

Diaspora and Post-War Political Leadership in Somalia*

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“The Diaspora appeared to be a driving force in steering the country’s politics away from the monopoly of the armed groups and helping to empower the unarmed civic actors”
UNDP (2009: 26)

“Diasporas are enemies ... and they are to be confronted violently ... I warn Somali people to get ready to fight them ... it is a common knowledge that people like me and Musse Sudi paid dearly for the sake of this country, we even lost our sights for it” Haabsade¹
(Hiiraan Online, May 19, 2011)²

ABSTRACT

Violence, insecurity, and severe hunger resulting from the civil war caused hundreds of thousands of Somalis to flee from the country. Now a large number of Somalis, over one million, live in the diaspora. These diaspora communities retain close ties with the homeland and engage in a wide variety of transnational activities. Some of them prefer to return to Somalia. With regard to Somali politics, there are three main areas that diaspora returnees are involved in. Some invest in the private and social sector; others engage in the civil services; while yet others directly compete for higher political positions. This paper will focus on the participation of returned professional politicians in post-war political leadership in the Somali Republic.

This research intends to fill the knowledge gap on the political role of the Somali diaspora and, therefore, to contribute to the ongoing wider debate on diaspora and their impact on their homelands. Based on the assumption that Somali diaspora is increasingly dominating the political leadership of the homeland, this paper intends to answer two questions. Firstly, what is the role of the diaspora relative to their local counterparts in the field of political leadership? Secondly, given the leadership skills and experiences accumulated while abroad, particularly in the West, what diaspora political leadership is able to contribute towards peace and a state-building project in post-war Somalia? Raising this second question, my intention – in addition to illustrating the role of political leadership – is also to moderately respond to a perceived weakness in the literature on the diaspora engagement.

Keywords: *Somalia, Diaspora, Political Leadership, Ethiopia.*

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¹ Both Mohamed Ibrahim Haabsade and Musse Sudi are former Somali warlords, ministers and current members of the TFI parliament.

² Hiiraan Online (http://www.hiiraan.com/news/2011/May/wararka_maanta19-13616.htm)

INTRODUCTION

Violence, insecurity and severe hunger resulting from the civil war caused hundreds of thousands of Somalis to flee from the country. Now a large number of Somalis, over one million, live in the diaspora³. In other words, some 14 percent of Somalia's population is now living outside the country. Most of these Somalis are in the neighbouring countries, but the most significant groups, in terms of their contribution, are those in Western Europe, North America, the Middle East and Australia. The Somali diaspora has different meanings in different contexts. In this study, the term Somali diaspora refers to the Somalis living in the later – countries outside the Horn of Africa region (Kleist 2008b: 1132). On the one hand, Somali diaspora in these regions accumulate human, financial, and/or social capital that are extremely scarce and therefore badly needed in Somalia. On the other hand, these diaspora communities retain close ties with the homeland and engage in a wide variety of transnational activities such as social and financial support (i.e. supporting their families/relatives and contributing to the humanitarian relief and development efforts), private investments and political engagements. Therefore, in this context the term 'diaspora' for many indicates "expectations of economic support as well as continued loyalty towards Somalia and other Somalis abroad" (Kleist 2008a: 308).

The political role of the diasporas is a controversial issue in both the academic debates and policy-making circles. In the literature⁴ a substantial amount of studies consider the diasporas as destructive force contributing to the conflict in their homeland. Here diasporas was considered as a source of revenue and political support for the armed struggles within their home countries. For instance, Paul Collier and others argued that diasporas engagements, particularly sending remittances to homelands, fuel the conflict there (Collier 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Kaldor 2001; Duffield 2001; Berdal 2003; Lyons 2007). Here the main argument is that their engagements in the conflict are less costly relative to the local counterparts since "they are much richer than the people in their country of origin and so can afford to finance vengeance. Above all, they do not have to suffer any of the awful consequences of renewed conflict because they are not living in the country." (Collier 2000: 13) With the increased preoccupation of security and terrorism after September 11th, 2001, this role of the diasporas in the conflict has attracted substantial attention on the part of policy-making circles in the West (Berdal 2005; Kleist 2008b).

³ Considering the current massive influx of Somali refugees into neighboring countries, the one million figure is old and somewhat misleading. For instance, in 2009 the UNHCR figures for registered refugees were as follows: (Kenya 224,000), Ethiopia (17,000) and Yemen (91,000) (UNDP, 2009). In July this year the UNHCR estimated that the Somali refugees living in these countries are: Kenya (405,000), Ethiopia (110,000) and Yemen (187,000) (<http://www.unhcr.org/4e16da4d9.html>).

⁴ For nice review on the literature see Pirkkalainen and Abdile (2009).

On the other hand, some other studies foregrounded the role of the diasporas as peace-makers and state-builders and emphasized the immense contributions in promoting post-war recovering and peace-building by the diasporas (Zunzer 2004; Frost 2002; Zack-Williams & Mohan 2002). According to Zack-Williams & Mohan (2002)

[T]he diaspora has been one of the pillars of development and industrialization. ... So, the financial power of the diaspora is clearly formidable. However, development is more than money and the diaspora contributes in a myriad of other ways. ... We can say that an increasingly confident diaspora yearns for Africa, wants to speak and work with Africa in its moment of crisis.

Again, this recognition in the academic discussions has generated awareness in the policy-making areas. In Europe, for instance, due to the considerable engagements with development and peace building of the diasporas, the issue of the diasporas attracted great interests in both governmental and non-governmental areas. According to a recent report, there are a number of reasons for this interest, that relate to remittances, return, resources, recognition and reputation (Horst et. al. 2010: 9).

The diaspora involvement in Somali politics, with both positive and negative effects, has been recognized some time ago (UNDP 2001; Gundel 2002). However, it was only a few years ago that a number of empirical studies began to consider the political role of the Somali diaspora (Horst 2007, 2008; Horst and Gaas 2008, Kleist 2008a, 2008b; Galipo 2011). Furthermore, these studies mainly deal with a transnational engagement perspective, where members of the diaspora involve Somali politics while they are mostly abroad. Very few, such as Ibrahim (2010), deal with the political role of the returnee diaspora members.

At the level of political engagement, the diasporas contribution could take many shapes. It could be e.g. a financial contribution, advocacy within the host country, and educational transfer with the aim of influencing political developments in the homeland. Regarding the geographical perspective, Al-Ali, Black and Koser (2001) differentiated between two arenas of transnational political activities that may contribute to the post-war reconstruction efforts. The home country focus activities such as membership of political parties and participation in elections, and the host country focus such as political demonstrations and mobilisation of political contacts in the host country.

Quite similarly, Østergaard-Nielsen (2006: 5) pointed out that diasporas engagement may take the form of direct or indirect political support. In the former, the diasporas participate in local homeland politics by influencing the political mindset and in the democratic solution to a conflict by participating in “advisory councils or governments of transitions”. In the latter, the diasporas may mobilize political support by influencing their host societies and governments or even international organizations.

The economic role of diaspora remittances has been recognized by both researchers and policy makers. However, their social and political role in general is less understood.

There are three main areas that diaspora returnees⁵ are involved concerning Somali politics. Some of the diaspora returnees invest in the private and social sector⁶; others engage in the civil services; and yet others directly compete for higher political positions. This paper will focus on the participation of returned professional politicians in post-war political leadership. On the other hand, a number of diaspora returnees rather than directly engaging into the political leadership prefer to contribute their expertise as professional expertise in certain relevant areas and I will occasionally consider the role of these returned experts in the post-war political reconstruction in the Somali Republic⁷. The role of political leadership is vital in the process of state formation. The leadership decisions and leadership failures may shatter peace- and state-building processes in the post-war situation. Given the current political geography of the republic, the diaspora political involvement could be at different levels. Here, I will consider their role in five national/regional political institutions: the TNI/TFG, Somaliland, Puntland, Gal-Mudug, and Himan & Heeb.⁸

This research intends to contribute to partially fill the knowledge gap in the political role of the Somali diaspora and, therefore, to contribute to the ongoing wider debate on the Somali diaspora and their impact on the homeland. Based on the assumption that the Somali diaspora is increasingly dominating the political leadership of the homeland, this paper intends to answer three questions. Firstly, what is the role of the diaspora relative to the local counterparts in the field of political leadership? Secondly, given the leadership skills and experiences accumulated in the diaspora, particularly in the West, what the diaspora political leadership is able to contribute towards peace and state-building project in post-war Somalia? With this second question my intention, in addition to illustrating the role of political leadership, is also to moderately respond to a perceived weakness in the literature on the diaspora engagement. As Brinkerhoff (2011) noted there is a well recognised research

⁵ The term return is not exclusive, it may include someone who simply came for short time involvement and those who stayed longer time or even resettled in the home country.

⁶ Here the private and social investments are considered as political activities if it used for political purpose. For instance, the Ambassador Hotel in Hargeissa was a private investment built to generate profits. However, the hotel is a powerful political tool (Ibrahim 2010: 36).

⁷ Somali Republic or Somalia, unless stated otherwise, means the formal republic that existed before the civil war.

⁸ The Transitional National Institutions (TNI) and its successor the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFI) were respectively created in October 2000 (in Djibouti) and in October 2004 (in Kenya) with mandate of creating a permanent viable state institutions in the Somali Republic. Somaliland is a self-declared state in the northwest of the Republic. Puntland is a regional state in northeastern Somalia. Gal-Mudug and Himan and Heeb are regional states in central Somalia. The latter three entities, unlike Somaliland, are not trying to obtain international recognition as separate states.

deficit in the area of diaspora engagement in peace-building and conflict. Thirdly, what are the major challenges facing the diaspora engaging into Somali politics?

This study relies on both secondary and primary data. Firstly, a desk study on Somali politics and review of existing literature on Somali diaspora was conducted. Secondly, primary data was collected from various places in Somalia – Mogadishu, Hargeissa, Garowe, and Baidoa – and several other countries – UK, Canada, Finland, Kenya, and Uganda – in May/June and September/October 2011. Collecting primary data, mainly from diaspora but also local, politicians involved in post-war political leadership were firstly identified and approached for interview. Conducting interviews, I utilized face-to-face meeting, telephoning, and emailing strategies⁹. While conducting the face-to-face meetings, respondents were asked in-depth interview questions and in both telephone and email, interviewees were asked focused interview questions. Furthermore, news archives of some main Somali web pages were surveyed.

Apart from this introduction, the paper is divided into five sections. The following section will give a general overview on the role of the diaspora in post-war political leadership. It is then followed by a brief section looking at the potential contributions of the diaspora leadership in the process of peace- and state-building. The section that follows will give particular attention on main challenges facing the Somali diaspora in its engagement with political leadership in Somalia. The last section will conclude the study.

1. DIASPORA AND THE POST-WAR POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

For a long time, members of the diaspora have been returning to Somalia and taking part in the political leadership of the country. However, their involvement dramatically increased since 2000. One possible explanation is that for some the first ten or so years were the period of capital accumulation in the host countries. Another is that the Arta peace conference held in Djibouti in 2000 provided real opportunity for the diaspora “to play a meaningful role in Somali national politics” (UNDP 2009: 16)¹⁰. In any case since then, strong diaspora leadership engagement was felt in many parts and in many levels of the Republic.

⁹ A total 33 (12 face-to-face, 19 email and 2 telephone) interviews were conducted. In Canada I used telephone interviewing and in UK both telephone and email were used. In Mogadishu, Baidoa, Kenya and Uganda I employed email interviewing. In Hargeissa and Garowe interviews were conducted in both face-to-face and email methods, and in Finland the method was face-to-face.

¹⁰ More on Atra process, please refer to section five.

Table 1. *Governments¹¹, May/June 2011.*

	Head of States	Ministers/PMs	State Ministers	Total	Diaspora
TFG	1	19	9	29	19
Somaliland	2	20	0	22	7
Puntland	2	19	5	26	14
Gal-Mudug	2	7	0	9	4
Himan & Heeb	2	6	0	8	4

Source: field note¹²

Table 1 presents the administrations or executive branches of the five administrations noted above in May/June 2011. The share of the diaspora is surprisingly high relative to their local counterparts. In general, diaspora represents about 14 percent of the total population. However, most of these live in the neighbouring countries (Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti) and in this study returnees from these countries are not considered as diaspora. Therefore, Somalis living in the countries regarded as diaspora are in all accounts less than 10 percent of the total Somali population. However, the diaspora was highly visible in the top leadership of these state institutions as heads of states, parliamentarians, cabinet members, or professional bureaucrats. As Table 1 illustrates these diaspora represent at least about a third (Gal-Mudug, Somaliland), in certain cases (TFG) almost two thirds of the respective regional governments.

Table 2. *Heads of states, 2000–2011.*

	Total	Diaspora
TNG/TFG	3	1
Somaliland	3	0
Puntland	5	4
Gal-Mudug	2	2
Himan & Heeb	1	1

Source: field note

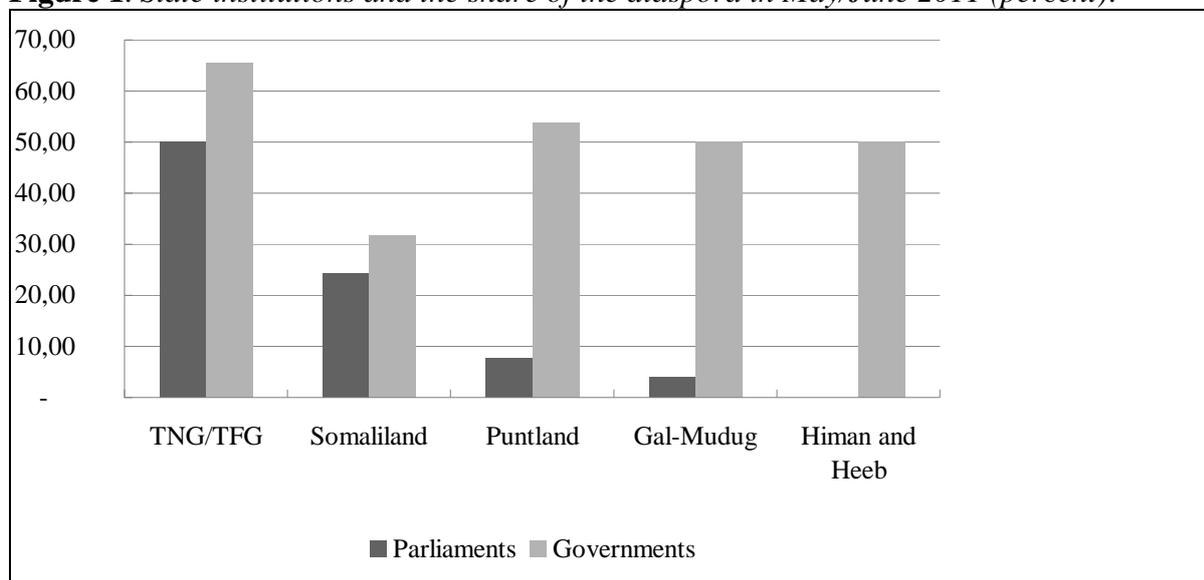
The share of the diaspora is even higher if highest political office, the president, of these states is considered. Both presidents that occupied the President's

¹¹ In current Somalia, the heads of states are presidents, as the chief public representative, of these political entities. Except the TFG there are presidents and vice president in all other entities and in this paper I consider both presidents and vice presidents as heads of states. State ministers or ministers of state are junior ministers and in general they are assigned to specific tasks under specific ministries. PMs are prime ministers.

¹² Data in this table, following tables and figure 1 were collected from a vast number of sources. For instance, the 19 out of 29 of the diaspora proportion in the TFG in this table is based on interviews data collected from Mogadishu, Baidoa, and Nairobi as well as consulting with a number of news archives.

Office in Gal-Mudug and the President in Himan & Heeb are from the diaspora. In Puntland, four out of five Presidents were from the diaspora. The case of Somaliland is quite exceptional here. In addition, since the Arta Conference nine out of ten prime ministers appointed for TNF/TFG were from diaspora. Premier Ali Mohamed Geddi alone could be considered as local. Furthermore, as Figure 1 illustrates at the parliaments the case is somewhat different. The figure compares the diaspora proportions of current governments to those of respective parliaments. For instance, in Himan & Heeb there is a 23 seat legislative body and all are occupied by local people. At Gal-Mudug the proportion of the diaspora at the 25 seat house is 4 percent and Puntland total members are 66 and less than 8 percent are from the diaspora. At the TFG the figure is relatively high, but in all cases the diaspora proportions of governments are higher than those of the parliaments. However, in both Somaliland and Gal-Mudug the speakers of the houses of representatives are from the diaspora.

Figure 1. *State institutions and the share of the diaspora in May/June 2011 (percent).*



Source: field note¹³.

A general perception is that proportion of diaspora representatives in these state institutions is continuously growing. Data in Table 3, by comparing 2011 administrations with 2001 administration, supports this conclusion. However, that trend is rather fluctuating. For instance, at the TFG, in January 2008, 66.7 percent of the cabinet was diaspora members. A year later, the share of the diaspora was reduced to 48.6 percent. In a cabinet appointed in 2010 the diaspora gained more, 53,9 percent and in 2011 in a new cabinet the share increased again.

¹³ The percentage of the TFG parliament is based on a quite rough estimate. It is very difficult to find the exact number of the diaspora in the current oversized, 550 seats, TFG parliament.

Table 3. *Governments, 2001 & 2011.*

	2001	2011
TNG/TFG	51,6	67,86
Somaliland	3,8	31,8
Puntland	22,2	53,85
Gal-Mudug	NA	33,3
Himan & Heeb	NA	50

Source: field note

2. DIASPORA LEADERSHIP CAN MAKE MOMENTOUS CONTRIBUTIONS!

Despite its importance, as Horst (2007: 8–9) pointed out, the constructive engagement of diaspora in peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation is underreported in the literature and requires further research. In the post-conflict situation, the diaspora can significantly contribute to the reconstruction efforts. According to Abdi, an expert on institutional development from the Nordic countries based in Hargeissa, in many ways, diaspora dominates Somaliland politics;

In Somaliland politics, the diaspora influence is substantial and their impact is amply observable in the cabinet, parliament, political parties – both established and newly formed ones – elections, and the national political programs. They both directly and indirectly present the experiences they accrued while in the host countries. They repeatedly initiate ideas for discussions and it is these ideas that often stimulate the local thinking and in many cases result actual developmental gains. In the debates, those from the diaspora often refer the leadership culture of their host countries and how institutions operate there, some of them write articles explaining, for example, good governance and here too they illustrate good examples they witnessed while abroad. On the other hand, there is a conflict of views between the diaspora and the locals on the best political leadership practices and the diaspora position is often the stronger. The main reason for that is that their argument is mostly grounded on scientific facts.

In addition, Abdi identified six main areas that the diaspora may influence the political system of Somaliland:

1. They participate in the political leadership in an extensive way
2. In the discussions, their arguments are stronger relative to the locals.
3. They present good practical examples

4. They brought knowledge
5. They provide significant financial contribution to the political agendas
6. By organising seminars and debates they influence the people's mindsets.

On the other hand, although he does not deny that there are some negative aspects of the diaspora engagement in politics, such as that they are occasionally influenced by the sectarianism, he insisted that on the balance the positive impacts are far greater than the negative influences. (Interview, Hargeissa, September 2011).

However, although Abdi's argument, that the political role of the diaspora is for the most part a positive one, could be challenged in many ways, its general conclusion is something that is bluntly observable in the recent political arrangements of Somaliland and to some extent in Puntland as well. Here I present a quite special case that illustrates the enormous positive contributions that diaspora political leadership can make in peace and state building. According to one of the founding members of the Gal-Mudug Regional State, Mursal H. Shirwa¹⁴,

A brutal conflict between the Sacad and Saleebaan clans triggered in Mudug and Galgadud area in 2004¹⁵. There were a number of conflicts between major clans in the area and, in addition, there were tensions among the sub-clans of the Sacad clan – one of these tensions was the result of the conflict between Aidid (General Mohamed F. Aidid) and Ato (Osman Ali Ato). Therefore, it was quite a difficult time for the Sacad clan. The consequence of these conflicts in general and the war between the Sacad and Saleebaan in particular, generated a number of concerns among the Sacad intellectuals in the diaspora. One was the direct consequences of the wars on the local people, i.e. families and relatives, such as insecurity and other humanitarian crises. Another was that local warring militias succeeded to mobilize people in the diaspora to financially contribute to the conflict. However, prior to 2005 there was no organized effort for these concerns. As a member of those concerned with how things were in the region, I took an initiative to transfer these diaspora efforts to the positive side. (Interview, Helsinki, September and October 2011).

Mr Shirwa noted that there were two Major goals for their initiative; (1) to stop the war and (2) to redirect these diaspora resources for peace building and development. Revealing his strategic move he mentioned that he first shared his ideas with friends and colleagues in Finland. Secondly they approached to the

¹⁴ Mursal H. Shirwa, is a founding member and former Commissioner of the Social Affairs, Gal-Mudug Regional State.

¹⁵ Both *Sacad* and *Saleebaan* are sub-clans of the Habar Gidir, a main branch of the Hawiye clan-family.

Sacad diaspora in North America, Europe, the Middle East, and East Africa. In both cases the responses were encouraging. Since the information on the ground the group had was very limited, in January 2005 Mr Shirwa himself was sent to Somalia to collect data from the area.

After a five days trip, besides the devastating humanitarian crises I witnessed, I came up with two specific conclusions, (1) a main cause of the persistence of the war was that the war was generating a huge amount of financial resource from the diaspora and (2) most of that resource was channelled into private pockets¹⁶. The information was shocking and we decided to organize a meeting for diaspora representatives in London in March. (Ibid)

Some fifty Sacad delegates from the diaspora met in London and in addition, as Mr Shirwa noted, “to gain legitimacy we contacted Sacad leadership in the area – central Somalia – before the London meeting and without difficulty we secured the approval of eighty influential signatories – i.e. traditional and religious leaders, businessmen and politicians”. In London, a decision to establish the Somali Diaspora Alliance (SDA) was made. The mandate of the SDA was to establish *maamul goboleed* (regional administration) in the area. Security, education, health and water were identified as major areas of engagement for this administration. In July the SDA organized a two days conference in which 1500 people attended in Stockholm where a charter for the regional administration was approved and the SDA was allowed to pursue its objectives¹⁷.

With the aim of establishing the regional administration, in January 2006 Mr Shirwa and other 56 individuals from the diaspora were sent to Galkayo Somalia by the SDA to prepare and organize a conference. Mr Shirwa emphasizing the importance of their mission noted that;

To raise awareness and gain local people’s confidence, we conducted a nine days tour in the area. Here, we visited and spoke with the people in every settlement in the area populated by the Sacad clan. We had two simple messages for them: peace and administration. After the tour we met a 15 member team of the South-Galkayo Administration who were running some day to day activities in the south of Galkayo and informed them that we had come there to establish a larger regional administration that could bring peace and development to the area and they accepted to cooperate with us and five of them joined our diaspora group. We started

¹⁶ Horst (2008: 330–1) and Horst and Gaas (2008: 18) confirm this conclusion. They noted that the majority member of the diaspora of both clans paid monthly USD 300 per person. The money was collected by a committee in Norway, and thereafter sent to the respective clan in Somalia. However, large amount of the money was misappropriated and this was discovered by respective Diaspora members only after they sent USD 200,000 a number of times.

¹⁷ Mr Shirwa also noted that the huge amount of money that the *Sacad* Diasporas were sending to the war was almost halted after their initiative and findings.

meeting different sectors of the society in southern Galkayo and we finally succeeded to establish a formal council for the traditional leaders by setting up an office and administrative structure for them and explained them that the work we were doing falls within the spheres of their responsibilities and we convinced them that we were there to help them. In addition, the SDA delegated the task of selecting delegates of the forthcoming Galkayo conference to them. The SDA reserved the responsibility of selecting some of key intellectuals and technocrats for itself. (Ibid)

Some 350 delegates from all over the world met in Galkayo in July with the aim of establishing a regional administration. However, Mr Shirwa noted that their original regional administration idea was rejected by the delegates. “After two weeks of debating, our argument was defeated. I had no choice but to accept the majority vote, but I and others still believe that our original argument was more appropriate”.

According to him, the rise of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in mid 2006 inflicted two major negative impacts on their mission: (1) the UIC diverted the attention of the most of the SDA supporters in the diaspora to a national Somali project (2) forces loyal to the UIC reached the area which created uncertainty and this in response hindered the former’s performance¹⁸. Nevertheless, the Gal-Mudug Regional State was established and 23 member parliament and president were elected.

Apart from the setbacks I mentioned earlier, I am confident that our engagement was on the positive side. In security terms, although I am not claiming that conditions became perfect, the situation changed dramatically. On the development side, let me give you few quantitative examples: In 2006 there was only one hospital, three primary-intermediate schools and five in-service drilled water wells in the area. In 2011, there are four hospitals, 25 health centers, 18 primary-intermediate schools, four secondary level schools, two universities and 28 operating drilled water wells (Ibid).

The diaspora engagement in the formation of the Gal-Mudug Regional State presents a number of useful lessons, i.e. In conflict and peace issues diaspora is a two edged sword; diaspora negative efforts are transferable into a positive contribution; positive mobilization of the diaspora could secure significant gains in peace building and state formation; in general, local people are keen to listen and ready to accept positive contributions from the diaspora; diaspora efforts could challenge and may overcome the efforts of local war profiteers; diaspora individuals may gain political power through peace building and state formation initiatives.

¹⁸ However, Mr Shirwa realises that the emergence of the UIC created recognizable opportunities for Somalia in general.

3. SOMALI DIASPORA VS. THE ETHIOPIA-WARLORD AXIS¹⁹

The engagement of diaspora returnees in the Somali political leadership is not well received by everyone (Pirkkalainen and Abdile, in this issue; UNDP 2009: 18). There are a number of concerns against diaspora politicians raised by local politicians and according to Ibrahim (2010: 39) their involvement naturally spurs “negative reactions from some quarters, particularly politicians and opinion makers who have vested interests in keeping things the way they are.”

However, as the two quotations above indicate, the Somali warlords who dominated the political leadership of the country, understandably, perceived the diaspora engagements as imminent threat – simply because warlords have a fundamental interest in maintaining the status quo – conflict, lawlessness, state collapse.

On the other hand, since the mid-1990s, after the US/UN troops had withdrawn, Ethiopia increasingly tried to tighten its control over Somalia’s political destiny and gradually became the dominant external player in Somali politics. Ken Menkhaus recently wrote:

How Ethiopia opts to pursue its security interests ... is key to the success or failure of almost all other policy agendas in Somalia. ... The problem for Somalia is that Ethiopia is simultaneously the single most important external actor, yet its motives, interests, strategies, and intentions are the most difficult to understand and predict. ... Ethiopia’s future policies thus constitute the key ‘wild card’ in the Somali crisis. (Menkhaus 2008: 14)

Ethiopia, like warlords, realised that the best strategy to manage Somalia and its potential problems is to keep Somalia in the status quo. A perfect coincidence of interests between Ethiopia and warlords emerged. Therefore, in order to secure that objective Ethiopia developed a closer relationship with the Somali warlords. The two crafted an alliance with Washington, particularly after September 2001. Here, their objective was clear. As one former US intelligence officer noted, “[e]verybody is playing the counterterrorism card on the Bushies. ... All you have to do is say ‘counterterrorism,’ like this silly alliance in Somalia²⁰, and you’ll be given guns, money, and trucks. It’s becoming a sick joke.” (quoted in Silverstein 2006)

However, should that approach prove impossible, then the exit strategy for Ethiopia would be (1) to help reliable leaders, the warlords, to achieve power (2) Ethiopia want any future Somali state to be based on a federal system, rather than centralised system. Here the perception is that Ethiopia could have greater influence on small regional administrations ruled mainly by allied warlords.

¹⁹ The term Ethiopia-Warlord Axis is borrowed from Ahmed Samatar (2007).

²⁰ Here the officer is referring the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counterterrorism formed in 2006 by the most ruthless warlords in Somalia.

In March 1998, after a failure of 13 peace conferences for Somalia, a possibility of another conference for the Somalis was discussed at IGAD meeting. Hassan Guled Aptidon, the former president of Djibouti, asserted that in order to succeed the proposed conference “should be moved away from the faction leaders and warlords”. A year later Aptidon’s successor, President Ismail Omar Guelleh, took over the IGAD chair with the ambition to carry the initiative forward. In accordance with his substantial understanding of the situation, President Guelleh tried to convince his neighbouring Ethiopia to accept him, as the chair man of IGAD, to execute the Somali peace mandate. After active diplomatic manoeuvring, President Guelleh received the approval of all important bodies, such as the UN, the Arab League, the Organisation of African Unity, and IGAD, to go ahead. Djibouti Government also tried hard, with remarkable success, to convince the Somali people as much as possible. (IRIN, June 30, 2000)

In March 2000, a preliminary meeting was held in Djibouti where about 60 Somalis mainly from the diaspora came together and later a technical committee was established. (Jama A. Jama²¹, member of the technical committee, interview, London, October 2011). Intellectuals from the diaspora dominated the committee. The Coordinator, Deputy Coordinator, and the Secretary General were selected from the diaspora. Since then the diaspora’s leadership role in the conference was apparent. The chair of the conference was from the diaspora. A main feature for the members of this committee was that it was made up of some of the Somali intellectuals who campaigned for a peace process based on civil society since early 1990s.

On the other hand, a unique feature of this conference was that there was no role for a warlord and the reason was that they were seen by the organisers as spoilers of the previous peace conferences. Therefore, unlike the 13 previous peace conferences they were not only refused to control the conference agenda but they were informed that no one will get any special consideration or treatment. However, they were encouraged to attend it as Somali citizens.

Therefore, most of the warlords decided to boycott the process including Mogadishu-based faction leaders. Very significant absentees were Mohamed Ibrahim Egal and Abdullahi Yusuf, presidents of Somaliland and Puntland respectively, the latter being the most aggressive opponent to the conference.

In August 2000, after six months of deliberations at a Somali peace conference, commonly known as Arta Peace Conference hosted by the government of Djibouti, ended up with the formation of a Transitional National Institutions in Arta, Djibouti. Abdiqassim Salad Hassan was elected as an interim president and he appointed Ali Khalif Galayr as prime minister. Both were from the diaspora. Furthermore, most of the government ministers appointed by Premier Galayr were from the diaspora²².

²¹ Jama was appointed as president of Puntland in 2001.

²² The President and Premier as well as some members of the new cabinet were former associates of the military regime.

Diaspora and Post-War Political Leadership in Somalia

The Arta process was supported by many and according to Kieran Prendergast, U.N. under-secretary-general for political affairs, the Arta conference was “a unique political experience for Somalia”. According to him; [T]his is the first time that Somali elders from all parts of Somalia have met; the first time that representatives of the grass-roots, of almost all clans, have discussed ways and means of rebuilding their country in a process based on consensus-building from the bottom up, and the first time that Somali women have been actively involved.²³

However, Ethiopia although it first formally accepted the process, soon after the political leadership of the Transitional National Institutions emerged it started to sabotage the whole process²⁴. The Government of Ethiopia based its rejection on two arguments: the absence of the faction leaders and the established administration (Somaliland and Puntland) and that the TNG was supported by Islamic fundamentalists.

Ethiopia prompted several strategic moves to disrupt the TNG. First, Ethiopia stated that it will recognise the TNG as a legitimate partner, only if the TNG successfully eradicates the Al-Ittihad al-Islami. (IRIN, 22 January 2001) In addition, the TNG leadership was asked to bring Ethiopia’s allied warlords on board. For Ethiopia, more than anyone else, it was apparent that the two targets were almost impossible for the weak TNG to accomplish, nevertheless, it insisted that it “has not yet officially recognised the new government and recognition will depend on how the new leadership addresses these issues” (IRIN, 6 December 2000).

Secondly, in late 2000, Ethiopia started organizing warlords that abstained from the Arta conference to oppose the TNG militarily. In January, 2001, Abdullahi Yussuf and leaders of four factions met in Ethiopia, and established the National Restoration Council (NRC). In addition, Ethiopia encouraged the small number of warlords who had participated in the Arta process to withdraw from the TNG and invited them with other Mogadishu warlords who had not participated in both the January meeting and Arta process to meet the NRC leaders in Awasa Ethiopia. In March warlords established a coalition, the Somali Restoration and Reconciliation Council (SRRC), “with the objective of opposing the TNG militarily, as well as creating political confusion in the international donor community” (Interpeace 2009: 48–9). Furthermore, to demonstrate its support to the warlords and provoke the TNG, Ethiopia instigated occasional military intervention in Somalia.

Thirdly, to undermine the Arta outcome, Ethiopia promoted what it termed as “all-inclusive” peace conference. In March, the Ethiopian government noted that the objective of the Awasa meeting was to create an environment in which

²³ Xinhua News Agency, 29 June 2000. (Republished in <http://reliefweb.int/node/65913>)

²⁴ This is not to blame everything on Ethiopia. There are a number of leadership weaknesses that failed the TNG, including that there was little effort, if any, to reach and win over the large and relatively talented Somalis in the diaspora. (Samatar 2007)

the opposition will be able to meet with the TNG. However, later in the month Hussein Aidid, a co-chairman of the SRRC, stated that the purpose of the Awasa meeting was to “lead the nation towards an all-inclusive reconciliation conference and the establishment of a legitimate transitional representative government of national unity.” (IRIN, 22 March 2001) Furthermore, the group, after meeting with senior Ethiopian officials including the Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin, noted that in the meeting they discussed with the Ethiopian Government “prospects for peace and reconciliation in Somalia, and ways of reinvigorating the role of Ethiopia in the process” and insisted that they will not accept that “the Arta outcome constitutes even a minimum base to build on” and added that they will talk to the TNG as a faction but not as a national government. (IRIN, 26–28 June 2001)

In May 2001 SRRC leaders met President Daniel arap Moi of Kenya and requested him to support the reconciliation process in Somalia and the President informed them that he will do his best and added he “would closely consult Ethiopia and Djibouti in the process” (IRIN, 28 May 2001). President Moi convened peace talks in Nairobi aimed at bringing about reconciliation between the TNG and the SRRC in early November 2001. Although President Hassan with high level delegation attended the meeting, most prominent SRRC leadership failed to show up. They instead went to Ethiopia to hold “rival talks”. Understandably, their concern was that the Nairobi talks failed to fulfil their preconditions to sit with the TNG.

In February 2002, member states of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) decided Kenya to convene a new round of Somali reconciliation conference which would include the TNG and other Somali parties. Later in that month, Ethiopia brought SRRC leaders into the Ethiopian town of Dire Dawa and according to the SRRC “The Ethiopian delegation underlined the imperative necessity of participating at the upcoming national reconciliation conference”. However, it was quite apparent that Ethiopia was projecting its preferences in the forthcoming conference and according to the TNG, “[t]he SRRC and their sponsors, the Ethiopians, are now saying that we should start from scratch [whereby all the sides, including the TNG, come as a faction]” and vowed that they “will never be part of efforts meant to derail” the Arta process. (IRIN, 4 March 2002)

Finally, the reconciliation conference, after a number of delays, commenced at Nairobi in October 2002 and was run by a technical committee to set up by IGAD ministers for foreign affairs consisting of Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti. The process was extremely long and full of irregularities. Ethiopia mobilized all it could, with great success, to dominate the whole show. Djibouti tried to salvage its Arta efforts but in vain, as tiny Djibouti was not able to confront Ethiopia. The conference ended in October 2004 with a humiliating end for the TNG and in its place the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was inaugurated in which Abdullahi Yussuf was selected as president of the TFG. Without any doubt Yussuf was, among the SRRC leadership, the most reliable leader for Ethiopia. He appointed Ali M. Gedi, as the prime minister. According

to Jeffrey Gettleman of the New York Times, “Mr. Gedi’s rise to power was essentially an Ethiopian creation.” and added that he has been chosen “as prime minister after heavy lobbying by Ethiopian officials, who portrayed him as a gifted technocrat.” (New York Times, 30 October 2007)²⁵ In his part the new Premier appointed a cabinet consisting of 87 members dominated by the SRRC leadership and their allied faction leaders. Pressing the process Prime Minister Meles Zenawi underlined that “Somalia has got a very rare opportunity,” and encouraged the rest of the world to support President Yussuf’s peacekeeping demand (IRIN, 26 October 2004).

However, my intention is not to claim that Ethiopia utterly opposes diaspora engagement in Somalia’s political leadership. On the contrary, as Zunzer (2004: 33) pointed out all faction leaders brought their expert and political adviser from the diaspora during the Kenya peace process. Yet, Ethiopia had no difficulties with these groups. Nevertheless, it decisively opposed and tried with remarkable success to eliminate from the process those it felt unfavourable to her position. For instance, at one point Ambassador Kiplagat, the chairman of the peace conference in Kenya, appointed Professor Abdi Samatar, well respected Somali scholar from the diaspora, as chairperson for an independent Somali group tasked to harmonize documents produced by functional committees of the conference. The Ethiopian reaction was awful and by accusing Professor Samatar of being a “traitor and anti-Ethiopian” mobilized all it could and successfully removed him from the process. (Samatar 2007: 26)

After the Nairobi conference concluded a diaspora member of the newly appointed Parliament visited Helsinki and in a private social event he told a group of us that, after presenting his credentials, he was admitted to attend the conference as a formal delegate from his clan. However, in the middle of the conference meetings he was told to leave the venue with the accusation of not being a legitimate delegate from his clan. He soon learned that he is facing a strong confrontation from the Ethiopian officials who were screening the Somali delegates. After a terrible struggle he and his Ethiopian opponents realised that one of his relatives who was contending for the clan representation falsely informed Ethiopian officials that the former is a member of the Al-Ittihad al-Islami. Finally, he was readmitted to the conference after he was cleaned from the allegation.

CONCLUSION

Political engagement by the diaspora could take many shapes. It could be for instance a financial contribution, advocacy within the host country, and educational transfer with the aim of influencing political developments in the homeland. Recently, a number of empirical studies considered the political role

²⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/30/world/africa/30somalia.html>

of the Somali diaspora, however, these studies mainly dealt with transnational engagement perspective, where diaspora involve Somali politics while staying abroad. The focus of this paper was the participation of returned professional politicians in post-war politic leadership and, to a lesser extent, considered the role of returned experts, as civil servants, in the post-war political reconstruction in the Somali Republic. The role of political leadership is vital in the process of state formation. Given the current political geography of the republic, the paper considered the diaspora political involvement in five national/regional political institutions; The TNG/TFG, Somaliland, Puntland, Gal-Mudug, and Himan & Heeb.

The main goal of the study was to provide insight into the role of the diaspora relative to their local counterparts in the field of political leadership. In addition, given the leadership skills and experiences accumulated in the diaspora, particularly in the West, the paper looked at what the diaspora political leadership was able to contribute towards a peace- and state-building project in post-war Somalia. Here my intention was to illustrate the role of political leadership and also to respond to a perceived weakness in the literature on the diaspora engagement.

Regarding the role of the diaspora in the field of political leadership, the paper presented a number of findings:

Firstly, diaspora in comparison with the local population is emerging as an exceptional political class that relatively dominates the country's top leadership. Members of diaspora were highly visible in the top leadership of the state institutions as heads of states, cabinet members, and parliamentarians. For instance, the overseas diaspora accounts for less than 10 percent of the Somali population, but occupies about half of the executive branches of the state institutions. Furthermore, this proportion of diaspora representatives in the leadership positions is continuously growing.

Secondly, the diaspora returnees mainly aim at the highest offices. For instance the share of the diaspora as heads of states, in the five state institutions considered in the study, is 8 out of 14 and thus higher than that of the cabinet members, while their share on the cabinet is much higher than the share of the diaspora in the parliaments which is less than 20 percent. Nine out of ten prime ministers of the TNG/TFG were from the diaspora. All presidents that occupied the President's Office in Gal-mudug and Himan & Heeb are from the diaspora. In Puntland four out of five Presidents were from the diaspora.

Regarding the diaspora political leadership contributions towards peace and state-building project in post-war Somalia, without denying that diaspora could be a destructive force contributing to the conflict in their homeland, the paper finds, although quite preliminary, that the positive side may outweigh the negative side. For instance the paper finds that simple positive initiatives by a diaspora members or groups, such as the case of Mr Shirwa and his colleagues, could enormously contribute to a variety of areas i.e. peace building, state formation, reconstruction, political and socioeconomic development. Such initiatives may also provide diaspora members access to political power.

Finally, the paper pointed out that returned diaspora engagement in Somali politics is challenged by different actors with vested interests in maintaining the status quo, such as an alliance between Somali warlords and Ethiopian government which both have a fundamental interest in keeping things how they are and, therefore, perceive the positive diaspora engagements as imminent threat.

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