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Somalia

# A new model?

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**Somalia has been the victim of bloody civil wars for about half a century. Recent developments seem however to make clear that Somalia in fact can be one of the first countries in Africa which can liberate itself from the ugly consequences of US imperialism and the destructive consequences of the globalisation process.**

By doing this Somalia could serve as a model for other dependent countries in Africa, but in fulfilling this the Somali people need the active support from other opponents of the globalisation process all around the world.

## Strategic importance

Somalia, which is in fact a potentially rich country, makes up the very horn of Africa. It is placed where the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, leading up the Suez Canal, meet. On the other side of Somalia lie some of the most important oil wells. The power, which controls Israel in the north and Somalia in the south, can in fact control the richest area of oil fields in the whole world. This is the main reason for all the wars that have been going on in Somalia for such a long time.

Somalia was already the victim of colonisation (by Islamic countries) in the fifteenth century. In the time of modern colonialism Somalia was the victim of colonisation from the European great powers. The Somali people, who today number about 30 million, were divided by the colonialist powers into several parts. Some parts of Somalia went to Kenya, others to Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Sudan and Rwanda. The rest of Somalia was divided between Italy and France.

Britain, which also wanted its share, conquered British Somaliland in the northwestern part of Somalia (which is mainly a desert but faces directly towards Saudi Arabia on the other side of the Red Sea.)

## Flag independence

Before the colonial powers left Africa they first made sure to leave behind them a copy of their own institutions. Secondly, they ensured that power remained in the hands of the very same people who had served as their former servants in suppressing the ordinary people. The imperialists never intended to stop plundering Africa. The famous slogan of the British Empire - divide and rule - didn't stop existing either.

Division in Africa means building your continued presence on the outlived system of clans and tribes. To rule means to spread the poison of ethnic and religious hatred among the people and help the warmongers with sufficient amounts of weapons and economic support to fight against each other.

Sometimes the imperialists even succeed in getting their puppets in other African countries involved. A tragic example of this is happening now in the war going on in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Hundreds of thousands of Congolese, supported from countries outside the Congo, are killing each other to no other end than to keep the very rich natural resources of Congo in the hands of big international monopolies.

# Exceptions

However, there were at least some exceptions from the normal imperialist "liberation" of Africa. They are important to mention because they can serve as examples and inspirations for coming struggles. One of the exceptions was the short-lived experiment of Patrice Lumumba in the former Belgian Congo in 1960-61.

Lumumba was not a nationalist in the traditional African style. His intentions were to form a modern and socially conscious Congo liberated also from the yoke of tribalism. The real lords of the Congo mobilised traditional tribes against him. They brought Moïse Tshombé to power in Katanga - his office was in the very same building as the big Belgian mining company, Union Minière. The Katanga province declared itself "independent" from the rest of Congo.

The imperialist countries were alarmed by the victory of Lumumba in the elections so they sent UN troops to Congo with the official excuse of defending the integrity of Congo.

Helicopters from the US Embassy helped track Lumumba down when he tried to escape from the trap set up against him in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa). He was caught and brought back to Leopoldville where the "UN defenders of Congolese integrity" were passive spectators when Lumumba, in a very brutal way, was sent to Moïse Tshombé in Katanga and was finally murdered by Belgian soldiers.

Even imperialists can show some sorts of human feelings although in a passive way. When president Eisenhower made clear to members of the US National Security Council his decision to get rid of Lumumba, they were silent for 11 seconds. In order to try and get rid of Lumumba forever his dead body was totally destroyed. But have they really freed themselves from what Lumumba tried to tell the peoples in Africa? No way!

As one of the members of STS International Solidarity, Maryam Mursal Isa, sings in one of her famous songs: "They killed Patrice Lumumba but his soul lives with us for ever". Maryam is not only a very good artist known in all parts of Africa. She is also a dedicated fighter for the freedom of all human beings!

# Somali experiment

On July 26, 1960 the former British colony in the northwest part of Somalia got its formal independence. Four days later the former Italian colony in the Southern part of Somalia was also made independent. The two parts of Somalia the very same day signed an Act of Union based on a constitution [drafted by Italian and US experts-ed.], which was one of the most democratic in the whole of Africa. (In the usual French style the former colony of France in the far end of the north-western Somalia was transformed into a mini-independent state, Djibouti, with only about half a million inhabitants. But the population of Djibouti have never forgotten their relationship with the rest of the Somali people.)

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/barre.jpg>]

Siad Barre

At the beginning it looked as if Somalia would succeed in winning real independence. After first having elected a democratic president power in Somalia was conquered by Siad Barre who could not resist the temptation to play the two cards now in his hands. The first card was the strategic position of Somalia and the other was to further the narrow interests of his own clan.

First Siad Barré turned to the camp of the Stalinists. Somalia was declared a socialist republic and Barré got big

supplies of weapons, military trainers, troops and economic support from the Soviet Union. When he sensed the coming breakdown of the "socialist camp" he turned to the Western side (after 1978). He gave up the idea of Somalia of being "socialistic" and declared instead that Somalia was a Muslim republic.

As a reward for this manoeuvre he got even more weapons and economic support from the Western countries - first of all from the US. Like most leading politicians in Africa he tried to keep his elected position forever - regardless of what the people who elected him might have wanted. Like most of the other politicians he did so by building his support on the members of his own clan and some of his other corrupt friends.

## Narrow interests

In order to defend the narrow interests of a sub clan of his own, the Ogadeni clan, which is divided between Ethiopia and Somalia, Barré fought two very bloody wars against Ethiopia. He fought against most of the rest of Somali clans making it necessary for themselves to arm, to fight back under the leadership of different warlords. Only a few people acted in the way our member General Noor Dhuudhi, who was the leader of the Somali Air Force, did.

He was frustrated by the prospect of having to take part in the killing of his fellow Somalis and brought the Somali Air Force to Italy asking the Italian government to take care of it and telling them that he would pick it up again, once there was something positive to fight for in Somalia! (Dhuudhi returned to Somalia and after a short period serving in his old position he is now the adviser in military affairs for the new Somali Prime Minister, Ali Khalif Galayd.)

In the end Siad Barré lost, but in such a way that it gave rise to the development of many different warlords. Officially these warlords defended the interests of their own clans or sub clans. In reality they have all followed the "logic" of all other warlords in the world.

They murder, rape, torture and destroy not only people but also exploit every economic resource in the areas they conquered from one another - in ever shifting alliances. As long as there were still some areas free to destroy they could still follow this "logic". But in the end they even destroyed the very same resources from which they live themselves - making common people more and more angry by the brutal way in which they act.

Now we can finally see and end to the intolerable regime of the warlords. But before the Somali people could do so it first had to pay the heavy price of a new UN intervention in Africa (UNOSOM).

## Results of the UN invasion

The leading force in the UN, the USA, used the anarchy in Somalia as a first excuse to invade the country in 1992. At the beginning a few other members of the UN took part in the invasion but they soon wised-up and withdrew. In the forefront of the US troops were the famous professional soldiers of the Ranger Corps used whenever the US needs to kill other people. A problem for the US, as well as for the peoples the US attacks, is the big trauma that the war in Vietnam has left in the American public.

The Rangers used their normal way of "fighting" since then. They do not care how many foreign people they kill - but they are very careful to lose as few lives as possible of their own. They used the war tactics of carpet bombardment, which resulted in the deaths of thousands upon thousands of civilians in Somalia.

The US pointed to the biggest warlord at that time, General Aideed, as their main enemy. They set a big reward on Aideed's head. But the result was the opposite of what US had expected. Both Farah Aideed and his son, Hussein Aideed (who is in fact himself a US citizen and even a former officer in the Ranger Corps) became more and more popular among the Somali population!

The concrete excuse for the intervention was to pave the road for bringing humanitarian aid to the Somali people. During an 18-month period the UN pumped no less than US\$5.1 billion into Somalia. A whole army of international NGO's arrived with their very well paid officials. The NGO's needed a virtual army of well-paid Somalis as well. The result of this was rising inflation, an increase in corruption and further sufferings for the citizens of Somalia.

Even humanitarian aid from the US is mostly used to destroy the aspirations of independence of other peoples. In 1977 Somalia bought a lot of tractors and distributed them to the farmers so that they could produce enough corn to make Somalia able to feed its own population. But as soon as the corn was ready to be harvested a whole fleet of ships from USAID(!) [United States Agency for International Development-ed.], arrived in Somalia and the US began to distribute totally free corn to the people. (Later the US tried - in vain! - to persuade Somali farmers to use genetically manipulated seeds.) The US also delivered medicine for free and brought an end to Somalia's own pharmaceuticals industry.

Now the Somali people are used as a gigantic laboratory in testing new medical products not only from the US but also even from countries like South Africa. The coasts of Somalia are used for the dumping of industrial waste - including from the nuclear industry - by the imperialist powers.

But the worst consequence of the UN protected humanitarian aid to Somalia, and of all aid coming to Somalia until very recently, is the fact that the big donations from the outside made it possible for the humanitarian organisations to pay enormous sums of money to the warlords to "protect" their projects from attacks by the other warlords. The very same Hussein Aideed who killed his fellow Americans has received millions of dollars from NGO's to "protect" them.

This money has been used to pay for very big and heavily armed militias, which have also been used in the internal struggles of the warlords claiming thousands upon thousands more victims among the civilian Somali population.

As a result of this mistreatment from foreign countries anti-imperialist sentiment amongst the people of Somalia grew to unprecedented heights. The military invasion turned out to be a tragedy for the US. At the end of the war 18 dead US Rangers were dragged though the streets in Mogadishu. There were also huge demonstrations against the US in the streets demanding UN withdrawal from Somalia. These demonstrations were in fact the decisive factor that forced the US out of Somalia.

You can kill soldiers but it is far more difficult for a nation that "defends human rights" to kill unarmed citizens including women and children - especially when representatives of the press of the whole world are also present.

## Preparing for independence

In 1993 the UN closed its last office in Mogadishu. When Somalia was totally free of any foreign interference the democratic forces finally got their chance to come out more in the open and begin to collect support from strong forces who all wanted to put a definitive end to the civil wars.

The democrats in Somalia first had to convince a sector of the Somali population without whose support it would

nearly have been impossible to begin to work. As in other class societies in the world there are many poor Somalis but there are also Somalis who are very rich.

But how can you enjoy your wealth in a country where your own house is constantly in danger of being attacked by heavily armed bandits? And how can you enjoy your wealth when you are in constant danger of being kidnapped by the same bandits? It is no lasting solution to this problem if you try to protect yourselves and your life by employing your own, armed guards. The only lasting solution is to give your support to disarming all the militias and for the building of a Somali state that can guarantee not only your own right to live in peace but also the right of every other Somali.

We don't know exactly how the future world of socialism will be built or look like. After the failure of the Stalinists we are still in a phase where we must use a lot of different experiments - also in the nations in Africa. We agree that our comrades and friends in Brazil are making big contributions towards trying to find a way. We also agree that it can be necessary to use weapons to defend the people as the Zapatistas have done in Mexico and other comrades have to do in the Philippines.

Concerning Somalia there were in fact TOO many weapons and in order to get these weapons away from the warlords the democratic forces needed the support of some of the rich Somalis.

By having their support it was possible to take the first step in the direction of disarming the warlords. All available weapons in Mogadishu were bought up, raising the price of bullets and guns to sky-high levels. Many weapons were bought directly from the members of the different militias who were in fact very poor people and had only served in the militias as their only way to survive. All these weapons were stored away for eventual future use.

## Reconciliation conference

The departure of the UN made it also possible for traditional organs of negotiation and reconciliation to begin to work.

At the end of April last year there was a call for a meeting of reconciliation in Arta. Around 2,000 representatives from the traditional organs of reconciliation in Somalia - civilian representatives from all the clans and the councils of the elders from all of Somalia but also representatives of the women's movement and the important Somali peace movement - were invited. But no active warlord was invited and no single clan had any chance to influence the decisions of the meeting.

After several weeks of negotiations the meeting decided upon a very clear program. It was decided that the Somali state should be built again and it had to base itself on institutions that were totally free from any influence of the clans. The meeting also decided that the Somali constitution should be based on the old democratic one (from 1960 with very few "modernisations").

The meeting confirmed the Act of Union between the former British and the former Italian areas of Somalia. These two factors alone mean that the international organisations and most countries in the world can simply not avoid accepting the Somali Republic [former British Somaliland which independently of the UN and humanitarian organisations avoided the bloodshed in the south-ed.] although not - yet - in the diplomatic sense of recognition.

A new president was elected, Abulkassim Hasat Hassan - a veteran political figure who is known for resistance to both the civil wars and every kind of corruption. Hassan appointed a Prime Minister who elected the other ministers

coming from every part of Somalia and from most of the clans.

At the conference a transitional government was also elected - again in a way that secured the influence of all parts of Somalia and of all the clans. It will hopefully be the last time that the traditional organs of negotiation and reconciliation will have such importance. The first ordinary elections, taking place in Somalia in about a year and a half, will be based on normal political parties with their different political platforms.

When the conference for reconciliation ended in August the warlords and their militias (with about 75,000 members) were still very strong. The continued existence of the warlords and their militiamen created very special problems for the parliament and the government.

As institutions of reconciliation they aimed to reconcile the civil population but recognised that the process was a long one - especially with the war criminals and warlords.

## Warlords

First the warlords told the whole world that the new president and government would never be allowed to come to the Somali capital Mogadishu. But already at the time the economic support from the UN and the countries that had been stupid enough to give them money for "protection" had nearly totally disappeared.

Secondly, they began to lose the money coming in from "taxation" of trade going in or out of their different territories because the businessmen, to an ever, higher degree, preferred to pay for their own militiamen to protect the goods.

Thirdly the parliament and the government made contact with all the foreign countries, which had supported them before with money and persuaded them to cut off the stream of money to the warlords. Every country agreed - except Ethiopia (in the beginning).

The warlords quickly began to lose the money they had paid their militiamen with! Protected by the population in Mogadishu and by the militias of the business world it was in fact not difficult for the parliament and government to come to Mogadishu. Here it began a systematic disarmament of the militias, some of whom (after re-education) were turned into serving in the police forces of the government or in its military.

In these forces the former militiamen could at least get paid to feed themselves and their families. Today the warlords can in fact only pay for a few armed bandits. Every time a militiaman chose to give up his former way of living he is asked what he exactly had done to harm the people. He is asked if he regrets his acts. He is also asked who gave the orders for the massacres and who exactly stood behind them. You cannot seriously act in another way when you know that many of the militias were only kids when the wars started and had no other possibilities to survive than to pick up a gun.

You cannot put about 75,000 young people in prison and further harm their families but you can ask them who was really responsible for the killings. Today the government in this way has collected compelling evidence to prove the crimes of the warlords.

Before letting the new police out in the streets they were taught about the democratic constitution, about human rights and how (if necessary) to arrest people in a humane way.

## A new model?

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This important work was mainly done for free by a group of lawyers in the Somali Legal Aid Project (SLAP) which had existed for a long time, had given free legal assistance to the poor people and made a big contribution in other ways to supporting the government of reconciliation. (SLAP even educate some of the politicians themselves in human rights, in international law, and many other things necessary to know for people who had lived for nearly 20 years in a society where laws did not exist!).

The government gradually began to take power in Mogadishu. It created police stations in most of the city and defined civil rights according to the constitution instead of the Islamic courts. Lawyers' societies elected an independent high court.

As far as the warlords were concerned, the government demanded either that they turned up on one of the 5 free television stations telling people what harm they had done to them, ask the people to send in more information and asked for forgiveness of their crimes.

Some very important warlords have already done so and have shifted to support the government. Other warlords will do the same. If they don't want this solution they are "free" to go jail and face justice either in Somalia itself or the International Criminal Court.

Ethiopia tried for a period to hinder this process. They called the rest of the warlords to Addis Ababa and tried to unite them in their own "Council of Reconciliation" which worked for "genuine" reconciliation. This was itself not very difficult. By "genuine reconciliation" the warlords expected that the Somali people closed its eyes to their war crimes. That was in fact the only thing the warlords could agree upon. Otherwise they continued their internal struggles.

Ethiopia has problems of its own. The Ethiopian people rose in large numbers against the government when it realised the risk of a new war in Somalia - coming after all the other wars Ethiopia has been engaged in. Besides it got a very clear message from the Arab countries. All support from the Arab world would end unless the Ethiopian government stopped interfering in the internal affairs of Somalia.

Although the government in Addis Ababa at this moment still tries (very carefully!) to support some of the remaining warlords we don't doubt that this will soon stop. A last attempt to unite the warlords from Kenyan president Daniel Arap Moi - who is not exactly famous for defending human rights - will also fail.

At time of writing there is still opposition in a few areas among the warlords in small parts of Puntland (in the northeast), in Somaliland and in a few areas near the border of Ethiopia. But this opposition can't last if it is left on its own!

Also in these areas the warlords have based their power on a series of crimes against the population who will simply not accept this any longer. Today all people in Somalia know that there is an alternative democratic solution to choose.

With a minimum use of guns the Somali people has in fact nearly liberated itself not only from the warlords but also from imperialism and from globalisation. When a Somali minister went to Porto Alegre, Brazil [for the World Social Forum in January-ed.] he showed other participants a letter sent in 1977, where the Somali government told the IMF that Somalia didn't want any new loans! After the experiments with UN aggression this decision is even more popular in Somalia than before.

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# STS International Solidarity

STS International Solidarity is an organisation that includes people from different nationalities and of different political and religious convictions, united around three important principles: that ordinary people do not support wars; that an international organisation is needed to support the victims of war and mobilise opposition to war; that the trade union movement in all its different forms is an important (and potential) ally in the fight against ethnic and religious hatred.

STS International Solidarity has two main roots. One is the work started in 1993 by trade unionists in Europe to come to the assistance of the multi-ethnic industrial city, Tuzla, in the northern part of Bosnia.

Members of STS International Solidarity took part in the convoy sent by International Workers Aid who broke the total blockade of Tuzla in November 1993.

When STS later expanded its work to other areas of Bosnia as well as to Tetovo in Macedonia and Mitrovica in Kosova the name of the organisation changed to STS International Solidarity.

The other main root of STS International Solidarity is Somalia. This root goes back to the formation of a small group of opponents to the war in 1988.

The official spokesman of this group was Abdulkassim Hassan. Of the remaining and surviving six members of this group, three are today members of STS International Solidarity.

Through the very active help of these members STS International Solidarity has formed a special branch in Somalia with the name of STS Somalia. This affiliate today consists in fact of nearly all the civilian organisations in Somalia acting for the fulfilment of the idea of peace and reconciliation.