

Faking a Government for Somalia

International diplomacy supports fictitious peace process

By Ulf Terlinden and Tobias Hagmann*

the conference table - but only after his 150'000 dollar hotel bill had been paid for.

The fact that the negotiations, right from the start, focused on a united Somalia effectively excluded participation of the government of Somaliland, the former British part of the country, which had declared independence in 1991. Accordingly, the conflict over Somaliland's status was deliberately disregarded during the negotiations and escalated severely in October last year. Not only were the talks falsely portrayed as "inclusive", by fuelling this conflict, the formula compromise of the warlords also jeopardises the relative stability and democratic consolidation of the self-declared Republic of Somaliland.

Kenya's former president Daniel Arap Moi once characterized Somali peace conferences as camels being milked by warlords. Western donors and the Kenyan government invested at least 18 million dollars in the Somali peace process. In the end, the transitional parliament, or rather the warlords and their claquers, appointed Abdullahi Yusuf, the former ruler of the autonomous region of Puntland (North-East Somalia), as interim president. On this occasion the "people's representatives" also cashed in a part of their yield: Up to 7000 dollars were allegedly paid for every vote in favour of the new president. Yusuf is a close ally of Ethiopia, which is believed to have controlled a block of 100 delegates.

On final balance, the appointed cabinet includes virtually all influential warlords. By way of clan proportion, they brought themselves in position for a gamble for posts, which primarily serves the logic of personal enrichment, access to donor resources and power accumulation. Ending Somalia's violence does not constitute an original aim of most of these characters, and peace thus, is no more than a temporary "war by other means," as the International Crisis Group recently put it.

Recognition of virtual governments

The successive international recognition of Somali interim governments is reminiscent of Andersen's fairy tale "The emperor's new clothes". In this regard, the United Nations, the African Union, neighbouring and donor countries are victims of their own blinkers. The formal establishment of a central Somali government seems to constitute their pre-eminent political goal, while the quality and popular legitimacy of freshly chosen cabinets is rarely questioned. A striking example of this attitude was provided by the Kenyan government, which rewarded Abdullahi Yusuf shortly after his nomination with a brand new Mercedes. With unintended humour the Kenyan "Daily Nation" referred to the luxurious gift as the final point to Kenya's efforts "to reach sustainable peace for its north-eastern neighbour". In the eyes of many diplomats, new governments are sufficiently legitimised by the holding of elections in the course of peace talks. The questionable nature of these peace processes and the obvious incompetence and lack of integrity of new government appointees are ignored. Moreover: Even the dim prospects of effective improvements to Somalis' living conditions have not led to a more critical assessment of the shaky foundations of the latest Somali government.

Diplomatic recognition of virtual governments is gradually becoming a tradition in Somalia. The predecessor of the TFG, the "Transitional National Government" (TNG), neither controlled significant territory nor was it able to implement policy during its reign. While former President Abdikassim Salad Hassan took a seat in the UN General Assembly, his authority never exceeded a few street blocks in Mogadishu. Unimpressed by this fact, his cabinet squandered 30 to 60 million dollars of international aid in the matter of two years. Even though the new government is approached more cautiously, the international community failed to actually reconsider its role in the so-called Somali peace process. This time, the donors seem less inclined to pour out money before the TFG moves to Mogadishu. Nonetheless, the latter has already been recognised internationally, and in the longer run, foreign funding is unlikely to depend on an actual improvement of the situation in Somalia. Less will the Somali population's appreciation of the TFG be decisive for donors' decision to support, or not to support, the new government. In anticipation of these circumstances, President Yusuf initially had the guts to demand the unbelievable sum of 15 billion dollars in international reconstruction aid for the first years of his government.

Insistence on the central state

For more than a decade, the feasibility of successful reconciliation in Somalia has been proven in Somaliland. It accomplished peace and reconstruction largely by its own means and its government emerged from what observers have described as free elections. Yet the Somaliland Republic is denied recognition, due to the international community's insistence on the principle of a united Somalia. As an ironic consequence, donors and international organisations support what could be captured as a "letter-box government", which upholds a fiction of sovereignty, even over Somaliland.

The case of Somaliland also points to an issue that reaches beyond the gap between appearance and reality of Somali peace processes and interim governments. The internationally sponsored peace conferences were all

based on the assumption that sustainable peace requires the existence of a central state authority for Somalia. This stance overlooks the actual pacification and emergence of governance in Somaliland and other parts of the country. It furthermore disregards the link between prolonged state collapse and lacking acceptance of the central state, which under dictator Siyad Barre, had degenerated into a pure instrument of repression and enrichment. This experience has instilled little faith into state institutions in the liberal minded Somalis. The international community refuses to acknowledge that, based on the experience of the Barre regime, the de-construction of the Somali state was largely a deliberate and rational act. The primary goal, as Somalia Analyst Wolfgang Heinrich concludes, should therefore not be a "reconstruction of the state, i.e. a return to the earlier status quo". Rather Heinrich suggests embracing the challenge of constructing a new Somali society and state, which can provide both identity and internal sovereignty.

Cornerstones for such efforts can be found in the traditional authorities that in many parts of Somalia provide for law and order at the local level. Especially, since the end of the Barre era, they have acquired a considerable degree of legitimacy with which a weak new state can hardly compete. Moreover, the "modern" nation-state so far leads a rather uneasy co-existence with the segmentary clan structure of Somali society. Somaliland, therefore, amalgamated its new state institutions with the traditional clan structures. A national council of elders serves as the second parliamentary chamber. By contrast, beyond nominally proclaiming a federalist state structure, none of the Southern Somali peace conferences has so far made efforts to actually develop an innovative governance concept which could accommodate the fragmented political reality of the country.

In conclusion, countless broken ceasefires make a mockery of the faction leaders' alleged will for peace. More than a dozen international peace conferences have degenerated into a costly farce that impairs the credibility of the regional organisation IGAD and donor countries. While the warlords enjoyed the comfort of Kenyan hotels for more than two years, neither the United States nor the European Union or its member states undertook serious diplomatic efforts to lead Somalia closer to peace.

Ultimately, indifference conjoined with conceptual deficits, almost unconditional financing for the peace talks, and claims for hegemony by neighbouring states. The formation of the latest Somali interim government is thus not the end, but the temporary climax of the inability of both Somali leaders and international diplomats to find a peaceful solution for the disrupted country. •

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After its creation in Kenyan exile, the so-called "Transitional Federal Government" (TFG) delayed its relocation to Somalia for more than half a year, citing the lack of security as the main obstacle. However, heated quarrels over the seat of government, international peacekeeping forces, and the role of neighbouring states point out that in fact, the underlying power conflict between Somalia's faction leaders remains unresolved. The TFG is now effectively divided between its leadership under President Abdullahi Yusuf, who is seeking to establish himself in Jowhar, and some of the most powerful faction leaders, no less than 110 (of 275) members of parliament and their speaker, who have moved to Mogadishu. This rift is steadily aggravated by a massive military mobilisation. Current fears of imminent, large-scale bloodshed are symptomatic of the fact that neither two years of peace talks in Kenya, nor the TFG itself have produced a genuine and viable agreement between the conflict parties. The government remains in a nominal state of existence while its members, according to Hussein Farah Aided, a Mogadishu-based faction leader and now Deputy Prime Minister, "do not trust each other but ... were pushed and pressured to form a government at all costs".

Formally, the new government's political destiny appeared rather bright. It enjoys the backing of the United Nations and neighbouring states, and IGAD and the African Union pledged to send a peace support mission to its assistance. A detachment of 1'700 Ugandan and Sudanese troops was to protect the TFG officials against warlords, clan factions and criminals controlling Somalia since its state collapse in 1991, although most of these potential troublemakers are actually part of the TFG. Yet the formal support by the international community, and the power insignia that the new government has accorded itself, are not matched by the shallow and fragile consensus reached in the peace process. Eventually recognizing this reality, the UN Security Council recently blocked deployment of the peace support mission. Against this background, the following article reviews some of the fundamental flaws in the Somali peace process, and misconceptions underlying international approaches to it.

Fictitious Peace

International diplomacy applauded the TFG as a mediation success albeit basic principles of credible conflict mediation had turned meaningless during the two year long negotiation process (2002-2004) under the aegis of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). For the first time Somali clan elders, NGO representatives and the warlords had been convened at the negotiation table. But rather than co-opting the warlords into a government with civilian accountability, almost all civil society members and genuine lobbyists for reconciliation and good governance were marginalized by the factions. This occurred under the eyes of the IGAD mediation team and in striking violation of its stated original intentions. When the interim government was finally established last October, the elders simply nodded through what the warlords had pre-decided. Yet the negotiators attempted to sustain the fiction of an inclusive peace process.

In turn for their participation, the faction leaders enjoyed luxurious hotel stays, revaluation and international recognition as "political leaders". General Morgan is a particularly drastic example of the species of warlords-cum-statesmen. He undertook a military offensive even during the formation of the transitional parliament. When the push failed, the well-known war criminal returned to