

Somalia's new hope for unity

By [Philip Parnamets](#)

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Late last month Somalia's interim President Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed his Prime Minister Ali Muhammad Ghedi, arrived in Somalia for their first visit to the country since their appointment in late 2004. This may sound peculiar, but then again Somalia is a country like no other. It has been effectively stateless since 1991.

It was then that the dictator Major General Mahammad Siad Barre was toppled by a coalition of the clans that make up and pervade Somali society. Due to internal strife these clans were unable to create a new government and Somalia descended into civil war, leaving the country and in particular the capital, Mogadishu, too dangerous for any government to operate from.

The war proved to be extremely devastating to the civil population; in 1992 a UN estimate warned that a third of the entire populace risked starvation. A year later an unstable truce was negotiated and the US and later the UN stepped in to insure that humanitarian aid would reach those who desperately needed it.

During the course of the operation the international forces alienated the warlords and warring clans who actively started combating the peacekeepers, who in turn, for the first time in UN history, were given rights to actively combat the Somalis. The UN as a warring faction is of course very controversial and this mandate was later revoked and by March 1995 all international presence in Somalia had withdrawn.

Somalia has since then been torn between different clans, and in the north-east two regions have declared independence, Somaliland and Puntland. None of these regions have received any international acknowledgment, and some indications suggest that their respective leaders might want to cooperate in the rebuilding of Somalia.

The interim government has been appointed by the Somali parliament, which was created in September 2004. The parliament gives each of the four major clans' equal amounts of seats and a lesser amount to the minor clans, this way it is hoped that the warring factions will accept the new leadership.

This is not, however the first attempt to recreate the Somali state; several earlier attempts have been made and failed, mainly due to internal resistance. The current process has been going on for five years now and is supervised by a special branch of the African Union which has pledged to deploy it's peacekeeping troops as soon as possible. This is a very controversial move in amongst Somalis who have taken to the street to mark their dissent, still remembering the disastrous US/UN interventions.

In order to restore order to Somalia the new government must somehow establish control over the country and disband the clan militias, something that currently seems impossible. Though on the brighter side, Somali police forces are being deployed, at least in the capital of Mogadishu.

The economy has seen a slight but hopeful revival in the latest years of relative calm. In the major cities businesses are sprouting up, most notably a large internet and wireless communications sector, providing the cheapest high-speed internet in all of Africa.

Most notably, in 2004, Coca-Cola returned to Somalia in an all-Somali investment to re-open the closed plant in Mogadishu. The absence of a state has allowed businesses to enjoy the freedoms of no regulations (other than the whims of local militias), and Somalia is taken as an example of the possibility of statelessness by libertarians and anarchists.

Many businessmen, however, express the want of a state, so that taxes can be collected to provide public goods and for a central bank to be set up to facilitate trade; Somalia is almost entirely dependent on imports.

All together, this does appear to be the best chance at restoring law and order to Somalia, and more importantly facilitating the return of functioning health and educational systems.

This is also a victory for the new order in Africa, where conflicts are being increasingly solved by African diplomats, organisations and with African peacekeeping forces. While the UN and the USA have welcomed the recent developments and have had their diplomats involved, this is still an African run affair.



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