace process

First, it has become clear that, given the political will, regional organisations, such as the African Union have better chances of success in mediating peace processes in border conflicts in Africa compared to individual country initiatives.

Second, national politics sometimes may become more important than ethnic politics. This is particularly true with regard to the affiliation of politicians to their ethnic origins across national borders, especially if they come from two different countries. In other words, internal pressures might force some ethnic-oriented organisations or political parties to re-evaluate their long-term national agendas.

Third, parties to border disputes tend to be less compromising, especially when domestic pressures are strong and national cohesion exists.

Fourth, the level of human casualties in most border disputes tends to determine the outcome of the peace process or the continuation of open war.

Conditions for lasting peace

While the war has, to an extent, united both Eritreans and Ethiopians internally, the problem of the displaced people from both sides to the conflict will remain one of the unresolved issues that might trigger another war in the future. Thousands of people from the two countries were deported, leaving behind their properties. A good number of important government officials who were working in both countries were themselves victims of the joint deportation process.

As long as the leadership of both countries are still unwilling to open direct channels of communication (as it used to be) the possibility of forging a lasting peace between the two countries will be difficult to contemplate. While it seems unlikely that full military confrontation will resume again between the two countries, peace does not mean the absence of war, and thus a lasting peace only can be achieved when the two countries start to evaluate the effects of the war in terms of long-term national interests. Within Ethiopia, the internal political coalition is splitting, and already the Oromo People Democratic Organization (OPDO) leadership, a coalition member of EPRDF, is at loggerheads with the leader of the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF), led by Meles Zenawi. The TPLF itself witnessed defections in March 2001, when five members of its Political Bureau asked its leader to re-evaluate the country's economic policies. President Zenawi was very keen to resolve the internal split within his party, and offered his resignation to avert the deterioration of the situation. Some of his close allies said he was serious in his offer to resign from the helm of the ruling party. Similarly, in June 2001, nine members of EPLF's Executive Committee petitioned the president asking him to re-evaluate the country's internal and external policies. The president eventually ordered the arrest of these members in September 2001. The long-term trends that these developments will take within Ethiopia and Eritrea will determine the kind of

relationship between Asmara and Addis Ababa as they embark on the implementation of the December 2000 Algiers peace agreement.

Somalia: Responses to conflict

The history of Somalia's current stalemate started in 1969—nine years after independence—when the commander in chief of the armed forces, Mohammed Siad Barre, staged a military coup. Barre suspended the constitution, dissolved the parliament, banned all political parties in the country and arrested their leaders. He announced radical plans aimed at transforming the conservative Muslim country into what he regarded as a modern socialist state by adopting what he used to refer to as "scientific socialism". Barre also decided, in error, to transform Somalia—a pastoralist, underdeveloped country—without constitutional, legislative or judicial restraints on the exercise of executive power. It was Barre's move to concentrate all the state powers within his own office that led to all the subsequent problems of Somalia. Using dictatorial methods of a one-man show, Barre made it a capital offence to be a member of an opposition group. He ruled Somalia for 21 years without any serious attempt to encourage the opposition to either talk to him about the deteriorating situation of the country or to join him. Power was centralised, and Mogadishu became the nerve centre of the whole country. Human, material and institutional development of regions and provinces was neglected. As repressive measures were directed against those who opposed the government, more dissidents came openly to criticise and challenge the government.[17]

The two major opposition groups who were against the Barre regime in Somalia were the Somali National Movement (SNM), which controlled almost the whole of the north of the country (Somaliland) and the United Somali Congress Party (USC), which dominated the southern part of Somalia. The USC, later on, splintered into several factions on a clan basis, and eventually became responsible for most of the chaos that ensued following the overthrow of President Barre in May 1991.

The main causes of the Somali civil war could therefore be summed up as follows:

First, the autocratic rule of Siad Barre that concentrated all the political activity in the country within one party.

Second, the failure of the Somali 'fathers of independence' to address the administrative ineffectiveness of the government institutions in Somalia, particularly the question of centralisation of power in Mogadishu.

Third, the ideology of greater Somalia nationalism, which has always been used by Somali politicians to win political power within the country as well as against Somalia's neighbours. It should be recalled that the Somali leaders in the 1960s believed that Somalia, being one nation with one language and one religion would be more easily governable and better off compared to other African countries that were more diverse. The greater Somalia philosophy demanded that British Somalia in the south, Italian Somaliland in the north and French Somalia (Djibouti), be merged into one country with a strong central government.

Obstacles to peace

The historical factors cited above dominated the national politics of Somalia, especially when Somaliland and the south united and formed Somalia in early 1960s. The Djibouti and Ogaden issues remained unresolved until in 1977 when Djibouti became an independent state; however, Ogaden is remains part of Ethiopia.

There are also other important factors that shaped the political behaviour of Somali politicians since independence. After independence, clan politics became part of the Somali national political process. At one point, Somalis and their cousins in Djibouti and Ogaden who, as mentioned earlier, speak the same language and share the same culture had assumed that the 'clan' would become the main politic body that would distinguish Somalis in political terms. Regionalism was another tool used for the political identification of Somalis. Belonging to a region was considered an important factor in government appointments and promotion, especially the high positions in central government.[18]

There was also the question of racial and religious identity. Perhaps for historical reasons, the

Somalis see themselves as part of the Arab world. They also see themselves as Muslims whose loyalty to the Islamic world was far stronger than their loyalty to the continent where they belong: Africa. These factors became visible when the civil war erupted in that country in 1991 and became one of the main obstacles to all the attempts made by the outsiders to bring peace to Somalia.

The peace process: Unconnected and contradictory

Most of the peace processes launched since 1991, including the US–UN peace mission in 1992, came from several unconnected, and sometimes contradictory and competing directions:

First, most peace initiatives by neighbouring countries (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya and Djibouti) were competing to bring peace in Somalia. The problem with the neighbouring countries' initiatives was that each had a vested interest, and tended to favour one faction over the other.

Second, Arab countries who considered that since Somalia was a member of the Arab League, felt that they were qualified to help their Somali Arab brothers in their plight. These countries included Egypt, Libya, Sudan and Yemen. The so-called 'Arab initiative' was also hindered by the competitive manner that its members showed when dealing with various Somali factions. Each of these countries tried to show that it cared for the Somalis more than others, and thus all attempts to make the initiative a collective Arab approach to problem was frustrated.

Third, the OAU (now the AU), through the Inter-governmental Agency for Development (IGAD), also tried to initiate a formula for peaceful resolution of the Somali war. Several meetings were conducted under its auspices between 1992 and 1999 with the aim of bringing an end to the conflict, but most of their efforts were in vain. The failure of that initiative was mainly due to disagreements among the IGAD members over how to move forward, especially between 1991 and 2001.

Fourth, the European states led by Italy, France and Britain, also tried to bring some form of understanding among Somalis, but all their efforts failed to bridge the gaps between the warring parties. Several individual African leaders tried to mediate and offered some suggestions to the warring parties. Again, these efforts were unsuccessful. The European initiative was seen by some Somali warlords as a colonialist attempt to regain leverage over the country and was thus viewed unfavourably by the majority of the Somali warring factions. As for individual African leaders' initiatives, most of those who tried to mediate had very little knowledge of the internal Somali clan politics.

Fifth, between 1991 and 2002, Somali clan leaders tried very hard to bridge their differences and urged the Somali political leaders to accept a peaceful approach to the resolution of the conflict. Many temporary truces and agreements were signed to stop the war; however, none was implemented successfully. What some clan leaders seemed to be unaware of was that the Somali civil war have brought several new agendas into play. Some of these agendas are commercial interests of external forces who use some Somali warlords as agents to achieve their own goals. This might explain why, despite numerous meetings of and agreements between the 12 main Somali militia leaders between 1991 and 2001 in several African and Arab capitals none of the plans were implemented. In addition, the Somali diaspora, women's associations, youth and intellectual groups inside and outside the country, tried to mediate between the warlords and met them several times with the hope of resolving the conflict. They too were unsuccessful.

Attempts to bring peace become even more complicated when the Somalis in the north opted to unilaterally declare that part of Somalia an independent entity on 18 May 1991. No to be outdone, Puntland, once called north-eastern Somalia, installed its own administration in that part of Somalia in August 1998. However, unlike Somaliland, the Puntland government does not advocate the break up of Somalia and therefore supported the Djibouti peace process of 2000. Puntland president, Abdullahi Yousef prefers a federal system, rather that the north–south

formula advocated by the late president of Somaliland, Mohamed Egal. Efforts are being made by mediators to dissuade the Somaliland leadership from following a secessionist path, but all efforts to that effect have failed so far.

It should be emphasised that of all these peaceful efforts in Somalia, only the Djibouti-brokered peace process, started in May 2000, seems to have succeeded in bringing together most Somalis, with the exception of the northerners and some militia leaders in the South.

Conclusions

Answering the questions raised by this article is not easy. Despite the boycott of the Djibouti peace initiative by some leading warlords in Somalia, the initiative did succeed in instituting some vital interim institutions in the south, such as the transitional parliament and government, and also brought a degree of peace. Some lessons can be learned from the Somali peace agreement.

The first lesson to be learned is that peace initiatives must address the main issue, in this case, the lack of strong institutions in the country. Most of the peace initiatives carried out since 1991 failed to address the fact that the government institutions installed at independence were too weak to meet the needs of a vast country like Somalia. Part of the problem is the lack of a clear formula for power sharing among the regions. Moreover, very few mediators realise that although the Somali militias buy their weaponry from the West through flourishing black markets in East Africa, the Somali war was not instigated by outsiders. Therefore, the solution to the conflict ought to be found by the Somalis themselves.

Second, most observers who follow the dynamics of the Somalis civil war closely seem to agree that the dual affiliation of the Somalis to Africa and the Arab world has delayed the peace process. Most Somalis believe that the solution to their problem will come from the Middle East, whereas the countries keenest to solve the Somali problem are the East African states that are members of IGAD. In fact, the majority of the Somali politicians in exile and their associated think-tanks are based in Middle Eastern capitals, Europe or North America. Very few are based in Nairobi, Addis Ababa or Djibouti.

Third, there should be a single main peace initiative that all the parties to the conflict have agreed on. In fact, the multiplicity of initiatives and their simultaneous occurrence in Somalia definitely undermined serious attempts to solve the problem. Moreover, different mediators have failed to persuade the Somalis that those who initiated these peace processes were genuine and that they understood the root causes of their problem.

Fourth, the Djibouti-brokered initiative achieved as much as it did because it involved a genuine inter-Somali dialogue. It was notable that those who attended the peace process were Somalis from all works of life. They went to Arta, Djibouti, willingly and were convinced that the war in their country had to stop. Those warlords who refused to attend the inter-Somali dialogue–Hussein Mohamed Aideed, Musa Sudi Yalahow, Mohamed Kanyare Afrah and others–seemed to have lost control of the population they claimed to represent. The fact that they did not attend seems to suggest that they were disillusioned and had no specific agenda to take to Djibouti. Importantly, the solutions suggested at the Arta peace process were provided for by the Somalis themselves and not imposed on them.

Fifth, imposing new actors into old plans without consensus or a new deal risks reversing the trend of the negotiations and can derail the whole process. In Somalia, imposing the renegade warlords on the interim administration will simply mean going back to war and derail the whole peace process. The transitional institutions (a government and National Assembly composed of 245 members) that were formed are representative of all the Somalis, except the northerners. These institutions and individuals should be the base of any new deal that includes at least all the southerners. It should be emphasised that President Abdulgasim Salad Hassan, elected in Arta, Djibouti on 25 August 2000, has already won international and regional recognition, as has the Somali

transitional parliament. Although this recognition has little to do with the reality of his power base within the country, it does show that the international community has not given up hopes of reviving the failed Somali State. Therefore, the ongoing peace process must focus on strengthening the transitional institutions, and activating communication among Somali clans in the south, and should try to make the renegade commanders and their militias' part of the process. Africa and the international community ought to support the interim arrangements until some political and economic foundation has been put in place. This will allow a more inclusive Somali peace agreement to be brokered again, which might include Somaliland and other small regions that abstained from the Djibouti peace process.

A sixth lesson is that the final stages of the peace negotiations should be not be carried out by outsiders. The question of Somaliland and other small regions that are not part of the current peace process should only be worked out after the other internal issues are settled. These include: militia disarmament; integration of national ports into the central government system; economic institutions; a constitution; new inclusive administrative structures; and power sharing issues.

The Arta process's partial success may have raised hopes among the IGAD leaders—especially Kenya—and encouraged optimism among some of Somalia's traditional leaders that the momentum of these talks might be maintained. The negotiations taking place in Nairobi, under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's technical committee, are expected to provide a blueprint for a constitutional framework for a post-war Somalia. This envisaged draft framework is to cover issues pertaining to reviving the Somali state; restructuring the government apparatus on a federal basis; and issues related to the future relationship between the north and the south of the country. The IGAD-sponsored talks began in October 2002 in the western Kenyan town of Eldoret, before they were moved to Nairobi in February 2003.

Among those absent from the talks are the president of the Transitional National Government (TNG), Abdiqassim Salad Hassan, whose government mandate expired in August 2003; prominent Mogadishu-based faction leader, Muse Sudi Yalahow; and the leader of the Kismayo-based Juba Valley Alliance (JVA), Col Barre Adan Hirale. Abdiqassim walked out of the talks on 30 July 2003 saying that they were leading to the disintegration of Somalia.

Since November 2002, Kenyan diplomat, Bethwell Kiplagat, who chairs the talks, and his counterparts from Ethiopia and Djibouti have made great efforts to persuade the delegates to accept the blueprint draft transitional constitution which the IGAD mediators have helped the Somalis delegates to draft. Indeed, the UN secretary-general's special representative to Somalia, Mr Winston Tubman, has been quoted as saying the process will go ahead even without some of these key players. This remark prompted an observer to ask rhetorically: Whose peace, then, will it be?

The IGAD mediating process is likely to yield positive results since the warlords and their advisors have spent almost a year in Kenya getting to know each other and have been trying to rebuild what is left of their country. The significance of this process lies in the fact that the actual bargaining process is run mainly by the Somalis, with very little input from IGAD and the European observers. It also suggests that the Somalis are convinced that the colonial state structures, which they inherited from France, Italy and Britain, have failed, and thus new state structures with new objectives ought to be established.

Looking to the future, there appear to be two outstanding issues that might cause problems within Somalia and perhaps with its neighbours.

The first possible problem is the matter of the Ogaden territory. A war between Somalia and Ethiopia broke out in Ogaden in 1977. Though Ethiopia regained control of the territory the matter has not been fully resolved. Some Ogaden rebels groups still wage war against the Federal government of Ethiopia from hiding places in Somalia. Any solution that aims at creating a strong federal government in Somalia should bear in mind that it is in the interest of both the Somali and Ethiopian governments to discuss the question of Ogaden thoroughly.

A second future issue is the status of Somaliland. While it is true that Somaliland has not been party to efforts made to settle the Somali civil war so far, it is important for the Somali leaders in the south to learn from the administrative developments that their counterparts in the north have carried out. Somaliland is quite advanced in terms of human-centred services and has already installed some efficient government institutions. It has disarmed militia groups and a form of democratic structure is in place. The Somaliland leadership seems to be more concerned with developing that part of Somalia than in pursuing unity arrangements with the rest of Somalia. The official aim of the Somaliland leadership is to strengthen their region's developmental projects and, if possible, gain international recognition as a sovereign state. So far, no country seems ready to give such recognition; a situation that allows for the possibility of uniting the Somali regions again. Moreover, any future peace talks that plan to include the Somalilanders and Puntlanders, must pay some attention to the higher level of the infrastructural development that Somaliland has already reached. The use of traditional discussion methods to deal with conflict in Somaliland and the encouragement of the Somali Diaspora to remain part of the country's development plan will definitely be useful when time comes for Somalis to rebuild their country.

Endnotes

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