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THE SOMALI TRIBAL TANGLE:  
TRIBAL SOLIDARITY -v- THE STATE

by

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# **THE SOMALI TRIBAL TANGLE** **Tribal Solidarity v The State**

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## THE SOMALI TRIBAL TANGLE Tribal Solidarity v The State

by Yousuf Duhul

The United-Nations is humanity's fragile refuge against the perils of the inter-Statal conflicts -- rendered inevitable by the inherent combativeness of each of the present couple of hundred sovereignty-armoured, and so notionally equal, Nation-States.

### I. The UN Rule in Somalia

The complete disintegration of all Statal institutions and authority in Somalia poses a challenge to the UN not contemplated by its precepts. The challenge constituted by the Somali tragedy defies the whole European-erected Nation-State system, forming the foundations of the UN, and humanity's basic social structure since the Renaissance -- as the Europeans have designated their pioneering melting of the achievements of all mankind's earlier civilizations, which had bloomed at differing times in differing places, into humanity's first world-encompassing civilization.

The many UN Security Council Resolutions on Somalia, beginning with its adoption on 24/04/1992 of Resolution 751 establishing UNOSOM, were evidently designed to revive the authority of the Somali State and endow it with the means needed for its survival. The UN Security Council evidently now assumes that demoting Somalia to an unprecedented interlude of an informal UN trusteeship administration is its best way to the needed recovery. The Somali people realise that normal life, based on their usual communal values, cannot prevail again until the variety of armed groups, controlling the various parts of their country, are completely disarmed. They, therefore, accept in principle that the UN'S pioneering scheme -- on its use of force, at its own initiative, and temporarily assume political power in a member country -- is the best of the options open to them in the circumstance.

The Somali people's broad support for the objectives of the UN operation in Somalia was, however, dampened and rendered controversial by the unevenness and unfairness shown in its implementation. The main example of the UN unfairness is provided by its widely publicized clobbering of General Aideed and his supporters. The equally publicized emotional controversy surrounding the UN operations against General Aideed and his supporters has been generated by the fact that General Aideed is only one among many warlords plaguing Somalia. Besides, even in the West, where General Aideed is viewed as being one of the worst of the bloody warlords, it is widely



accepted that some of the of the others are even worst. For instance, the British (and the world's) oldest Sunday paper, **The Observer** of 24/06/1993, says: "The UN has personified [General Aideed] as evil incarnate. He may well be, but he is not the only one." It goes on point out that the UN is dealing politically "with warlords every bit as merciless as Aideed, and in the case of men like General Morgan, far worse." This writer's 01/03/1993 memorandum to the UN Secretary-General on the Somali tragedy, chronicles some of the deeds of General Mohammed Said Morgan.

One key fact, largely unknown to the outside world is that that peace prevails in most of the territorial pieces to which Somalia got splintered under the devastating impact of the former dictator's colossal abuse of the resources, power and machinery of the State. Such general prevalence of peace and communal harmony is particularly strong in (ex-British) Somaliland -- the only part of Somalia subjected to a decade-long hammering with the combined firepower of all the arms and resources of the State. A chilling example of the savagery resorted to by the former dictator's regime against Somaliland is provided by the plan General Morgan outlined in his infamous 23/01/1987 Letter to Siyad Barre, his father-in-law.

## II. A Somali's Maze of Tribes

The mighty pull of the Somali's pervasive tribal system constitutes the dominant factor behind phenomena as diverse as: (a) the broad prevalence, in most of Somalia, of communal peace and harmony when all formal Statal authority has ceased to exist (b) the emergence and configuration of the new post-dictatorship territorial entities and (c) the former dictator's specific targeting of the (ex-British) North for special devastation.

The Somali tribal system is an exact copy of that which prevailed among Hijaz Arabs at the dawning of Islam, over fourteen (Higra) centuries ago. Each of the vast majority of the Somali people believes that he descends from one of a half dozen founding-fathers, and traces his descent from the appropriate founding-father through an unbroken paternal lineage. The tribal affiliation of each Somali is not, however, confined to the main clan, headed by the founding-father. As has been mentioned, each step up one's genealogical ladder, which could consist of anything between 15 and 60 ancestors, constitutes for each Somali a distinct tribal unit. Such multi-layered tribal affiliation represents for the Somali nomad his identity card, address, social security and defensive shield. The source of the pressure necessitating the need for tribal solidarity determines one's 'tribe' of that moment. For instance, only first cousins would constitute one's 'tribe' when the adversary



is a second cousin. But all main clan, issuing from the founding-father, would be one's 'tribe' when the momentary adversary belongs to another main clan with differing founding-father. The key factor here is that all the Somali people are, irrespective of educational level or occupational status, of nomadic background. They are therefore all invariably immersed in the nomadic values and outlook.

#### A. The Traditions of the Traditionalist Elders

The system of tribal hierarchy, founded on paternal lineage, is simply the key survival instrument for the Somali people's nomadic life. And it still functions excellently when exercised by the communal elders in the context of their traditional use and their own expertise. A telling illustration of that is provided by their success in ensuring peace and communal harmony throughout most of Somalia -- without any law-and-order organs or any governmental machinery, whatsoever. In fact, the various parts of Somalia -- outside cosmopolitan Mogadishu and some tribally contested zones -- enjoy not only communal peace and harmony but also, in many parts, wide-ranging regulation-free trade, and hence a truly free market economy.

#### B. The Alien Byways of the Alien State

The fate of institutional and foreign relations politics in Somaliland, since the overthrow of the former dictator, illustrates the limits of politizing of the Somali's nomadism-engendered tribal heritage. The communal elders, so effective and wise in promoting and oiling of the means needed for safeguarding communal peace and harmony, found themselves so hopelessly adrift in relation to the politics of the State's institutions, its central government and its relations with other States and inter-State organizations.

Those with European-type training, known as the educated class, were supposed to provide the needed relief. They are, however, crippling handicapped by two realities. The first is that the acquisition of modern education, even at the highest levels, does not undo their nomadism-based tribal outlook and values. The second is that their very education would marginalize for them the consensus foundations of all Somali communal decisions, and would instead instill in them European political concepts like contested elections, spawning contested central governments. Their consequent endeavours to seek mandates from the nomadism-imbued electorate leaves them no choice to playing the tribal card, and so get sucked into the quagmire of polititized tribalism.

#### C. The Genesis of Secession in Somaliland



### C. The Genesis of Secession in Somaliland

The gravity of the damages caused by the dubious leadership of the practitioners of politicized tribalism, among the Somali educated elements, is shown by the secessionist label gratuitously stuck to Somaliland through their political ineptitude.

The wholly superfluous unilateral declaration of the independence of Somaliland on 16/05/1991 was the result of the combined effects of two facts. The first was the overpowering pull of the ubiquitous tribal machine. The second was the inability of the educated class, and in particular their politically active elements, to escape from the blinkers of politicized tribalism to a modicum of the rationality inherent in the education attributed to them.

The move was propelled by the massive resentment of Issaaq clan, constituting about two-thirds of the population of the ex-British North, against the former dictator's targeting them and their land for systematic annihilation, exemplified by his total devastation, largely through the military direction of his son-in-law, General Morgan, of Hargeisa, Somalia's second city. The genocidal overtones of the attacks unleashed against the Issaaq, led, on the overthrow of the dictator's regime, to an understandable determination among the Issaaq, at the popular level, not to be subjected again to similar attempts at wiping them out. The former dictator's premeditated use of all the power and resources of the State for their collective elimination was, as is usual in such circumstances, attributed by the masses to the whole of the ex-Italian South. 'No, more Mogadishu' was the popular synthesis of such sentiment. It is such popular opposition to a recurrence of their collective travail that the appalling inadequacy of the political leadership of the educated class has translated into the needless braving of world opprobrium through the unfortunate unilateral declaration of independence.

Here is an outline of the self-evident political facts which plainly obviated, at the time, any need for such a hazardous step. The first of such facts is that, at the time of such declaration, the State of Somalia had already largely disintegrated and ceased to exist. Consequently, there was no State to secede from. In fact Somaliland was, at the time (and evidently still is), the biggest territorial chunk of Somalia. Moreover, the fact that demographically and territorially it represented about a third of Somalia, and also encompassed one of the two Somali States which united in 1960 to form Somalia, made Somaliland the best qualified heir of the name and resources of the Somali State. In addition to that, the Issaaq were then the only major Somali clan enjoying, on account of their unparalleled suffering under the overthrown



dictator, great sympathy among all the other Somali clans. Consequently, the Issaaq assumption of of Somalia's political leadership would have been the one development that could have saved Somalia from the present tragic disintegration.

It was, in any case, obvious that Somalia's old highly centralized political set-up, which led to Siyad Barre's highly personalised savage regime, was finished and dead. Equally obvious was the fact that the chaos then pervading the ex-Italian South rendered unrealistic any talk about the future political system for Somalia -- until really representative solid administrations were established in all the territorial entities of the South. It was, in addition, clear even then, that Somalia could be reconstituted only on the basis of a new political system -- clearly founded on the twin pillars of consensus and decentralization.

One corrective measure urgently needed is to raise Somaliland from its present limbo, to which it got internationally relegated. The international community's abandon of Somaliland and its people is glaringly shown by the fact that all its public utilities and infrastructure remain as devastated and desolate as the day the dictator responsible for them was overthrown. A few of the hospitals, schools etc have been restored to makeshift use. But obviously the former dictator's destruction mania has left little room for self-help improvisations. The completely devastated utilities include all the installations and equipment for electricity generating, telecommunications, water and all those of its meagre industrial and artisanal plants -- plus of course the schools, hospitals, bridges and other social facilities.

Clearly, the people of Somaliland will not be able to resume their coherent and productive social living until such primary utilities and infrastructure are restored. And it is the UN's failure to draw the attention of the international community to their sad plight that is jarring the people of Somaliland.

#### D. A Plague Called Siyadism

The troubles of the people of Somaliland have been compounded by the incompatibility of their multi-layered tribal structure -- so marvellously adapted for the Somali people's extravagantly egalitarian nomadic life style -- with the intrinsic inequality of a hierarchy-based central government. To neutralize the intrinsic divisiveness of the Somali tribal system, all mention or acknowledgement of any tribal affiliation was tabooed during the anti-Colonial struggle for independence. Such ban of all mention of any tribal affiliation has never been lifted.



However, even during the Fifties, when the Somali people's virtual unanimity on seeking independence was generating maximum pan-Somali nationalism, the ban on tribalism did not extend to its social security dimensions. The powerful tribalism-abhorring nationalist parties did not object to, or even notice, that the better off continued to support their needy tribal kinsmen. The full-faceted tribalism itself re-emerged before the advent of independence. Such resurfacing was triggered by the lure of the benefits and patronages enjoyed by the members of the first Somali governments, installed for internal affairs by the Colonial powers. The overthrown dictator gave caricatural inflation to both aspects of the preceding duality on the role of the tribal factor in Somali politics. At the official level, he not only continued the ban but pretended to extirpate it completely by presiding over its public ceremonial burial. And, at the same time, he raised its actual practice to the unique status of being the one constant and overriding consideration of his regime's criteria for evaluating everything and everybody.

Somaliland is now bedevilled by the effects of the former dictator's two interconnected political innovations. The first is his astronomical elevation and extension of the sway of the tribal factor in all aspects of the use (and abuse) of the State's machinery and powers. The second is his consequent promoting to political prominence of an endless parade of the types who would feign believing in the dictator's pretence of being "the father of wisdom and the fountain of learning"; and, in addition, would always be prepared to espy the singularity of the virtues of the dictator's eponymous contribution to humanity's heritage, 'Siyadism', as incarnated by the ideological label sported by the dictator at that moment -- be that Positive Neutrality, any of the variety of (non-scientific) Socialist tags (Arab, African, Islamic or simple Socialism) or either of the poles of Marxism-Leninism or Western Liberalism.

### III. The Case for the Authentic Tribalism

The Issaq clan's instrument for the struggle against the dictator, the Somali National Movement (SNM) and its pos-dictator Government of Somaliland, were both plagued by being taken over by the graduates of Siyadism. The Siyadists' three arms for their usurping of political leadership in Somaliland were all owed to the dictator and his Siyadism. The first was the Siyadism-sharpened expertise in the manipulation of politicized tribalism; the second was the communal prominence conferred by the (at least nominally) elevated posts held by them in the dictator's regime; and the third was the financial clout given to them by their shares of the public assets looted under the spoils system, sponsored, by the dictator.



Tribalism was Siyadism's instrument for its variegated evils. Not, however, the authentic tribalism of the Somali nomads, but the politicized counterfeit. An excellent example of the use of such nefarious hybrid is provided by Egal's statement in May 1993 at the Borama Conference about his being the official candidate of Issaaq's Awal sub-clan for the Presidency of Somaliland. He was deploying the highly emotive invocation of tribal succour of the Somali nomads' genuine tribalism in support of its politicized imitation -- which is characterized by its wrapping itself in the cloak of the genuine tribalism while totally disregarding its criteria and values.

#### A. The Eternal Tribal Angle

The Somali nomads naturally never selected anyone for the Presidency of a State or indeed any officers of any permanent central authority. In fact, the Somali nomads did not have, or need, any organized political authority. That of course does not mean that nomadic societies are immune to the frictions and tensions incidental to social living.

The disputes within the Somali nomadic society could, as in other human societies, be between individuals or groups. The Somali tribal structure gives individual disputes, even those between a husband and wife, a communal (i.e. tribal) dimension. The Somali nomad's machinery for the handling of such disputes, whether of individual or group origin, is an ad hoc body, formed for the specific dispute. It would invariably consist of the delegated representatives of the two sides, and its decisions would be reached by consensus. Occasionally, the two sides would invite the good offices or the arbitration of a third party, acting through a similar ad hoc body.

The selection of the delegates of each side to such ad hoc bodies is the only electoral process known to Somali customary precepts. Each side's delegation would, as far as is possible, be representative of the sub-sections of the particular tribal level. The invariable practice is that the tribal entity concerned, whatever its level, would -- as a matter of its tribal prestige and honour -- select as its delegates the best qualified among its members for the particular task. Picking the persons best qualified for the particular job, among their members, needs no competitive campaigning. They would have already emerged, and established their reputations.

#### B. Refurbishing the Original Tribal Criteria

The crux of the present Somali problem is that the preceding basic Somali social norms are being not only ignored, but ousted. They are being reversed and supplanted by the values and processes of the imported State and its central government.



The intruding alien conceptual outlook and processes, incarnated by the State and its machinery, are not being adapted and fitted into the millennial Somali social framework. On the contrary, the complete reverse is being attempted -- namely, using the values and needs of the imported State as the social mainstay, and adaptively subordinating to its needs and processes the tribal system underlying the Somali social fabric. Hence the sway of the prevailing pernicious hold of politicized tribalism in the selection of super-delegates, like the President of Somaliland. And hence the relegation into oblivion of the impeccable pan-Somali tradition of selecting, as a matter of communal prestige and honour, their best qualified for the job.

Full rehabilitation of the Somali tribal system and the adoption of the values indicated above is advocated in my 21/10/1988 paper, "A Letter To My Faqash Friends". It was a polemical pamphlet directed against the supporters of the former dictator's regime. Its Part One, comprising most of its 32 pages, was devoted to a detailed examination of "the national disaster in the North". The call for the rehabilitation of the Somali tribalism and the application of its norms to the processes of the Somali State is in Part Two, constituting the last ten pages. It attempts to analyse the political options available to the people of Somalia after the overthrow of the dictator's regime. It suggests that Somalia already had direct negative experience of both the Scientific-Socialism and Western Liberalism, respectively championed by the USSR and USA, the Superpower duet -- that is before the disintegration of the USSR under the impact of the ideological bankruptcy it was relegated to by the Soviet leadership's political apostasy, and its simultaneous decamping to the adversary's version of 'democracy'.

In the chapter entitled "Refurbishing our Native Institutions", the paper advocates "a government based on the representatives designated by tribal segments corresponding to constituencies or electoral districts of the past." The paper goes into some detail on both the anticipated objections to fully tribalized political system, and the methods and machinery needed for realizing it. An aspect not sufficiently stressed at the time is the fundamentality in Somali traditional norms of selecting their best qualified for any communal assignment -- and its being an invariable pan-Somali norm, reflected by the universality of its use by all tribal entities in designating their delegates to all ad hoc meetings (shir) for examining and determining of an inter-tribal issue. Such meetings constitute the Somali nomad's sole governmental institution.



### C. Comprehensive Tribalization: The Minefield Ahead

Clearly a most welcome monumental advance would be achieved if the traditional criteria for selecting the tribal delegates to the variety of ad hoc meetings could be applied to the nominating of the officers for the various institutions and organs of the Somali State and government. Obviously, the difficulties of the complete and formal tribalization of the primary State machinery, like the civil service, are immense. Even more serious are the seemingly unsurmountable barriers constituted by the ethos and organizational structure of the armed formations essential for the existence of the State. A minimum of such armed formations would be a police force to ensure the law-and-order needs of the State and to guarantee the executability of its laws and administrative measures.

Such seemingly insurmountable difficulties may look less formidable when the top echelons of the State's institutions and machinery are manned by the best qualified elements of country's clans and their subsidiary tribal levels. There is an evident need for some representative organ to oversee, at the level of the Issaaq sub-clans and their non-Issaaq equivalents, the selection of their best qualified for the various posts, at all the appropriate tribal levels. It would be reasonable to rely, in that regard, on the continued prevalence of the give-and-take pragmatism so crucial to the day-to-day application of the traditional tribal affairs.

If we take as an example the post of the President of Somaliland, he would plainly belong to only one of the sub-clan level tribes of the Issaaq. The post would be allotted to one sub-clan on something like the following context. Each of the tribes at the sub-clan level would have selected its candidate for the Presidency of Somaliland from the candidates emerging from the preceding selection processes of the network of tribal branches at each link in the (Issaaq) tribal lineage. The selection process at each tribal level would include some inter-tribal haggling. Each tribal side would refer to the special qualities of their candidate, the exceptional reasons for allotting the position to their side; and would emphasise points like the rival tribes having been assigned earlier benefits, some special needs of their side, some customary norms favouring their side etc. Such informal bargaining eventually leads to a consensus on the tribe (not the candidate) to assign the post to.

### V. The Borama Experiment and Experience

The proceedings of the shir (meeting) of the traditional elders of the tribes of Somaliland, held in Borama from 04/02/1993 to 15/05/1993, is instructive in that respect.



It originated as a pan-Issaag ad hoc assembly, empanelled at the level of the Issaag sub-clans -- the highest echelon of the Issaag tribal structure -- to determine a tribal dispute which had degenerated into some serious armed clashes between two Issaag sub-clans. The participation in the meeting, in addition to the two warring sub-clans, by the rest of the Issaag sub-clans was intended, as is usual in such circumstances, to facilitate the peace process of the two opposing sub-clans. The successes of that summit assembly of the Issaag clan was not limited to its settling the dispute between the two sub-clans whose conflict was the cause of organizing it. It also similarly ended other less acute differences simmering among other elevated levels of the Issaag clan tribal hierarchy. To make its peace mission not confined to the Issaag but extend it to all Somaliland, the assembly invited the non-Issaag tribes of Somaliland to make it a pan-Somaliland assembly by sending delegates, at corresponding tribal levels.

#### A. The Impulsion of the Approaching Vacuum

It was after the successful conclusion of its peace mission that the assembly of tribal elders, representing the people of Somaliland, decided to examine in Borama, as the country's representatives, the wider issue of the political needs of Somaliland. They appreciated that one mishap was the main cause of the political problems facing Somaliland. This was the failure of the government of the first President of Somaliland, Abdulrahman Ahmed Ali, to accomplish the preparatory assignments of its two-year transitional mandate. The crucial measures never even attempted by the transitional government include: the vital task of tackling the destabilizing peril posed by the various tribe-based militia groups -- by transforming their better elements into the nucleus of the Somaliland army, and disarming the rest. Less daunting tasks were subjected to similar total neglect. The areas so totally neglected include: failure to enact the basic laws establishing the structures and powers of the legislative, executive and judicial organs of the State; the laws establishing and regulating the dues, levies and taxes needed to generate the revenue for financing the basic needs of governing; the re-establishing of the primary administrative machinery of the State; and the re-organizing and operating of the nucleus of the social services.

The assembly of tribal elders was faced, when it gave itself ultimate political authority of Somaliland, with a two-pronged peril. The first prong of the hovering menace was the highly precarious security situation inherent in the unabated prevalence of the political, legal and administrative vacuum incidentally spawned by the successful revolt against the former dictator's regime; and the second was the scheduled end, on 17/05/1993, of two-year mandate of the transitional government.



The assembly of tribal elders' initiative of, in effect, investing their assembly with the powers of Somaliland's constitutive assembly, had, however, its own intrinsic problems. The important reality, lost sight of by the tribal elders, is that their own field of expertise does not extend to the powers, structure and machinery of a Nation-State. The requisites of a State are simply unknown to the norms and precepts of the Somali tribal system. Moreover, the Somali tribal criteria under which the Borama assembly was convened and conducted were not the genuine variety of the Somali nomads, but that of politicized tribalism -- the debased, generally pernicious, convoluted metis, evolved from the vain endeavour of trying to fit the precepts and values of Somali tribalism to the needs and methods of the Nation-State. As has been pointed out, the exact reverse should have been done. The needs and processes of the State should have been adapted to the norms and values of the native Somali tribal system. And aim of this paper is to show the ways and means of doing that.

#### B. The Strains of the Overlooked Criteria

The rectification needed would cover the formation of the assembly of tribal elders itself -- and the assembly's subsequent functioning as the interim constitutive assembly of Somaliland, including its selection of Egal as the President of Somaliland. In both, the missing element is the respecting of the outlook and values of the Somali people's genuine nomads' tribalism, and the application of its criteria for the selection of its political representatives. As has been indicated, the sole political representatives, or indeed political authority, known to the Somali nomads and their tribalism were the delegates of a tribal entity to an ad hoc meeting in which a communal matter concerning its members would be dealt with. The criteria of Somali tribalism for selecting its political office-holders or representatives are those used by the multitudes of tribal entities at the multitude of tribal levels in the selection of such delegates to such ad hoc meetings. And, as has been pointed out, the invariable rule of all Somalis in all parts of the Somali country has always been the selecting of their best qualified for each assignment.

#### C. Egal's 'Election': A Video Farce?

Clearly such criteria were not applied in the selection of the members of the Borama assembly of tribal elders or in their subsequent selecting of Egal as the President of Somaliland. Even if all the earlier errors and faults are disregarded, the events of its closing phase -- that of the day of 'electing' Egal, as recorded in the semi-official video



tape -- remove the assembly and its processes from any connection with the precepts of the Somalis' tribal system. Consensus is, after all, the foundations of all the Somali people's determination of, not only political issues, but of all communal matters. Yet, the chairman of the Borama assembly refused to allow the three rivals of Egal for the Presidency of Somaliland their requests for addressing the meeting on their respective political programmes. The chairman, a strong partisan of Egal, pretended to cancel unilaterally the earlier formal acceptance by all, including the chairman himself, of the principle of the candidates addressing the assembly on the their respective programmes. He further denied the candidates their requests for addressing the meeting on the arbitrariness and illegitimacy of his ruling. Consequently, the three candidates and their supporters walked out in protest.

The ensuing commotion was not confined to the protesting candidates and their supporters' walkout. It engulfed the Egal supporters, including many who were not members of the assembly but had walked in from outside. The chairman still insisted that he would ballot those present in the hall, including the many intruding non-members. Egal was 'elected' as the President of Somaliland by such dubious balloting -- additionally marred by much disorder and confusion surrounding the agreeing on the method of conducting it, and then even during the voting by the hand-raising which eventually prevailed.

It would be superfluous to point out that such 'election' has nothing to with the consensus so vital to political and all communal decisions under the rules of the Somali tribal system. It would seem equally clear that, under the normal processes of the West, the fountain of the requisites and processes of Nations-States, any general assembly meeting conducted in this way would be invalid. And so would of course be any business conducted by it.

## VI. Some Thoughts for the Future

It may be appropriate to return now to the issue of fitting the essentially centripetal requisites and processes of a State to the manifestly centrifugal ethos and methods of the Somali tribal system's intricate network of graduated layers. Let us continue with the ways of filling, under Somali tribal methods and perceptions, of the variety of positions at the various levels of the variety of institutions and organs of a State. As has been noted, the daunting practical difficulty of applying Somali tribal norms to the Somali State is constituted by the impracticability of assigning on tribal basis of all posts of all the State's departments, institutions, establishments and organs -- and particularly those in the armed formations, like the police and the army.



#### A. The Pivotal Steering Committee

Such seemingly insurmountable difficulties may, however, be less formidable if, as would be the case if the tribal criteria is strictly followed, the top echelons of the State's institutions and machinery are first manned by the country's best elements. There would presumably be established -- for the need is evident -- a tribally representative organ, at the Issaaq sub-clan level and their non-Issaaq equivalents, to oversee the actual selection of the best available for the differing posts at the differing tribal levels. Such a superior, in fact sovereign, tribally mandated organ, would delegate the needed supervisions, at the medium and lower tribal echelons, to appropriate subsidiary organs. It would similarly delegate its authority in relation to the armed formations by entrusting the day-to-day running of each of such armed formations to its commander. The commanders themselves would have been put through the supervisory organ's selecting process, and so presumably would be equipped with the needed discretion and breadth of vision.

Such delegation at this level, and the subsidiary delegations of authority at lower levels, would be made in the context of the Somali traditional requisites of acceptance into the ranks of communal leadership. The qualities considered crucial for communal leadership include -- as is known to all -- fairness, discretion, breadth of vision and, above all the foundations on which such qualities would rest, namely plain common sense. Such officers would, when selected according to the Somali standard criteria, be amply endowed with the qualities needed to restrain them from the temptations of abusing their powers -- and indeed from all excesses.

#### E. The Posts of the Tribe-based State

After this delineation of the social context in which the powers of State posts allotted on tribal basis would be exercised, let us begin with a State's top possible position -- that of a person heading both the State and the government of a country, like the President of Somaliland. Normally, the post would be given to one of the Issaaq sub-clans, and, as has been observed, the background of the selection would be something like the following: Each of the tribes at the sub-clan level would have selected its candidate for the Presidency of Somaliland from the candidates who had emerged from the preceding selection processes by the lower network of tribal branches at each link in the (Issaaq) tribal lineage. The selection process at each of such lower tribal levels would have included some inter-tribal haggling at the given lineage level. Each tribal side, in each of the differing tribal levels through which the matter had progressed, would have emphasized all



matters likely to help their candidate -- the special qualifications of their candidate, the meritoriousness of the claim of their tribal side, the advantages formerly allotted to the others etc. Such informal bargaining would eventually leads to a consensus on the tribe (not the candidate) to assign the particular position to.

The selection of the next officer of the State, the Vice-President in the case of Somaliland, would follow similar course except that it would be affected by the tribal repercussions of the preceding selection. For instance, the sub-clan given the top post would be out of the race for the Vice-Presidency and for all the following important posts until, at least, each of Issaaq's major sub-clans and their non-Issaaq equivalents are allotted one of the chain of posts, next to the preceding one, in a descending order of importance. The bargaining, and its give-and-take approach of assigning posts, would continue until all the positions, subjected to partition at that tribal level, are exhausted. The posts subjected to direct division at the lower tribal levels would be similarly allocated.

#### F. The Perils of the Tribe-selected Rulers

There is of course an understandable worry about the risks of tribal or personal abuse of the power by the holders of the positions so gained. Such worry would be especially acute among those not familiar with the social ethos of the Somali nomad and his multiplicity of tribal kinsmen -- and the way its appropriate rung gets activated, at the appropriate moments, by the source of the pressure responsible for the invoking of the kinsmen's tribal solidarity.

The checks against such abuse are provided by the very Somali tribal system on the basis of which each of the powerful positions has been assigned to its holder. A member of a tribal entity has, towards his tribal kinsmen, a responsibility inherent in, and additional to, his instinctively rushing to their unquestioning succour. It is the duty of restraining a fellow tribal kinsman from transgression against the others. Such duty of dissuading fellow tribal kinsmen from wrongs against others arises from the cardinal tribal character attributed by the Somali tribal system to both the initial transgression and the retaliation it provokes. The Somali nomads' instinctive hostility to the aggressions by the members of their (tribal) side is dictated by self-interest. Such conduct would, if not restrained, provoke retaliation. And the workings of the over-powering tribal solidarity pull would ensure that the ensuing conflict would not be confined to the aggressor, but would engulf his tribal kinsmen. Hence the permeating of the Somali social fabric by the sentiment of effectively taking the side of wronged strangers, as against the serious excesses



of their tribal kinsmen, in the self-interested preventing of the sparking of tribal conflicts.

It is, therefore, clear that the risks of abuse of power will not be increased by the tribal source of the relevant power. On the contrary, such tribal dimension is the best guarantee not only against the abuse of the power, but also against all blatant excesses and inequities in any aspect of the organizing and administering of such open tribalization of the powers and structure of the Somali State. The offender's own tribe would, as his nominees and guarantors, be the first to pressure the offending officer to desist from any measures or conduct which provokes the justified hostility of the tribal entity concerned -- that is because their very selecting of the offender for the position would make them tribally responsible for his excesses.

## VII. And Some Concluding Observations

This paper argues that the Somali tribalism, so extravagantly practised by the former dictator -- and which was the principal cause of the disintegration of the authority and institutions of the Somali State -- was not the genuine tribalism of the Somali nomads. It was, this paper maintains, the counterfeit alien politicized tribalism, propagated by its unscrupulous practitioners, generally known as 'afminshaaro' (the saw-mouths).

The Somali people's first priority is considered to be the reverting to the values and criteria of their nomads' authentic tribal system. Such return to the social values and criteria underlying the Somali people's authentic tribal system, entails the prior discarding of the basic error which has led to its being supplanted by the present politicized counterfeit. This is the unwary acceptance, and subsequent maintenance, of the departed Colonial powers' policy of using their own political outlooks and social values as the governing principle of their rule. They viewed the values and standards of the tribal structure underpinning the Somali society, as a vulgar 'native' monstrosity to be tamed and fitted, to the extent possible, to their 'civilized' values.

### A. Re-educating the Educated Class

The so-called educated class are the social stratum responsible for the continuation, after the depart of its Coloniaist begetters, of the reversal imposed on the Somalis' own millennial social standards and operating criteria. The 'so-called' tag is intended to underline the deficiencies of the arrogant assumption behind limiting the status of being educated to those schooled according to the teaching methods,



conceptual parameters and values pioneered in Europe. The imparting and acquisition of the fund of knowledge specific and essential to the Somali society, and from which emanate Somali social values and culture, the fund of knowledge vital to nomadic life and its sustaining pastoralism -- these are, by definition, excluded from the elements constituting 'education'.

Yet the indisputable fact is that the social stratum considered 'educated' by that yard-stick is the one which has failed the Somali people. The Somali traditional elders, who are steeped in the Somali people's traditional education, reflecting its social standards and criteria, are the ones sustaining, despite the total disintegration of the State and its authority, the organized and peaceful communal life enjoyed in nearly all the parts of Somalia. The sad exceptions are areas in which Somali traditional values have been fatally weakened, like metropolitan Mogadishu; and the areas permeated by inter-tribal contests, deeply rooted in old rivalries.

A good example of the vital social contributions of the traditional elders, really educated in the ways of the Somali people, is provided by their communal role in Somaliland. Such tribal elders have been the social mainstay there not only since the completion of the disintegration of the Somali State in early 1991, but also during the preceding decade -- when the former dictator's attempt at crushing, by limitless savagery, the Issaq's long-simmering resistance, led to the big urban centres only, transformed into armed citadels, remaining in the former dictator's grip.

#### B. Loosening the Grip of Politicized Tribalism

It would seem obvious that the solution for the present Somali tragedy is the discarding of the prevailing mischievous politicized tribalism, and reverting instead to the authentic tribal system of the Somali nomads. Still unresolved would be the thorny problem of the method and mechanism of actually determining the persons best qualified for the top positions of the State, and indeed the nature of the qualifications needed.

One thing would be clear. The traditional leaders cannot be expected to repeat their successful deploying of their great expertise in the Somali traditional rules and the tribal system on which they are founded, for the preservation of communal peace and harmony -- in the unrelated field of picking the best suited persons for each of the State's top posts, among those 'educated' in alien ways, and so are needed for the running of the alien State. They simply lack any knowledge of the scholastic ingredients of the expertise expected of the managers of the machinery of a State.



The top selectors of the nominees for the top positions of the State would have to come from the 'educated' stratum, who have been so pathetically ineffective upto now. Their past group failing, however, were not due to any in-built group-wide faults or deficiencies. Their trouble stemmed from the ramifications of politicized tribalism, particularly as escalated and exploited by the former dictator. He attributed to the others his own ammorality and singular capacity for intrigues. He consequently was always on the lookout for those likely to rise to political leadership at the upper echelons of the main Somali clans. The educated elite were singaled out for constant surveillance by his infamous National Security Service (NSS). Those with the integrity and ability components of effective leadership were targeted for intensive persecution. In consequence, the more decent and more able members of the educated class had to flee out of Somalia or languish in one of the dictator's numerous prisons. The few of the category, who managed somehow to evade both the above fates, remained in the oblivision corners of the dictator's regime, depressed and depreciated by the constant fear of being found and flushed out. Thousands of the leadership-class category of educated Somalis, specially among those maturing during the last quarter of a century, are dispersed all over the world. It is merely a question of establishing the machinery to mobilize them.

The ultimate question is the way of establishing, through the open use of the traditional tribal criteria, of the pivotal Steering Committee itself -- to be entrusted with the fundamental task of selecting, from the appropriate categories, the nominee for each leadership position in the political and permanent personnel of the State.

### C. Steering Towards the Steering Committee

One Somali rhetorical traditions, frequently used in meetings on communal matters, is to ask the proponent of an unexpected or untried suggestion to furnish himself the needed elaborations. This writer proposes to follow that tradition, and put forward his suggestion on the formation, on tribal basis, of the cardinal Steering Committee. One of the basic requisites, implicit in the processes of the nomad's authentic tribal system, is the tribal identification of the parties concerned -- by the tribal level appropriate to the circumstances. This writer proposes to respect that tradition, and tribally identify himself as a member of the Garxajis sub-clan of the Issaaq, which would be the appropriate level here. Hence the suggestion is being made in the writer's capacity of an elder of the Garhajis branch of the Issaaq educated leadership. Traditional elders do not usually identify themselves in this way because the details of their tribal identity would be well known to their counterparts -- and they certainly do not attribute to themselves



specific qualities or talents. It is, however, suggested that the writer's claim to membership of 'the Issaaq educated leadership' is justified by the unprecedented context in which it is being made -- namely the proposing of a way of nominating, on tribal basis, the members of the key Steering Committee, which will, in turn, nominate all the holders of all important posts in Somaliland.

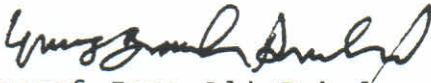
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To go, then, to the core of the suggested tribe-based State, this writer proposes, in his capacity of a Garxajis 'educated' elder:

That, firstly, the educated leadership of the Awal sub-clan of the Issaaq should select, on the basis and criteria of the authentic Somali tribal system, one of their members to be the President of the Steering Committee of Somaliland, the kernel of the proposed tribe-based government, which is entrusted with the selecting of the persons to fill each of the important positions of Somaliland; and

That, secondly, the educated leadership of each of the other main Issaaq sub-clans and their non-Issaaq equivalents select one of their respective members, on similar basis and criteria, to be a member of the said Steering Committee; and

That, thirdly, the wide discretion of the said Steering Committee would include its coopting to its membership of full additional members to represent the people of Somaliland who do not belong to the main Issaaq sub-clans or the main sub-clans of their non-Issaaq equivalents.

  
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