



# Post-Conflict Peace Construction in Somaliland: Analyzing the Internal and External Dynamics

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## Abstract:

The Horn of Africa region has witnessed a protracted conflict and Somaliland has been a part of it. This article explores and seeks answers to questions related to the stumbling blocks to post-conflict peace-building in Somaliland, analysing and assessing the internal and external dynamics of stumbling blocks to peace, including but not limited to: constitutional gaps, individuals and interest groups, media and donor approaches. It also examines other challenges to peace-building, recognising that reaching a peace agreement or concluding a peace dialogue is often more important than its sustainability. Somaliland peace-building is a viable critique of all established peace-building and state-building models, including the liberal, republican NEPAD model. The study is exploratory in nature and seeks to identify and assess internal and external blockages - (including geopolitical implications) - to post-conflict peace-building. It used an in-depth review of existing literature as a method of data collection under the qualitative research approach. The study finds that Somaliland faces a number of internal challenges in its post-conflict peace-building, which include: constitutional gaps, individual and group interests, and the media, which could play a clear role in peace-building but could also exacerbate tensions and mistrust; external challenges include, but are not limited to, the failure of donors to invite the Somaliland government to participate in fundraising and sectoral allocation.

**Keywords:** Peace Blockage, Conflict, Post-conflict, Peace Construction, Somaliland.

## Introduction

Somaliland is a de facto independent state in the Horn of Africa, gaining independence from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on 26 June 1960, soon after which it united with Italian Somalia. Some claim that the unification was driven by a sense of pan-Somali nationalism among Somalis living in the Horn of Africa, who wanted to form a Somali state consisting of; Ogaden and Reserve Area, Italian Somaliland, British Somaliland, French Somaliland and Northern Frontier District of Kenya (NFD). The idea of pan-Somali nationalism has long held out the promise of overcoming colonial division and uniting Somalis under one state. However, the unification of British Somaliland and Italian Somalia and the formation of the Somali Republic was problematic because it did not include any of the other three states (French Somaliland, Ogaden and Reserve Area, and Northern Frontier District of Kenya). The Somali Republic existed for almost nine years, although the British Somalilanders' claim to be marginalised prevailed, but the Republic ruled its country peacefully and democratically. But in late 1969, a coup overthrew the democratically elected government of Sharmarke and years of dictatorship and brutality began in the Somali Republic. In the 1980s, a stream of insurgents began to fight the dictatorial regime, and a decade-long civil war erupted, eventually leading to the overthrow of Siad Barre's rule in 1991 (Hirsi 2018).

The collapse of Barre's regime marked the beginning of decades of state-building efforts in Somaliland. Traditional leaders, together with senior officers of the Somali National Movement, laid the foundations for the creation of a new, independent and democratic state. With indigenous bottom-up peace formations, Somaliland has since achieved and existed peacefully. In the early years, Somaliland's capacity and legitimacy over its territory was questioned. However, this has not been a reason to hinder Somaliland's democratisation process, locally run elections have been held and rivals have transferred power peacefully on several occasions. However, from state-building and peace-building to democratisation, the international community has turned its back on Somaliland, refusing to acknowledge its involvement or even recognise it as a state. The international community has not been involved in Somaliland peace-building and state-building from the outset, although its efforts and commitment to capacity-building and institutional decentralisation are undeniable and widely recognised by the Somaliland people. In addition, recent developments in the region and the world at large have placed Somaliland in a position to address several issues that have emerged on its path to post-conflict peace-building and institutional capacity building. This article critically analyses the internal and external dynamics of peace blockages.

## Background of Post-Conflict Peace Construction

The traditional appeasement diplomacy used by Somalis to resolve any conflict, or even to prevent a dispute from escalating into conflict, is called Xeer. According to UNESCO,

"Xeer" is an unwritten code of conduct agreed upon by Somali clans in each area.<sup>2</sup> It is a way in which elders and traditional leaders come together to resolve a dispute or conflict, and as a last resort, the judgment is based on their knowledge of the tradition of unwritten previous judgements. In addition, any xeer will be dependent on the advice of the elders who gather to resolve a particular problem within a clan or between clans (Ali, Mohammed and Walls 2007). The xeer played an important role in post-conflict peace-building, as it was the intermediary through which clans communicated.

After the collapse of Barre's dictatorial regime, the Somali National Movement (SNM), with internal and external support, launched a movement to establish some form of governance in the northern region of former Somalia (now Somaliland). This region is home to a number of clans, some of which were at loggerheads with the SNM. As a result, the first inter-clan conference on state building was held in Burao in May 1991. This conference is now known as the conference where all the clans living in the northern region of former Somalia came together to declare the restoration of Somaliland's state sovereignty (Ali, Mohammed and Walls 2007). The second conference was held in Borama in May 1993 and is considered the most important national reconciliation conference. According to Lewis, the delegates adopted the country's first National Charter (a framework agreement countersigned by stakeholders that led to Somaliland's long-lasting peace, political stability, social cohesion and de facto statehood.<sup>3</sup> The period between the Burao and Borama conferences was marked by jubilation, economic growth and social stability. In addition, there were many other conferences held in parallel with the Burao and Borama national conferences, but these were comparatively less important because the issues they dealt with were localised and narrow in scope. For example, the Tawfiq Sheikh Conference in 1992 and the Erigavo Grand Conference in 1993 dealt with issues of governance and inter-clan accommodation.

### Post-Conflict Peace Frameworks and Models

Post-conflict is a term used to describe the period immediately following the end of a conflict. According to Cunningham, post-conflict is the transitional period between a past war and a future peace, in which a number of challenges are introduced (Cunningham 2021). Post-conflict is conceptualised as a complex, holistic and multifaceted method that includes efforts to simultaneously improve security for the sake of rule of law, governance and economic and development rehabilitation.<sup>4</sup>

The end of the Cold War brought an increase in intrastate conflicts, Smith categorised 100 out of 118 vicious conflicts around the world between 1990 and 1999 as intrastate conflicts (Almi, BinWasi 2013). As a result, post-conflict peace-building has been on the agenda of the United Nations as well as scholars in the years following the end of the Cold War (Filipoy 2006). For Elizabeth, the concept of peace-building is approached either inductively or deductively; 'deductively' describing peace-building as tools and

approaches available to international communities, while 'inductively' referring to the conflict itself, its nature, depth of social support and intensity (Cousens, and Cater 200). Thus, a logical and more realistic framework will interweave these two dimensions as the most preferable model for post-conflict peace-building.

The liberal peace model emerged in the late 1980s. It promotes democratisation, market-based economic reforms and a host of other organisations associated with modern states as the driving force for peace (Newman, Paris and Richmond 2009). The main argument of this model is that promoting democracy and a market economy in post-conflict states will pave the way for lasting and sustainable peace. However, it is questionable whether the liberal peace-building model has been successful in addressing the challenges faced by post-conflict societies. According to Kurtenbach, post-conflict societies in Central America do not provide evidence of a self-reinforcing cycle of democracy and peace as predicted by liberal peace-builders, but instead present negative outcomes of weak governance, development and social exclusion (Kurtenbuch 2010). While the broader goal of liberal peace-building is to transform war-torn nations into liberal market states, peace-building strategies fail to build effective institutions before liberalising a market. Somaliland's peace-building is a viable critique of liberal peace-building, as well as of state-building beyond; the dominant narrative in Somaliland is one of the absence of external actors, which is at the centre of liberal peace-building critiques (Njeri 2019).

Republican peace-building can be a viable alternative to the liberal model of post-conflict peace-building. According to Barnett (Barnett 2006), republican peace-building asserts the importance of institutional mechanisms of representation, constitutionalism and deliberative processes to encourage groups to express their views. Liberal and republican models share many similarities, such as the prevalence of freedom, constitution, elections and representation. In addition, the republican model relies on the core doctrine of deliberation (this process paves the way for public engagement as it encourages individual entities to express their ideas and be tolerant of opposing ideas). For republicans, the period of conflict is supported by unelected representation, such as interim governments, until elections can be held. However, this type of representation must meet three key standards: inclusiveness (bringing together different groups and views) and openness (explaining the reasons for decisions and their intentions), and constitutionalism (providing a justifiable division of power and limitation of authority to limit the exercise of arbitrary power). However, republican post-conflict peace-building is considered to be far superior to the liberal post-conflict model', because republicanism offers a viable solution to the challenges of post-conflict state-building, which include accepting indigenous realities, encouraging local accountability and promoting a gradual approach to peace-building.

Despite criticisms of the liberal peace model, a successful alternative model has yet to emerge. Between the continuum of typical liberal and illiberal peacemaking, there

are many types of centric peacemaking. To illustrate, Jihad Al-Bina was adopted by Hezbollah's reconstruction wing, which aimed to rebuild the nation after the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war. The reconstruction efforts of Jihad Al-Bina and the Gulf states do not constitute a full-fledged alternative approach to liberal peacemaking, but they do reveal some limitations (MacGinty 2007). A key difference is that the Gulf States and Jihad Al-Bina relied on unconditional cash transfers to needy and affected families. This was seen as beneficial because it was immediate and unencumbered by bureaucracy (Goodhand and Walton).

According to Eaton, states must use what power they have to name and shame war economy profiteers in order to weaken their local legitimacy, which is critical to their survival (Eaton 2018). On the African continent, a different approach to peace-building has emerged - the African Union (AU) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) have identified the dismantling of exploitative war economies as a priority for African peace-building. To localise the model of post-conflict peace-building, NEPAD has articulated the "African Post-Conflict peace-building Framework". For NEPAD, there are three phases of post-conflict peace-building, namely: the emergence phase (this phase begins immediately after the end of hostilities and comprises two stages, namely: establishing a safe and secure environment and facilitating an emergency response to the catastrophic consequences of the conflict); the transition phase (this phase derives from the end of hostilities and comprises two stages, namely: establishing a safe and secure environment and facilitating an emergency response to the catastrophic consequences of the conflict); the transition phase (this phase derives its name from an appointed and interim government, which is a period focused on developing a legitimate and durable internal capacity); and, finally, the development phase (this period is aimed at supporting the newly elected government and civil organisations with a series of programmes and projects aimed at promoting reconciliation and socio-economic development). According to this articulation, externally driven post-conflict reconstruction processes lack sufficient local ownership and participation and are unsustainable.<sup>5</sup> It also provides a common conceptual framework for assessing, planning, coordinating and monitoring post-conflict reconstruction systems across Africa.

In conclusion, Somaliland peace-building is not only a viable critique of liberal peace-building and its state-building beyond, but it is a critique of all established peace-building and state-building processes. Somaliland is the prime example to show that externally driven peace processes, be it liberal, republican or even NEPAD processes, are not the only typical way to generate social order. Somaliland has become a prime example of an indigenous and bottom-up form of peace-building and state-building.

### Internal Dynamics

Somaliland's 'bottom up' approach to peace-building is entirely indigenous, with no external intervention. Thus, the bottom-up indigenous peace construction that emerged

in Somaliland consisted of fusions of local institutions, practices, values and social hierarchies (Njeri 2019). These fusions are both contributors to peace building and, at times, barriers to peace sustainability. Somaliland's indigenous approach includes three complementary institutions: the president (executive), the lower house of parliament and the upper house composed of traditional clan elders called 'Guurti' - the house of elders composed of 82 members elected by clan representatives. The main principle of the Guurti is inclusiveness, in that all clans are represented, regardless of their numbers or social status. However, the main statutory mandate of this institution is to facilitate mediation and dispute resolution (Garimu 2014). According to Fadal, the early role of the Guurti as a peacemaker is well recognised by both Somalilanders and outsiders, but since it became a legislative body, it is argued that it has become a partisan political institution, accused of aligning with the already powerful executive to make it more powerful against the already weaker branches of government, the lower house of parliament and the judiciary (Fadal 2012). Claire Elder and Cedric Barnes note that the Upper House of Elders worried Somaliland's international partners and risked creating a dangerous political and clan polarisation by announcing a two-year extension of Silanyo's term - without consultation with the National Electoral Commission (NEC), the government or political parties - including a further postponement of the presidential and parliamentary elections.<sup>6</sup> Although the postponement of the elections was the exception rather than the rule, it was still unconstitutional, and such acts trigger the recurrence of conflict. New constitutions have always followed conflict (Ladley 2011), and any unconstitutional act can lead to new forms of conflict.

Interest groups or pressure groups are any association of individuals or organisations that are usually organised on the basis of one or more common concerns. Some form of cooperation between interest groups is necessary in the public interest (Hettlage 1984). It could be a two-sided coin; if interest groups are cooperative, only then would it be a positive initiative, for often when there are inequalities, especially economic inequalities, interest groups tend to resort to violence rather than seek to resolve differences through political negotiation (Stewart 2002). Although there has been little or no interest-group conflict in Somaliland's history due to the multi-party system, there is a great risk that some groups will not accept the outcome of any election.

Governments and social stability are maintained as a result of a social contract; that is, people will accept state authority as long as the state delivers services and provides reasonable conditions (Stewart 2002). According to Rusten,<sup>7</sup> Somaliland's political legitimacy comes from its contribution to peace. Thus, the basis of mutual consent is to maintain peaceful coexistence, and any act by the government, an individual or a group that is perceived by others as compromising mutual consent could lead to conflict. Moreover, in many peace agreements, the mere conclusion of a peace agreement has been more important than its implementation. Therefore, creating a sense of mutual trust and implementable agreements should be a central goal of a peace agreement.

According to Stroehlein (Stroehlein 2009), while some may doubt the importance of the media in post-conflict peace-building, the role of the media in post-conflict is clear. The more they (the media) present diverse viewpoints to the public, the greater the opportunity for competing parties to see what they have in common.<sup>8</sup> However, local media could exacerbate public tensions and mistrust, which could ultimately lead to violent conflict. Hohne argued that newspapers printed in the capital, Hargeisa, contributed greatly to the establishment of a democratic political system, but that some propagandistic coverage of the conflicts in the Far East had the potential to contribute to serious political tensions and the escalation of violent conflict (Hogne 2008).

## External and Geopolitical Implications

### a) External Blockages

It's important to recognise the resilience of the Somaliland people, who have initiated and supported various peace-building efforts without external intervention. Post-conflict peace-building coincided with Somaliland's state-building process. This legitimised the urgent need for aid, and it was high time for external actors to respond to these needs. According to Njeri, Somaliland's first ten years were community driven, but since then it has been donor driven, with donors such as DFID, Danida, EU, and a number of other organisations, have been working with Somaliland to provide institutional capacity building. However, direct funding cannot be transferred to Somaliland due to non-political recognition, and is only possible through partnership with the UN Development Programme (Njeri 2019).

Although Somaliland's tireless efforts to gain international recognition have not yet been fully successful, this could be seen as a positive and negative trend at the same time, because otherwise there could be direct cash flows, which at some point could cause a conflict of interest, as there is no strong central government with powerful forces to maintain rule and deter any conflict of interest due to direct cash flows, donors and agencies are increasingly aware of the potential for aid to do harm (Goodhand and Atkinson 2001) on the other hand, it could be seen as a negative trend, as there is no strong central government with powerful forces to maintain rule and deter any conflict of interest due to direct cash flows, as well as donors and agencies are increasingly aware of the potential for aid to do harm (Goodhand and Atkinson 2001). It could also be seen as a negative because of the Somaliland government's current inability to deal with international donors.

While the importance of peace-building aid to global development is clear, there have been troubling criticisms of its overall impact and effectiveness (Goodhand and Atkinson 2001). According to one report, Somaliland views aid as unpredictable and donor-driven, which does little to enable Somaliland to pursue its own post-conflict development agenda (Njeri 2019). The government of Somaliland mentioned that



donors do not invite them to participate in fundraising and sectoral allocation of funds, which undermines Somaliland's efforts (Render 2012), such as allocating sufficient budget for conflict prevention mechanisms and strengthening the capacity of conflict resolution-related institutions.

### **b) Geopolitical implication**

The Horn of Africa region has been a site of colonial and great power competition for over centuries, although the players have changed over time, but the game continues as the importance of the region shines in the eyes of the world; previously the main players were colonial powers, including but not limited to; Britain, France and Italy, while the current players are grouped into two competing blocs, which are; Turkey and Qatar on one side, and United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Egypt on the other side.<sup>9</sup> In addition, major global players from the US, China and Russia are keen to gain a foothold (Aidi 2004). In the context of intensifying competition, Somaliland's geopolitical location on the Red Sea has assumed and continues to assume particular importance (Guraj 2020); because of its geopolitical importance, external powers are competing to gain a foothold in Somaliland as it, along with its neighbouring states, appears to be the gateway to the wider African continent.

In order to reach out and engage with the Horn of Africa countries, major global players as well as Middle Eastern states have invested millions in ports and bases. Since 2010, Middle Eastern states have spent millions to acquire ports and land to build military bases (Aidi 2020). Global players such as the US, China, Russia as well as France and some other states invested in bases even before 2010 to gain a foothold in the region, for example, Italy established its base in Djibouti in the 2000s.<sup>10</sup> There are a total of 19 foreign military bases in the Horn of Africa, established by the international and regional powers, including the United States, China, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, Israel, Spain, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, in addition to Russia, which is on the verge of acquiring a base in the region (Abebe 2021). In terms of ports, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Turkey and China all have bases (Aidi 2020). Although Somaliland doesn't have political recognition, its undeniable de facto existence legitimises its indispensability in the competition for ports and bases, and these competitions have direct consequences on its internal affairs.

In 2016, Somaliland signed a 30-year agreement with the state-backed Dubai Ports (DP) World to upgrade and modernise the port of Berbera, the agreement included a commercial port, a free zone, a corridor linking Berbera to landlocked Ethiopia and an airport (Darwich and Bakonyi 2022). According to them, although the airport has been completed, its original designation as a military base for the UAE remains ambiguous.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, in 2018, Somaliland signed an agreement with the Republic of China (Taiwan) to establish bilateral relations based on shared beliefs in freedom and democracy, which paved the way for the exchange of representative offices ( Hurre 2020).

According to Lanfranchi, the involvement of external actors in the politics of the Horn of Africa may involve the cultivation of alliances with local political actors, and these actions will have a direct impact on local political dynamics (Langranchi 2021). Somaliland's agreement with the UAE and Taiwan both had consequences on domestic politics, to illustrate, during the bilateral agreement between Somaliland and DPWorld in 2016, the ruling party Kulmiye was at the helm, Waddani and Ucid were the only political opposition, the presidential election held in November 2017 resulted in the re-election of Kulmiye party as the ruling party and its candidate Mr. Muse Bihi as the new president, replacing the outgoing president Mohamed Silanyo, whose own government signed the agreement with DPWorld to modernise and manage the port of Berbera for a period of 30 years. However, the political opposition, particularly the Waddani party, is well known for its opposition to the Berbera port deal and the UAE's involvement in Berbera. In addition, China has clearly declared Taiwan to be part of its territory and has openly declared Somaliland's agreement with Taiwan to be a violation of its 'One China' policy.<sup>12</sup> The opposition parties, particularly the Waddani Party, vehemently criticised this agreement, with the former leader of the Waddani Party and its current presidential candidate, Mr. Cirro, stating that "Somaliland's bilateral agreement with Taiwan will not support Somaliland's quest for recognition, on the contrary, China could be of great help".<sup>13</sup>

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Existing local tensions may be exacerbated if each party perceives that it can rely on strong foreign support.<sup>14</sup> Although there are no obvious tensions between local political actors that could be exacerbated, other than that of elections and winning seats, the geopolitical competitions have a major impact on Somaliland's local politics if they are not well managed and the competing parties are treated equally and to the benefit of Somaliland's quest for recognition.

## Conclusion

International donors and external mediators have not been involved in Somaliland's peace-building, at least from the outset, yet their efforts and commitments to institutional capacity building are undeniable and widely acknowledged by the Somaliland people and their government. However, the effectiveness of donor-led funding sabotages Somaliland's peace-building and institutional capacity building efforts.

Somaliland peace-building is not only a viable critique of liberal peace-building and its state-building beyond, but it is a critique of all established peace-building and state-building processes. Somaliland is the prime example to show that externally driven peace processes, be it liberal, republican or even NEPAD processes, are not the only typical way to generate social order. Somaliland has become a prime example of a deliberate discussion (bottom-up approach) that has resulted in the outlawing of war without international involvement.

Somaliland could be the prime example of a viable critique of most known peace-building models, such as liberal, republican or even the NEPAD peace-building process. However, it faces a number of internal challenges in its post-conflict peace-building, including constitutional gaps, individual and group interests, and the media, which could play a clear role but also exacerbate public tensions and mistrust. In addition, the external dynamics of post-conflict peace-building in Somaliland include, but are not limited to, the failure of donors to invite the Somaliland government to participate in fundraising and sectoral allocations. This could undermine its post-conflict peace-building efforts.

**Notes:**

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