

Chapter 1 – The reasons and results of international intervention in Somalia

Before delving into the effects of international intervention on Somali state-building today, it is necessary to acquire a historical perspective. This will show, *inter alia*, that building a Somali state has always been an externally-imposed idea, and one of the central justifications of intervention. State-building intervention has been variously motivated over time, from ‘native administration’ of colonies to post-WW2 development, Cold War strategic alignment, humanitarian needs, and fighting global terrorism. However, it has always led to increased conflict among Somalis trying to capture the ample financial and political resources associated with state-building.

Hereafter, we will draw the background against which the rest of this dissertation will evolve. Pre-colonial history, Somali forms of governance, and historical developments not immediately related to international intervention will only feature insofar as they serve to explain the reasons and results of intervention.

The area now known as Somalia is situated on international trade routes connecting the Mediterranean and Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, and the East African Coast with the Arab world and India. Besides this central geopolitical location, the northern coast of Somalia is also one of the few places in the world where the highly prized commodity frankincense grows. Since ancient Egyptian times, the Horn of Africa has been integrated into global trade flows¹ and has experienced the resulting mixing of populations and cultures. For example, Arab, Persian, Indian and Bantu communities have been present in Somalia for more than five centuries, dissolving into the Somali coastal and riverine population mix.

Efforts to incorporate parts of the Somali region into larger empires were undertaken by African kingdoms such as Shungwaya, as well as by the Ottomans, the Sultanate of Muscat and later that of Zanzibar. Although such partial annexations left their imprint on Somali history and culture, the history of international interventions described here will start with the arrival of the European colonial powers in the 19th century. The British and Italian interventions kickstarted the history of modern Somalia, and most Somali specialists agree that the effect of these interventions is still discernible today.

1.1 British protectorate in Somaliland (1884 to 1960) – Cinderella of the British Empire

The shift from coastal navigation to the trans-Indian Ocean routes, which came with improved navigation and seafaring techniques of European ships on their way to the riches of the East, temporarily decreased the strategic importance of Somalia’s coast. This explains why the colonial scramble in the Horn of Africa started comparatively late. But the opening of the Suez Canal in 1876 restored Somalia’s geopolitical significance. The British asserted their naval dominance in the Gulf of Aden to protect their shipping lanes against Egyptian, French, and Italian contenders. The coaling/transshipment port of Aden, occupied by Great Britain in 1821, soon became one of the busiest

¹ The waters separating the Arabian Peninsula from the Horn of Africa had historically been called the Gulf (or Sea) of Berbera before the British renamed it. This indicates the importance of this town, already mentioned as *Malao* by Greek navigators circumnavigating Africa in the 1st century AD. See Anonymous, ‘[The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea](#)’, translated by Wilfred Schof.

ports in the British Empire. Controlling the Somali coast on the other side of the Gulf of Aden, with its treacherous coastline and history of piracy and looting of stranded ships², became a tactical necessity.

Several British explorers, most famously Richard Burton in 1855³, visited the Somali coast and some parts of the hinterland. Their accounts of the lack of resources of the Somali interior and common clan conflicts dissuaded British officials to set up anything more than a skeleton presence in what they named 'Somaliland'. At that time the coast was still under nominal Ottoman, *de facto* Egyptian control, as it had been since the 16th century. When the British annexed Egypt in 1880, they first ruled the Somali coast by proxy; but in 1884 the Egyptian troops abandoned the region to fight against the Mahdi revolt in Sudan, and Britain hastily established a protectorate, modelled on those they had set up in Southern Yemen.

British aims in Somaliland were to protect naval interests, secure a regular meat supply for their colony in Aden and preserve peace among the tribes. The latter objective would help secure the first two and prevent their expulsion in favour of another colonial power. British gunboat diplomacy relied on superior firepower and principles of peacekeeping they had honed among Arab tribes on the Arabian Peninsula, selecting local allies and keeping them in power by coercion, stipends and interfering in succession quarrels. Besides the livestock exported from the Somali coast to Yemen they had no commercial or extractive interests.

Not inclined to invest in Somaliland, the British were by contrast eager colonial explorers and geographers, and accounts by British travellers and colonial agents have dominated, arguably until today, the perception of Somalis by Westerners. This is a contentious point for many Somalis (and postcolonial theorists), but there are few other written sources available, and many of these travellers tried to present a balanced and well-informed view of Somalis and their affairs.⁴

The Dervish rebellion by Mohamed Abdullah Hassan, which started in 1900 and lasted until 1920, aimed at kicking the English infidels out of Somaliland. But most of the fighting occurred between Somali clans and in any case there were not many British interests or servicemembers to put at risk. After several expensive and inconclusive military campaigns, and later when England was engrossed in World War 1, the protectorate's authorities waited out the rebellion, which provided more amusing anecdotes to the

² There are many accounts of shipwrecks off the Somali coast. See, e.g., Durrill, W.K, *Atrocious Misery: the African Origins of Famine in Northern Somalia*, in *The American Historical Review* Vol. 92, No. 2, Apr. 1986. "By 1800 the Majerteen confidently expected two or three European ships to be wrecked on their shores every season" as quoted on p. 289. He also provides a map with explanations on the treacherous currents that in July and August would carry ships to the rocky coast between Ras Xafuun and Caluula.

³ Burton, R., *First Footsteps in East Africa or An Exploration of Harar*, 1856. Other British travellers preceded Burton, and many were to follow him, but his detailed account of the Somalis remains one of the most complete descriptions from the 19th century, and he was (one of) the first travellers to go far inland, all the way to Harar.

⁴ In this caricature by F. Elliot of the Somali man, Somalis might well recognize themselves: "In appearance the Somali is an Arab, and sometimes a handsome Arab. Treat him with confidence and consideration, he is cheerful, intelligent, willing to learn and true to his code of honesty. Treat him harshly or unjustly, he becomes sulky, obstinate, mutinous and dangerous. He is an excellent scout, a wonderful marcher, and very proud if confidence is shown in him. It would be fatal to the peace of the country if the Somali should be treated with that contempt which is often shown to the black races by Europeans." In *Jubaland and its Inhabitants*, *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 6, June 1913, p. 561. Other portraits were less flattering, but most visitors readily agreed that the Somalis were not a people to be subjugated easily and thus urged caution in approaching Somalis.

English press about the ‘Mad Mullah’ than dilemmas for colonial administrators. They saw their minimalist approach vindicated by the unfolding events, although the chaos that ensued when British troops retreated entirely from the interior between 1910 and 1913, leading to increased clan fighting, proved that some presence beyond the coast was required. In 1919 and 1920, Great Britain ended the rebellion with an aerial bombing of the Dervish leader’s headquarters in Taleex.

In 1925 Douglas Jardine pointed out that the lack of development of what he called ‘the Cinderella of the British Empire⁵’ was costing the British treasury, as the country’s revenues were only a meagre £80,000, while the British presence there cost the treasury £150,000 per year. He did not consider the transfer of government to Somalis an option⁶. Jardine thought that education, despite the mistrust it might provoke among the conservative, religious Somalis – the Dervish rebellion had started when Sayyid Hassan found out that young Somalis were being taught lessons in Christianity in an English school – and the development of Somaliland as a hunting and sporting paradise could be avenues for development, as “*there can only be one criterion of success, namely the increased happiness of the people, and of that there is ample evidence in Somaliland*”⁷. Supposedly the Somalis were grateful for the British presence.

After the second world war, England started investing a bit more in Somaliland, because of ethical pressure on the colonial apparatus as well as in response to the nascent Cold War. The administration headquarters were moved from Berbera to Hargeisa in 1946, signalling a shift in intent from controlling only the coastline to controlling the interior. A treaty was signed with Ethiopia in 1954 to fix the border, angering Somali nationalists and Isaaq pastoralists, who thereby potentially lost the right to access the pastures on the other side of the border (in fact Ethiopia has never barred access to pastoralists).

Efforts to groom Somalis to take on more administrative and security responsibilities, were given a boost by institutes of secondary education in Sheikh and Borama, and by modest police and military training. The impact of these schools was considerable, as many of Somalia’s future elites, also from the South, attended them as there were no secondary schools in Italian Somalia (see hereafter). Airfields were opened in Berbera and Hargeisa, and the protectorate was connected to the rest of the Empire by radio and postal service.

On the eve of independence, a British observer noted that “*The Somalis have done well enough, and there is no reason why they should not govern their country without chaos ensuing, provided they are subsidized*”⁸. He warned that “*The Somalis of the Protectorate are better educated than the Somalis of Somalia. It will be very unfortunate if they are dragged along behind an independent Somalia, always looking to Somalia for leadership*”. However, in late 1957 there was still no schedule for Somaliland’s independence, or any preparation, such as planned elections or a gradual transfer of administrative responsibilities.

⁵ Jardine, D., *Somaliland: The Cinderella of the British Empire*, Journal of the Royal African Society Vol. 24, No. 94, Jan. 1925. Jardine also wrote the most comprehensive and rather sympathetic account of the Dervish wars, *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland*, in 1923.

⁶ Jardine mentions that “*there is no doubt that the British officer, both as a soldier and an administrator, has won the respect and admiration of the Somali in a very high degree. But this (...) does not carry with it any desire [of the Somali] to imitate the European or his standards of life and action*”.

⁷ Jardine 1925, p. 108.

⁸ Waterfield, G., address to the Royal Africa Society and the Royal Empire Society, Oct. 3, 1957, *The Horn of Africa*, African Affairs, Vol. 57 No. 227 (Jan. 1958).

Reflections on the British colonial presence in Somalia

- * Great Britain's efforts to transform Somali society in the area they controlled was minimal. Anticipating on the next section, the same may be said of Italy's efforts in Puntland. Both regions were integrated into the regional livestock market, increasing the power of urban commercial elites (often Arab or Indian); but the predominant pastoral economy and its social relations remained undisturbed. From a postcolonial perspective, this light-handed approach could explain the capacity of local societies to self-organize into autonomous states after 1991.
- * In an effort to preserve peace with minimal expenses, the British engaged the clan system, acting as arbiters but also exacting collective vengeance when the context required it; they established themselves as *primus inter pares* among the Somaliland clans. This strategy, interestingly, had considerably more success than the heavy-handed approaches tried later.
- * By their extensive travels in the region, ethnographic studies and efforts to understand Somali language and culture – within the imperial context of the 19th and early 20th centuries – the British defined the international image of the Somali as follows: a tough, ferociously egalitarian nomad who can best be left to his own devices. The riverine agricultural communities of the South and the more sophisticated inhabitants of coastal settlements never seemed quite as Somali as the Northern pastoralists⁹. This image, tainted by the media coverage of civil war savagery and Al Shabaab extremism, still predominates international thinking about Somalia, and preconfigures tentative solutions for Somalia.

1.2 Italian colonial development (1890s to 1941) – Grand dreams of Fascist Modernization

Compared to the sparsely inhabited and resource-poor north of Somalia, South Somalia had more to offer. Behind the old port cities of Mogadishu, Merka, Baraawe and Kismayo lay a fertile agricultural hinterland, largely unexploited, save for the presence of small farming communities.

When in the late 19th century Italy embarked on its own colonial adventure, there were few areas left in the world to colonize, besides the Horn of Africa. South Somalia was at that time loosely controlled by the Sultanate of Zanzibar, which had an alliance with the Somali Sultanate of Geledi, based in what is now Afgooye (25 km from Mogadishu on the banks of the Shabelle river).

Robecchi-Bricchetti describes Mogadishu in 1891¹⁰ in terms that are so similar to those that could be used now, that one wonders how much impact colonialism really has had...:

- Strife in the city between settlements of Xamar Weyne (Somali population) and Shingani (Arabs, mixed, cosmopolitan) occurs on an almost daily basis. This situation of daily strife was also recorded by previous Western visitors Revoil (late 1882) and Roskoschny (1889); the latter even noted that Mogadishu's epithet was *kul yowm daua fitna*: everyday a struggle. This internal struggle had led the city to the brink of destruction. Revoil estimated that the 6000 people living

⁹ This critique has mostly touched I.M. Lewis, the doyen of Somali studies. See for example the argument between Catherine Besteman and I.M. Lewis in the late 1990s, sparked by Besteman's publication *Representing Violence and 'Othering' Somalia*, *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Feb. 1996), pp. 120-133. This had repercussions with articles being published in other journals in defence of either author over the coming years.

¹⁰ Puzo, M., *Mogadishu, Somalia: Geographic Aspects of its Evolution, Population, Functions and Morphology*, 1972.

in the city were only a third of the original population, basing himself on the number of ruins and the lack of any new houses¹¹.

- The governor of Mogadishu had little control over the city. He disposed over 200 highly irregular and apparently ineffective soldiers, but tried not to use them, preferring to settle the numerous disputes by negotiation. They would have been of little use if the hostile surrounding Abgaal tribe decided to attack the city. Roskoschny suggested that the reason the Abgaal did not attack was because trade was more beneficial to them than occupation would have been.
- Bricchetti noted many irregularities in the collection of taxes; almost the only revenue came from duties levied in the port. The rich and powerful paid no taxes.
- Hostility towards foreigners was high in both sections of the city, and Bricchetti was attacked by the inhabitants of Xamar Weyne because “they felt they had received less gifts than the inhabitants of Shungani”, leading to several deaths.
- Despite the chaos in Mogadishu, commerce was bustling. In 1891 cotton, cereals and sesame oil were the main export items, but many products from the interior, including ivory, were also traded through Mogadishu’s harbour. Imports were mainly textiles¹².

In fact, the Banadir—the coastal strip between Warsheikh in the North and Baraawe in the South—was not the first part of the Somali coast to fall under Italian control. In 1889 the local potentate Yusuf Kenadid, to protect himself from his enemy the Majerteen Sultan Osman Mohamud, placed himself and Hobyo (spelt *Obbia* by Italians) under Italian protection. That same year, Sultan Osman Mohamud entered into a similar protectorate agreement with Italy, as he also wanted to benefit from Italian firearms and stipends in exchange for formal Italian control. But until the mid-1920s Italy did not seek to exercise any real authority in this zone, which covered present-day Puntland and Galmudug¹³.

Italy lobbied hard with the Sultan of Zanzibar to obtain a concession on the Banadiri coast, which had more to offer than the sparsely inhabited, dry northeast. After an initial rejection, the Imperial British East Africa Company lobbied on Italy’s behalf, and by 1892 Italy controlled the entire Somali coast from Bender Qassim (Bosaso) to the Juba river¹⁴.

Italy’s prime interest in Somalia was not agricultural, at first, but commercial and above all strategic¹⁵. Italy hoped to control the fertile regions of the Ethiopian highlands, and Eritrea and Somalia both provided access. Hence explorations up the Juba river (towards Ethiopia) were a priority. In 1892 Bricchetti noted that “*Somalia is not California, neither could one find there the rich pastures of Lombardy*” and that “*this country (...) would never offer resources to our peasant emigrants*”, but that, “*on the other hand, this land is good for commercial ventures*”¹⁶.

¹¹ Puzo, 1972, pp 51-58.

¹² Guadagni, M.G., *Colonial Origins of the Public Domain in Southern Somalia, 1892-1912*, Journal of African Law, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Spring 1978) pp 1-29; p. 2.

¹³ Hess, R.L., *Italian Colonialism in Somalia*, 1966.

¹⁴ Galbraith, J.S., *Italy, the British East Africa Company and the Benadir Coast, 1888-1893*, Journal of Modern History, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Dec 1970), explains how the occupation of the Somali and African Red Sea coast was shaped by European politics: the British suspicion of France led it to cooperate with Germany and Italy, granting the latter access to the Banadir coast through intervention with the sultan of Zanzibar. Great Britain saw little benefit in occupying the East African coast itself.

¹⁵ Guadagni, 1978, p. 1.

¹⁶ Idem

In the 19th century, the Banadir coast had long been in decline. It seems that the economy was somewhat revived under the Sultanate of Zanzibar in the second half of the 19th century, by Indian merchant capital and the slave trade: Bantu slaves were imported to Mogadishu, often traded for ivory. They worked the farms, did domestic labour, and worked as artisans¹⁷. In 1882, George Revoil noted that two thirds of the population of Mogadishu consisted of slaves. It must be noted that Somalis never exported slaves, they only bought them. Slaves allowed a boom in cereal exports from Banadir to South Arabia, as documented by several chroniclers at that time.

The Filonardi company (1893-96) and the Banadir company (1896-1904), both of which received concessions from the Italian government to manage and develop the Banadir coast, simply continued taxing caravans and trade as the Sultan of Zanzibar had done. They refused to engage in agricultural and commercial development as other European concession companies did, and when confronted with a public-relations scandal in Italy because of slavery in 1903, the concession was handed back to the government.

Italy's effort to build an empire was thwarted by its defeat against Ethiopian troops at the battle of Adwa in 1896, a resounding defeat of a European colonial power by indigenous African troops. This led them to reluctantly pay more attention to Somalia. The reluctance was due to perceived unprofitability of colonial enterprises in Somalia. A scheme was implemented to encourage Italian agricultural entrepreneurs to start businesses in Somalia, but in 1910 the new governor Di Martino reported that, of 11 farming concessions created, 7 had been abandoned¹⁸.

Capital and labour requirements could not be met, making any development slow and difficult. In Mogadishu there was hardly any effort to produce housing or other facilities for Italian colonists, who lived in the old houses of Shingani until the 1930s¹⁹, when an urban masterplan for Mogadishu was partially implemented.

The Somali colony languished until the advent of fascism in Italy; from 1923 onwards, more resources and energy were poured into the development of 'La Somalia Italiana'. The protectorates of Northern Somalia (Magiurtina), which had only been nominally under Italian control and refused to comply, were subjected *manu militari* between 1924 and 1926. The British ceded Trans-Juba to Italy in 1926, adding a large swath of partially fertile territory. Henceforth Italy directly ruled Somalia, although in practice local freedoms and the system of tribal hierarchy and customary law were not affected.

Modern institutions and some industrial processing plants were established, large farms and irrigation schemes planned, a railway was built from Mogadishu to Jowhar, roads were paved in Mogadishu, and poor Italians were shipped to Somalia with the promise of a better life. The Duke of Abruzzi established a large agricultural investment company (SAIS), which developed over 20,000 hectares of land around Jowhar²⁰. Although it became profitable, this was at the expense of large state investments in transport and processing facilities, so altogether it was not profitable to Italy²¹.

¹⁷ Alpers, E.A., *Mogadishu in the Nineteenth Century: A Regional Perspective*, Journal of African History, Vol. 24, No. 4, 1983, p. 448.

¹⁸ Hess, 1966, p. 112; see also Guadagni, 1978, p. 3.

¹⁹ Puzo, 1972, p. 72.

²⁰ For a description of the plantation, including photographs, see Istituto Coloniale Fascista: *Somalia*, published around 1930.

²¹ Hess, 1966, p. 164.

When Mussolini decided to reconquer Ethiopia, Somalia was one of the launching pads of the invasion. Many Somali troops fought alongside the Italians against their historic foes²². With the conquest of Ethiopia in 1935, Somalia became one of six provinces of 'Africa Orientale Italiana'; the Somali province included the Ogaden, inhabited by Somali tribes. The fascist objective was to control a large area that would contribute to the greatness of the Italian empire, absorb the population surplus that had been fleeing Italy to the New World throughout the second half of the 19th century, enrich Italian agriculture and commerce with tropical products, and become a destination for its industrial products.

*"From the outset of Italian colonialism, dreams competed with interests almost making the authorities lose a sense of proportion"*²³. Italy either did not have, or did not employ, the means to make its dreams come true. The Ethiopian adventure lasted six years before its demise and, in economic and social costs, could be termed a disaster. In 1941, without a shot being fired, Somalia surrendered to the British.

Italy did unify Somali territories, from Puntland to Jubaland and, for a few years, the Ogaden²⁴, under a single state structure, initiated some agricultural, infrastructure and light industrial development, and involved Somalis in these efforts, thus creating the nucleus of a modern urban class in Somalia. Arguably, Italy also instilled this class with the dream of a strong, modern state; it established some infrastructure for such a state, both physically and institutionally, but there was one area in which the Italian development record was dismal: education. By 1935, only 1250 Somalis were enrolled in primary schools, and when the Italians left there was still not a single secondary school in Somalia²⁵.

The legacy of the Italian presence is still present in manifold ways in Somali culture, from a popular predilection for pasta, pizza and 'macchiato', to the elite enjoyment of theatre and literature. That Mogadishu was known, from the 1960s to the 1980s, as 'the pearl of the Indian Ocean' can also be largely attributed to Italian urbanization and architectural contributions.

Hess concludes his imposing study of Italian colonialism in Somalia with a reflection on racism, noting that Italians in Somalia did not impose racial segregation and do not even seem to have had racist views. There was also no enthusiasm to spread Christianity. *"Perhaps for this reason, individual Italians are liked and respected in Somalia, as in Ethiopia, although colonialism as a whole is condemned in both countries"*²⁶.

Reflections on 'La Somalia Italiana'

* As in British Somaliland, Italians *used* rather than tried to transform traditional Somali self-governance. However, the Italians built much more infrastructure and tried to develop agriculture and commerce, as well as law and order; they obviously had their own interests in mind, but Somalis participated in the nascent state structures that accompanied these efforts. We know that states have historically existed in Somalia, from 'the land of Punt' with its queen Ati (2250 BC) through the Ajuran Empire of the 13th and 14th centuries, to the Geledi sultanate of the 18th and 19th centuries. Did any of these

²² 6000 Somali 'Zaptié' troops participated in the invasion. Hess, 1966, p. 174.

²³ Novati, G.C., *Italy in the Triangle of the Horn: Too Many Corners for a Half-Power*, Journal of African Studies, Vol. 32, 3, 1994, pp 369-385.

²⁴ For a brief period (August 1940 to March 1941) Italy even occupied British Somaliland, bringing all Somalis, except a few thousand Issas in Djibouti, under one administration.

²⁵ Hess, 1966, p. 187.

²⁶ Hess, 1966, p. 189.

previous experiences of statehood affect Somali experiences of the modern state that Italy introduced? Was there any historical continuity?

- * By involving Somalis in their efforts to conquer the Ethiopian highlands, the Italians spurred on dreams of ‘the greater Somali nation’. It would stand to reason that fascist modes of thinking about politics would have influenced this Somali project. This might explain the impractical irredentism with which independent Somalia later pursued this objective.
- * The cultural influence of Italy on Somalia was considerable and persists today. Might this be due to what Hess describes as the lack of racism, and the effort to befriend Somalis (and even intermarry with them)? This goes counter the predominant narrative today, which sees colonialism as an imposition and contemporary intervention as a collaborative effort; however, as we will see later on, the evidence rather points to a contrary conclusion, that colonialism sought more local acceptance than state-building efforts do today.

1.3 British and Italian trusteeships: preparing Somali independence (1941-1960)

When the British defeated the Italians in East Africa in 1941, they established a British Military Administration (BMA) in Somalia and Eritrea, returning Ethiopia (without the Ogaden and Haud that remained administered by Mogadishu until 1948) to Emperor Haile Selassie. They remained in control of Somalia until 1950, when the UN-mandated Italian trusteeship started, aimed at preparing Somalia for independence in 10 years: the Amministrazione Fiduciaria Italiana in Somalia, AFIS.

The BMA stripped what had been Africa Orientale Italiana of its assets, dismantling ports, railroads, industries and installations and shipping it all to their colonies (or selling it to allies). Great Britain was still at war and they considered all assets brought by the Italians to Africa as war booty, deeming the Somalis (and Ethiopians and Eritreans) had no use for them²⁷.

The BMA was a minimalistic ‘management’ of captured territories and did not seek to develop them. However, officers in charge were sympathetic to the young urban modernist class, which came together in the Somali Youth Club (established 1943) and a relation developed between them²⁸. When, in 1946, Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin suggested that British Somaliland, the Haud, Ogaden, Italian Somaliland and the North Eastern province of Kenya be joined together to form a ‘Greater Somalia’ this stirred up a lot of excitement among this group of young Somalis, and the idea of ‘Somaliweyn’, as Greater Somalia is known in Somali, became firmly implanted in the Somali political imaginary.

²⁷ Wrong, M., *I Didn't Do It For You*, 2005. K.C. Gander Dower, in *The First to be Freed: British Military Administration in Eritrea and Somalia* (UK Ministry of Information, 1944), states: “Eritrea and Somalia are (...) two over-capitalised, bankrupt semi-deserts” thus justifying the stripping of assets. Richard Pankhurst, in Michela Wrong, op. cit., p. 146, says “They [the BMA] felt there was too much industry here. This was a native state and it didn't need this infrastructure. It could be used more effectively elsewhere, and, coincidentally, “elsewhere” meant elsewhere in British-administered territories.” Wrong points out that Haile Selassie was so angered by this asset stripping that he maintained cool relationships with Britain throughout the rest of his rule, despite having been in exile in Bath and the British liberation of his country.

²⁸ Barnes, C., *The Somali Youth League, Ethiopian Somalis and the Greater Somalia Idea, c.1946-48*, *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 1:2, 2007, pp 277-291. He points out that the British were motivated both by the idea of retaining an imperial foothold in the region, and by the idealistic notion of an African nation-state.

By 1948, however, it was clear that Britain would not press this issue (opposed by France, the USA and the USSR who considered it a threatening British imperial project²⁹) and it disengaged from Somalia. Great Britain was facing the independence of its Indian colony, post-war reconstruction and many other pressing issues. The Four Powers (USA, USSR, France, England), mandated to decide on the future of the Italian colonies, could not agree on what to do with them. Their representatives visited Mogadishu to conduct hearings among Somalis in January 1948; the suggestion that Italy return to administer the territories caused riots instigated by the Somali Youth League (SYL, as the Club had renamed itself in 1947), who wished to self-administer a Greater Somalia instead, and 52 Italians died in Mogadishu and Kismayo³⁰. The Four Powers referred the matter to the UN General Assembly. Upon the suggestion of Iraq, the SYL and a pro-Italian Somali political coalition were invited to New York to participate in discussions on the future of their country³¹.

The decision of the UNGA (Resolution 289, Nov. 21, 1949) to establish a trusteeship under Italian administration in Somalia was unique in several ways. While trusteeships were quite common at that time, they were usually awarded to the power in control of the territory, formally and minimally arranged by the UN Trusteeship Council and open-ended. The return to administration by a defeated power (Italy was at that point not even a member of the UN), with a stringent mandate to prepare the territory for independence according to a plan prepared by the UN Trusteeship council, together with Italy and other UN members (the Philippines, India, Iraq and the Dominican Republic), and the ten-year deadline were all novelties. They inferred a greater responsibility for the UN, which had to adopt a more 'hands-on' approach, and indeed the UN Trusteeship Council made several visits to critically appraise progress in the 1950s³².

Neither Ethiopia nor the Somalis were happy with the return of the Italians, but Italy rapidly assuaged both, cultivating ties with the SYL over the years until it practically delivered Somalia to the party in 1960.

The mandate to prepare Somalia for independence both politically and economically presented Italy with problems similar to those it had faced as a colonial overlord. Somali society, with the exception of the budding urban professional class, had expressed no interest in statehood; the levels of education and professionalization were desperately low³³, forming barriers for both an efficient civil administration and a diversified modern economy; the country was resource-poor and had developed a habit of dependency in the colonial period, financing the trappings of the state and essential imports with

²⁹ Marcus, H.G., *Somalia and the Decline of US interest in Ethiopia, 1963-69*, Proceedings of the Second International Congress in Somali Studies, University of Hamburg, August 1983, edited by Thomas Labahn, Vol. II: Archaeology and History. "The White House strategists (...) opposed Greater Somalia because the resultant state would be weak and embryonic, easily manipulated by the USSR and Egypt, then under radical leadership. Since Somalia was already suspicious of close US ties with Addis Ababa, the State Department was directed to encourage Italy to continue 'its major role in the maintenance of Somalia's stability and free world orientation'." pp 280-81.

³⁰ Tripodi, P., *Back to the Horn: Italian Administration and Somalia's Troubled Independence*, in The International Journal of African Historical Studies Vol. 32 No. 2/3, 1999, pp 359-380.

³¹ Finkelstein, L.S., *Somaliland under Italian Administration. A Case Study in United Nations Trusteeship, 1955*, p. 10.

³² Finkelstein, 1955, p. 6.

³³ In 1954 there were 3000 Somalis with a primary education degree (Tripodi, 1999, p. 373, quoting AFIS Governor Martino's address to UN Trusteeship Council, NY 1954).

external support; moreover Somali culture, with its contempt for manual labour of any kind, was not propitious, in a Weberian sense, to the development of a modern state.

Italy was, moreover, itself poor and in reconstruction, and did not have many resources to spend on Somalia. The governors of AFIS and their administration had to be creative. The carabinieri contingent was drastically reduced in the first years of AFIS (from 6000 to less than 700) to save money and a policy of 'Somalization' of the administration was rapidly implemented. For some Somali critics, including the SYL leadership, this transfer of power did not go fast enough. They complained about Italian colonial attitudes. Since Italy was mostly sending personnel with previous experience in Africa, such attitudes were likely to occur³⁴.

AFIS focused most successfully on two areas: education and administrative reform. *"At the moment of the transfer of authority, there was in the territory no [formal] organ of self-government, much less of representative government, at any level; no Somali who had experience of governing or of administering in any superior post; no system of education beyond the primary level, and even the elementary education which existed was scanty"*³⁵.

By 1960 there were a few secondary schools in Somalia, as well as a University (established in 1954), a 'School for Political and Administrative Preparation' (est. 1950) and an 'Institute of Social Sciences, Law and Economics' (est. 1953). More than a hundred Somalis were studying abroad, mainly in Italy and Egypt. However, a Somali script had still not been decided upon, despite this being one of the priorities for AFIS. There was strong opposition between traditional and religious leaders, who desired the Arabic script to be used, and modernists, who advocated Latin characters or a modified version thereof, 'Osmania'³⁶. It wasn't until 1972, when Siad Barre imposed a modified Latin script, that this problem was resolved.

As regards administrative reform, on the eve of independence there was an elected legislature with the powers of a constitutional assembly, this assembly had selected a cabinet (1956), there were 48 elected municipal councils with powers of taxation, a court system had been established (although AFIS left customary law – *xeer* – undisturbed), and Somali civil servants were in control of 15 of the 19 government departments³⁷.

Despite the rapid 'Somalization' of the administration, political progress was slow and divisive. The Trusteeship Council established by Italy in 1950 to advise AFIS consisted of *"tribal chiefs who opposed virtually everything that smacked of modernization, including changes in traditional institutions"*³⁸. In contrast, I.M. Lewis noted in 1958 that the modern class of leaders in South and Central Somalia considered clan identity to be a thing of the past and refused to even reveal their own clan background. *"In their attitude towards clanship and heer [xeer = customary law] politicians in Somalia show a striking difference to those in the British Protectorate. Whereas in the latter territories the stranglehold of these traditional political principles is a burning question widely discussed, in Somalia their continued influence is discounted and even denied. In Somalia a deliberate effort is made to give the impression that the force of agnation is a thing of the past. The end desired is Westernization and the fiction is maintained*

³⁴ Tripodi, 1999, p. 364

³⁵ Finkelstein, 1955, p. 11

³⁶ "The main opposition to the development of the Somali language comes from the Somalis themselves" wrote Finkelstein, 1955, p. 18.

³⁷ Ware, G., *Somalia: From Trust Territory to Nation, 1950-1960*, Phylon, Vol. 26 No. 2, 1965.

³⁸ Ware, 1965, p. 179.

that the goal has already been reached and that clanship is now so unimportant that it has no relevance in the new political field.³⁹

Under pressure of the UN, Italy reconciled with the SYL, and gradually substituted the traditional leadership with this new class of politicians. As a result, clan balance could not be openly discussed. Since colonial times, the Italians had mostly relied on the Hawiye, who were most numerous in the administration at the beginning of the trusteeship period. The SYL however was mainly Darood: in 1956, this clan group constituted 50% of the SYL membership, while 30% was Hawiye. As a result of their electoral victory in the 1956 Somalia Assembly elections – winning 54% of the votes cast and securing 43 seats of 70 – the Darood thus became politically ascendant, which they remained until 1991.

In line with its stated clan-aversion, the SYL was careful to present a cabinet after the 1956 elections where clan affiliation did not seem to count. The President, Aden Abdullah (nicknamed Aden Adde – he later became the first president of independent Somalia) was Hawiye, as was the Prime Minister, Abdullahi Isse. The PM presided over a ministerial council of two Hawiye, two Darood and one Dir minister⁴⁰.

Table 1: clan composition of AFIS government in 1956. Source: Lewis 1958/2

Clan group	Government workers	Population
Darood	35%	22%
Hawiye	28%	36%
Rahanweyn	15%	25%

The Banadiri minorities (Reer Xamar and Reer Baraawe) were also well represented in government, capturing another 10% of civil service positions. Lewis noted, however, that the overrepresentation of Darood and Hawiye was also due to the propensity of pastoralists to seek employment far away, including in government, while the Rahanweyn cultivators were not so inclined⁴¹.

The Rahanweyn (or Digil-Mirifle) had also traditionally been pro-Italian. Pastoralists had always looked down on the Rahanweyn as cultivators of supposedly less pure Somali stock, so the Italian presence was experienced as emancipatory. In the 1956 elections, the ‘Hizbia Digil Mirifle’ (HDM, later HDMS) won 26% of the vote, indicating that this clan group was not only highly mobilized, but also massively voted for the party representing its clan interests. The ideology of the HDM was very conservative and even against independence, preferring continued Italian administration⁴².

The HDM went asunder because of internal rifts, caused in part because their political programme did not stroke with the UN Trusteeship’s objectives (and spirit). To avoid clan-based voting, in the 1959 general elections each party had to present a nationwide list of candidates for each of the 26 electoral districts. As a result, in the 19 districts where the SYL list was not contested the party won 61 seats; in

³⁹ Lewis, I.M, *Modern Political Movements in Somaliland part 2*, Africa: Journal of the International African Institute Vol. 28 No. 4, Oct. 1958, pp 344-363 – hereafter cited as Lewis, 1958/2. Quote from pp 353-354.

⁴⁰ Lewis, 1958/2, p. 352.

⁴¹ Lewis, 1958/2, p. 355.

⁴² Ware, 1965, p. 175 and Lewis, 1958/2, p. 355.

the other 7 districts the SYL won 22 of the seats, the HDM five and a youth party two⁴³. This gave the Somali Youth League 83 of the 90 seats in the assembly, a comfortable majority to 'sail' into the post-independence era.

Municipal elections were held in 1954 and 1958. A major problem for the elections was the lack of a population count. The vast majority of Somalis, then as now, voted along clan lines, and when AFIS attempted to conduct a census among pastoralist tribes in 1957-58, clan elders presented grossly inflated numbers⁴⁴. The AFIS had estimated the total number of voters in 1956 to be 300,000, but more than 600,000 ballots were cast in 1958. This skewed the electoral results in favour of the pastoralist tribes. The fraud that riddled the elections in the second half of the 1950s increased throughout the 1960s, until the Somali electorate erupted in anger after the March 1969 elections, paving the way for Barre's military coup.

While the trappings of a modern state were established in Mogadishu and the major cities, most of (rural) Somalia still lived under traditional rule, with clan elders deciding on collective matters, including justice. AFIS rapidly set up elected local councils in the main towns, but most decisions were taken outside them through the traditional governance mechanisms. The UN Trusteeship Council noted, after trips made to Somalia in 1951 and 1954, that local/municipal councils were not functioning as expected, and suggested as a solution to increase their responsibilities, for example raising revenues through local taxation, to make them more relevant⁴⁵. But AFIS had neither the resources nor the political will to thus formalize informal local governance, and continued to rule as in the colonial period, through government representatives that largely left local communities to their own devices.

In the economic field AFIS did not fare well. Besides the lack of professional skills, Somalis generally seemed to have no interest in import-substitution industrialization. There was also a dearth of investment capital: local capital did not exist, Italy had insufficient resources, and foreign investors were worried about what may happen after independence. Besides Italy, only the US provided very modest amounts of development funding.

Experts agreed in any case that capital-based development would be unsustainable if Somalia did not increase her foreign revenue⁴⁶. In fact, Italy subsidized her own industry (AGIP, Italcable, etc.) with contracts to develop Somalia while shielding Italian investors in Somalia from international competition⁴⁷. Grand agricultural development plans suggested by AFIS found no investors.

Internal revenue to cover recurrent costs was collected in very small amounts⁴⁸. Besides the small tax base, Somalis resisted taxation and Italian settlers argued that they need not pay taxes if Somalis didn't. Like the Sultans of Zanzibar and the federal government today, AFIS found it easiest to rely on taxing imports and exports and cover recurrent costs with external assistance.

⁴³ Ware, 1965, p. 179.

⁴⁴ *"Some of the chiefs presented numbers that exceeded the total population of Somalia"*, Ware, 1965, p. 178.

⁴⁵ Finkelstein, 1955, p. 12-13.

⁴⁶ Finkelstein, 1955, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Tripodi, 1999, p. 377.

⁴⁸ Finkelstein gives the following figures for fiscal year 1955 in Somalia (1 USD = 7 Somalos)
 - hut and income tax = 2.5 million So in 1952-53; customs tax = 29.3 million So; Total revenue = 31.8 million So
 - running costs of government = 57.6 million So; incl. development and military = 88.2 million So
 - Italian government must cover deficit with 54.4 million Somalos, i.e. 7.77 million USD...

Foreign revenue generated through export was equally hard to come by. The production of livestock, Somalia's traditional export, was constrained by environmental factors; agricultural production was not competitive (the market for the small and fragile Somali bananas in Italy was subsidized and protected) and Somalia had no known natural or mineral resources to export⁴⁹. As in most developing nations, the cost of imports exceeded export revenues, leading to a shortage in foreign reserves⁵⁰. It was clear that Italy could not have done much more, and that Somalia would remain dependent on foreign assistance after its independence⁵¹.

Maybe the most problematic aspect of the coming independence was the lack of coordination between the Italians and the British⁵²; both parts of what is now Somalia became independent with different systems of administration, governance and law; they did not even have a shared written language.

There were few organs of self-government in British Somaliland. By 1960 there were four elected municipal councils (in Hargeisa, Berbera, Burco and Gabilay). A Protectorate Advisory Council, whose members were selected by the clans under supervision of the British district commissioner, existed since 1955. In 1957 a Legislative Council was set up with 15 members, who were partially elected and partially appointed by the British governor; but both councils wielded little power, and in the same year only 30 of the 200 officers in British Somaliland were Somalis⁵³. In February 1960, elections were held for a national legislative council⁵⁴, but the British were under no UN-mandated obligation to prepare their protectorate for independence, and they did not. When Somaliland became independent on 26 June 1960, it had much less institutional autonomy than the rest of Somalia, which it joined five days later, on July 1st.

Reflections on the Preparations for Somali Independence

* Lyons & Samatar argued that "*The process of decolonization created an independent state that remained aloof from society*"⁵⁵. The state indeed appeared as a set of institutions that had little relation to the informal institutions of Somali society. For example, the relation between the formal justice system and customary law (xeer) was never defined; they just coexisted. One could argue that

⁴⁹ Repeated Italian efforts to revive salt production in Xafuun, Puntland, floundered for a variety of reasons, including lack of infrastructure and local ownership. Interestingly, already in the 1940s Somali leaders had set their hopes on oil, which was one of the reasons they were reticent to 'abandon' the Ogaden, where reserves were suspected. This hope still animates politicians in Somalia, Somaliland and the Ogaden today. See Barnes, 2007, p. 287, and Lewis, 1958/2, p. 356.

⁵⁰ For example, in 1953, imports amounted to So 78.6 million and exports to So 34.7 million, Italy covering the deficit.

⁵¹ Ware, 1965, "*The [1954 UN Trusteeship Council] mission found a wide expectation that 'the United Nations must and will assume' to carry the post-1960 budgetary deficit.*"

⁵² Issa Salwe, Abdisalam M., *The Collapse of The Somali State: The Impact of the Colonial Legacy*, 1996, pp 66-67

⁵³ Lewis, 1958/2, p. 349

⁵⁴ The results of the elections may have increased communal tensions in the protectorate: Despite receiving 31% of the vote, the National United Front and Somali Youth League coalition only obtained one seat, while the coalition between the Somali National League and the United Somali Party secured 32 seats with 69% of the vote. This was the consequence of a 'first past the post' system and the electoral circumscription borders. Touval, Saadia, *Somali Nationalism. International Politics and the Drive for Unity in the Horn of Africa*, 1963, p. 106.

⁵⁵ Lyons, T. and Samatar, A.I., *Somalia: State Collapse, Multilateral Intervention and Strategies for Political Reconstruction*, 1995

the weak state-society nexus, namely the rural/urban divide and the split between conservative majority and modernizing minority, was the cause of later state collapse.

- * There seems to have been no discussion about what kind of state structures would be most appropriate for Somali society. The Italians came with a model that was adapted to the Somali context and their own lack of resources. That it didn't fit was most apparent with the early Trusteeship Council, composed of clan elders, who opposed most reforms and institutions suggested by AFIS. The UN put pressure on Italy to seek more modern-oriented Somali partners, specifically the SYL. Although the matter would need more thorough investigation, it seems that within the SYL there was also little discussion about state structures, as the party soon became engrossed by its rapid expansion and the Greater Somalia agenda.
- * Rather than *what* the state should look like, from the beginning the question seems to have been *who* should take control in independent Somalia and *how* power would be shared. In democracies, this is the function of elections. In this regard, the Somali experience of doctoring elections from the mid-1950s onwards is interesting. First, the question of population figures (essential for that of representation) came up and could not be resolved, leading to over-representation of pastoralists whose numbers could not be estimated as easily as those of settled communities. Then, AFIS (again under UN pressure) re-engineered the system to favour political parties instead of clans, which ensured the SYL would be the undisputed master of independent Somalia.
- * Thus, the SYL's denial of clan identity was a precondition for it to capture state power. Given that the state was not supported by society, which remained clan-based, but by the international community, there was no incentive for the SYL to represent the population. Instead, there was a strong incentive to modernize society (with external resources) to create a larger constituency for itself.
- * A modern state, with its permanently staffed institutions and enlarged responsibilities for the welfare and development of its people, needs incomparably more resources than traditional governance systems, which are basically free. It was clear from the beginning that Somalia did not have sufficient resources to pay for its state, and that it would have to rely on external funding to maintain the state. This reinforced the 'aloofness' of the state vis-à-vis society.

1.4 Cold War Interventions in Independent Somalia (1960-1990)

In 1960 Somalia became politically independent, but, as we have seen above, in economic terms it was dependent upon continued assistance. This placed Somalis in a patron-client relationship to external powers, which in the Cold War context were the two 'blocs'. It spent about a decade non-aligned, then a decade with the Soviets, and finally a decade with the so-called 'free world'.

Somali Foreign Relations

Somali foreign policy was driven mostly by the 'Greater Somalia' agenda until the defeat in the Ogaden War (1978)⁵⁶. This was disastrous for the country's regional and international status. To neighbouring

⁵⁶ Although it was only in 1986, by signing a treaty between Somalia and Ethiopia that ended support to mutually destabilizing groups, that this policy was definitively abandoned by the Somali state. In a long private interview in 1985, General Barre was still preoccupied with how he could muster US support for his effort to retrieve the Ogaden, Laitin, D., *The American-Somali Alliance: Whose Agenda?*, TransAfrica Forum, summer 1985, pp 21-43.

states, Somalia was a constant threat, and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), with its fixation on not opening the Pandora's Box of colonial borders, strongly opposed the Greater Somalia agenda. When Somalia joined the Arab League in 1974 (as the first non-Arab member) the move seemed opportunistic to many Africans, as an attempt to escape the OAU framework. Indeed, the Gulf states, motivated by historical suspicion of Ethiopia and their fear of a hostile power on the other side of the Red Sea/Gulf of Aden corridor, supported the Greater Somalia project as a check on Ethiopia; but not at the expense of their relations with the USA.

The British rapidly lost their influence in Somalia. After Somaliland's independence, there was an exodus of British officials and citizens (in contrast, many Italian settlers remained in southern Somalia). In the second half of the 1940s, Britain had enjoyed popularity among Somali leaders mostly because of their support for the Greater Somalia idea, and because of their *laissez-faire* style of colonialism, which suited Somalis better than the directive and paternalistic Italian style⁵⁷. But the British were narrowly associated with the Isaaq clan group⁵⁸. A punitive disarmament expedition in the late 1940s in the Ogaden, then still controlled by the BMA, confirmed this in the eyes of many Darood⁵⁹. As seen above, the Darood formed about 50% of the SYL cadres⁶⁰, so the party that steered Somalia through its first decade of independence was suspicious of British motives. On the other hand, the Isaaq could not forgive the British for having 'given away' the Haud pastures to Ethiopia by the treaty of 1954⁶¹ and considered that the lack of preparations for independence had placed them in a subordinate position in independent Somalia. The final 'betrayal' by Britain came when Kenya kept the North East Province at its independence in 1963; many Somalis had expected that, in line with Lord Bevin's declaration, this area would be 'returned' to Somalia by Great Britain before Kenyan independence, just like Trans-Juba in 1926. This even prompted Somalia to break diplomatic relations with Great Britain entirely⁶².

The Italians were more successful in maintaining relations with Somalia. They expressly positioned themselves as a medium power: not threatening but conciliatory, seeking cooperation with all sides; within the Western bloc they profiled themselves as the only power keeping cordial relations with all antagonists in the Horn (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia), using their historic knowledge of the area and direct contact with its protagonists to their advantage. Although this did not strengthen their position within

⁵⁷ Tripodi, 1999, p. 364.

⁵⁸ Mohamed Ingiriis, in his review of Lidwien Kapteijn's book *Clan Cleansing in Somalia* (2013), contests that the British favoured the Isaaq clan family, noting that many of the British 'collective punishments' were against Isaaq clans. That is because the area controlled by the British was mainly inhabited by Isaaq. It is clear from the limited political liberties allotted before independence that the Protectorate administrators sought no balance between the Isaaq and the other clans inhabiting the territory, the Dhulbahante, Warsangeli, Gadabursi and Issa: the four towns with municipal councils were all in Isaaq areas. See keydmedia.com for the review of Kapteijn's book.

⁵⁹ This campaign was called the 'Geel Ood' – camel enclosure. British troops assisted by Isaaq auxiliaries abducted herds of camels and kept them hostage until Ogaden clansmen would hand over their weapons – Barnes, 2007, p. 287. The Ogaden, with the Majerteen and the Marehan, form the major clans of the Darood. Together with the Dhulbahante, the Ogaden also provided most of the Dervish rebellion's troops.

⁶⁰ Lewis, I.M, *Modern Political Movements in Somaliland part 1*, in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 28, No. 3, July 1958, p. 258 – Hereafter cited as Lewis, 1958/1.

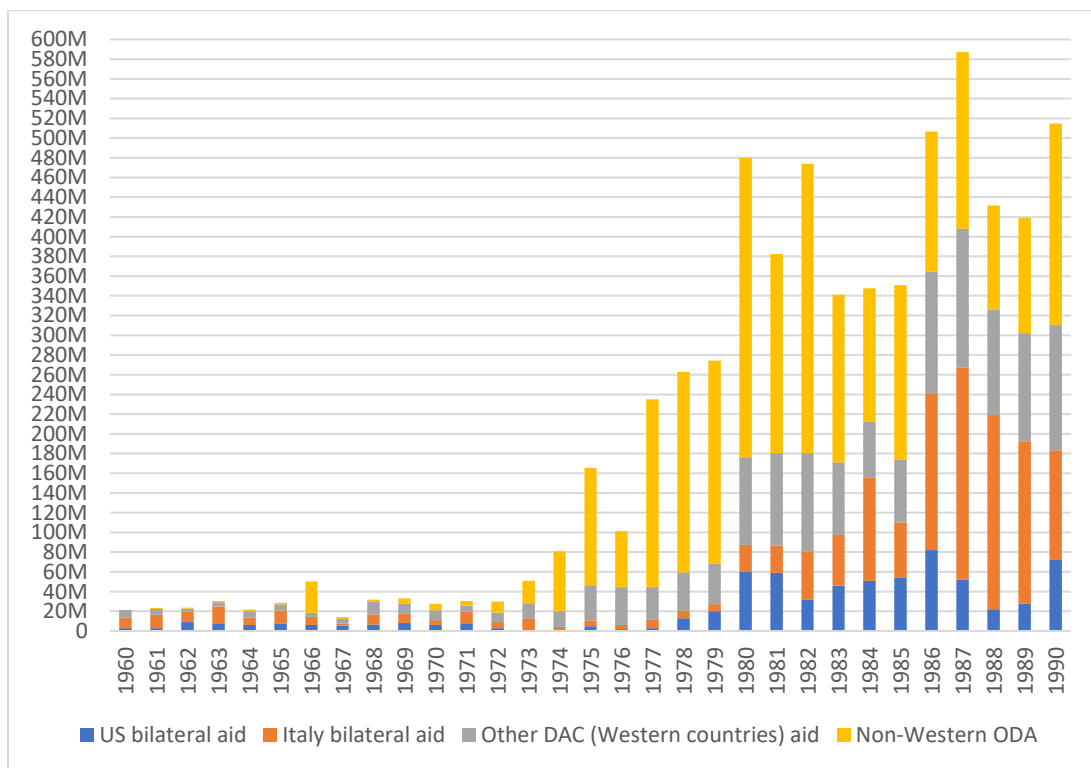
⁶¹ Issa-Salwe, 1996, p. 48.

⁶² Relations were re-established in 1967, but British influence in Somalia stayed minimal until the breakdown of the Somali state. The important influx of Somalis into Great Britain, together with the British role in the War on Terror and now in Somali state-building, thanks in part to the academic community of British Somali experts, have rekindled British-Somali relations.

the Western bloc (at crucial moments the USA and regional powers ignored Italy and dismissed its proposed services⁶³) it did ensure good local bilateral relations. The 1969 coup changed little in this regard: Siad Barre and many of those who took power had been trained in Italy, or by Italians.

Besides its pivotal diplomatic role, Italy maintained trade relations with Somalia, provided aid and made some investments⁶⁴. As Chart 1 shows, the lion's share of non-military official development assistance (ODA) provided to Somalia in the late years of Barre's regime came from Italy. One of its focus areas was higher education. At the Somali National University, lectures were given in Italian and many Somalis went on to Italy for a doctorate. Thus, Italian remained a language spoken by Somali elites until 1991. The Italian embassy was the last to be evacuated in Mogadishu in January 1991⁶⁵.

Chart 1: Somalia's official development assistance in USD by donor group, 1960-1990 (source [World Bank](#)).



Note: DAC countries include the USA, Canada, all Western Europe, Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand

⁶³ This happened during the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, the 1977-78 Ogaden war, and again with the collapse of the Somali state in 1990-91. Novati, 1999, pp 380-381.

⁶⁴ Novati, 1999, p. 375: "Italy was confident that the SYL government would be doomed to rely on financial assistance from Italy because of Somalia's backwardness and craving for more goods, cash and know-how (...) the Somali republic was the main if not sole beneficiary of Italian external aid during the 1960s and 70s." Ahmed Samatar also points out that Italy was the main source of imports to Somalia, even in the socialist 1970s. From 1973 to 78, 29% on average of officially registered imports to Somalia came from Italy (Samatar, 1988, p. 120).

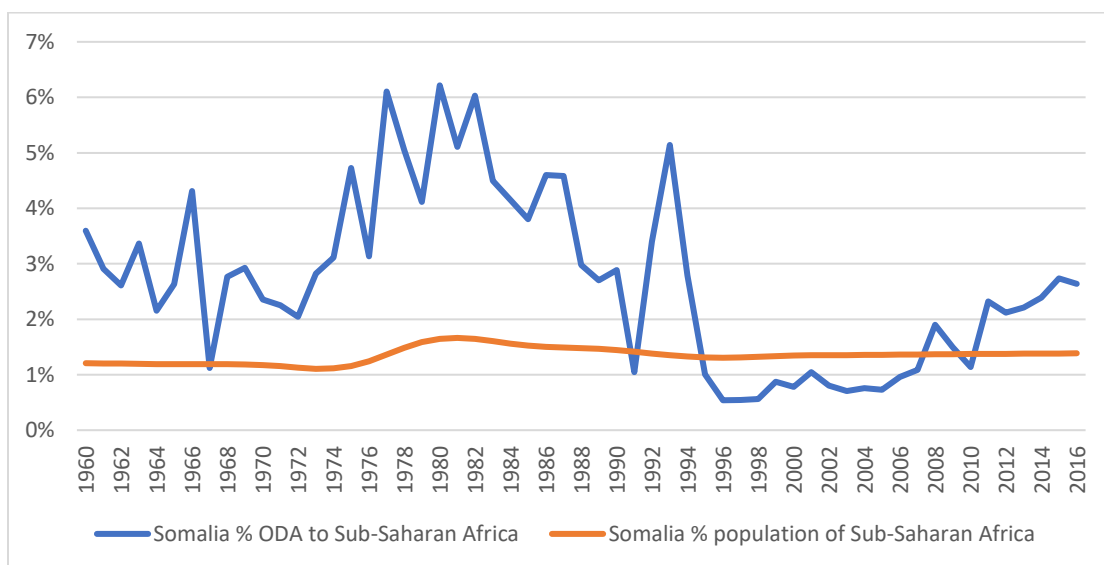
⁶⁵ The 'final-days-of-the-regime' accounts by Italian diplomats are among the most harrowing witness accounts of the outbreak of civil war. See Sica, M., *Operazione Somalia: la dittatura, l'opposizione, la guerra civile nella testimonianza dell'ultimo ambasciatore d'Italia a Mogadiscio*, 1994, and Pacifico, C., *Somalia: Ricordi d'un mal d'Africa italiano*, 1996.

The two former colonial powers were displaced in Somali foreign relations by the superpowers, who established clientelist relations with allies in the Horn of Africa as elsewhere in the developing world. Many Somali commentators overstate the strategic importance of the Horn of Africa⁶⁶, taking their cue from Cold Warriors, who in turn assumed geostrategic importance because of superpower rivalry in the Horn. Documents from both the Kremlin and the White House indicate that the region was not considered of vital interest for either⁶⁷, but Cold War dynamics turned the Horn into a zone of contestation, as each superpower tried to contain the other – without risking direct confrontation.

Proximity to the Arab world and oil-shipping lanes is not a unique position, and Somalia clearly lacked the capacity or will to disrupt either. The historic antagonism between Muslim Somalis seeking access to rich highland pastures and Christian Ethiopians seeking access to the sea was only of regional importance, with scant global strategic impact. The Horn also lacks unique resources that could whet the appetite of an external power. From 1967 onward, the Soviets had a good foothold in the region in Southern Yemen; that same year, the Americans replaced the base in Kagnew, Eritrea, with a much bigger one in Diego Garcia. Neither superpower sorely needed facilities in Somalia or Ethiopia.

Somalia managed the financial aspects of the patron-client relationship offered by the superpowers well. From 1960 to 1969 Somalia received 2.38 times the average ODA per capita allotted to Sub-Saharan Africa; in the decade of the 1970s that proportion grew to 2.82 and in the 1980s to 2.85 (Chart 2). However, the dependency of Somalia on development assistance also grew continuously (Chart 3).

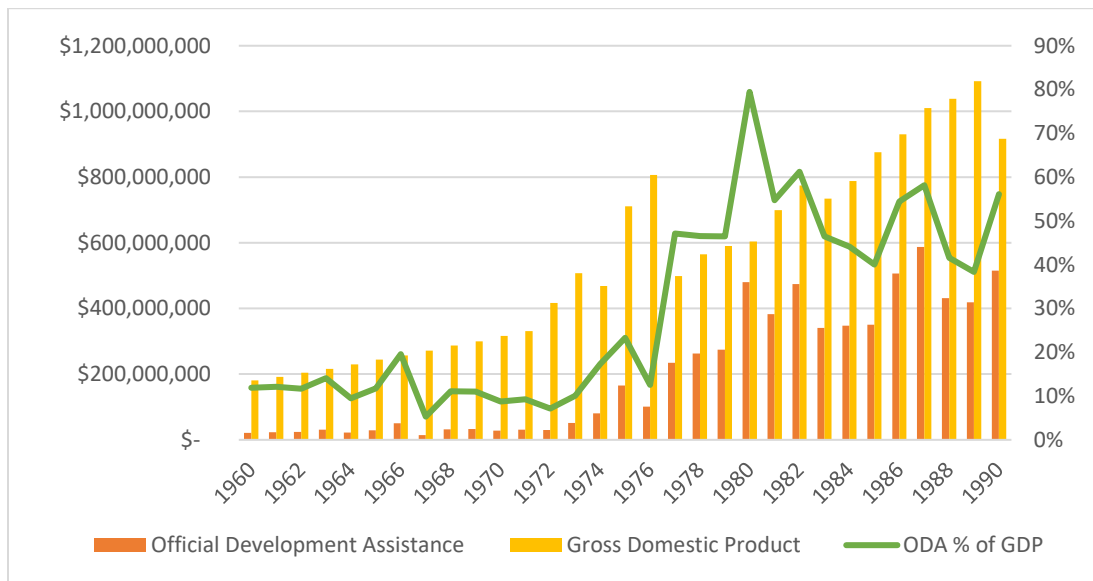
Chart 2: Percentage of Sub-Saharan African ODA allotted to Somalia (source [World Bank](#))



⁶⁶ E.g. Ingiriis, M., 2016.

⁶⁷ Brind, 1983, p. 76, "It is easy to overestimate the strategic importance of the Horn and of the facilities it can provide to the superpowers. (...) The Soviet Union was not greatly inconvenienced when Somalia expelled its military personnel in 1977". Similarly, one can find much evidence that Somalia and the Horn was of no specific geostrategic interest for the USA. See for example Habte Selassie, Bereket, *United States Policy towards the Horn of Africa, The Balance of External and Regional Interests*, in Labahn, ed. 1983, Vol. 2 pp 311-368.

Chart 3: Relation between Somali GDP and external assistance (source [World Bank](#))



Shifting alliances in the Cold War

Upon independence Somalia declared itself non-aligned, and it participated in the Yugoslav conference establishing the 'Non-Aligned Movement' the following year. In 1962, Somalia rejected an offer by Western nations (\$10-18 million according to the sources) to support development, in favour of a Soviet assistance package that amounted to \$63 million. The reason Somalia chose for the USSR, besides the more generous package, was Soviet readiness to build up Somalia's army, which it needed to pursue its prime foreign-policy objective, Greater Somalia. Since the countries this policy would adversely affect – Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti – were all solidly in the Western bloc, one can understand Western reticence in providing military assistance.

Somalia thus naturally drifted into the Eastern bloc. After the 1969 military coup, with its socialist rhetoric, the alliance became much stronger, culminating in the 1974 Soviet-Somali friendship treaty. On the other hand, in June 1970 the USA and West Germany cut off their aid programmes while other Western bloc countries, including Italy, reduced theirs⁶⁸. Besides Soviet-bloc assistance, the country was also the beneficiary of Chinese and Cuban aid; the Chinese offered non-military development assistance (the North-South paved road, from Bosaso to Kismayo, advantageous terms of trade and generous lines of credit), while the Cubans mostly came as military advisors. Nevertheless, throughout the 1960s and 70s, Somalia also received Western support, mostly in the field of development (see Chart 1), but in small amounts; the yearly average of development assistance provided by Western nations jumped from 38 million US\$ in the 1970s to 250 million US\$ in the 1980s.

⁶⁸ Issa-Salwe, 1978. The US had earlier suspended its aid programme in 1966, angered by the provision of goods to North Vietnam by ships sailing under Somali flag, but the diplomatic efforts of PM Cigaal had resulted in the resumption of aid.

Estimates vary, but by 1977 the USSR had poured about 600 million dollars plus a lot of military hardware and manhours – thousands of experts – into Somalia⁶⁹. It was joined in this effort by a contingent of Cuban military advisors. The USSR supported fish-processing plants in Berbera and Bosaso, and a meat-packing factory in Kismayo, as well as a dam project on the Juba river (all of these projects came to nothing). The Soviet Union had also granted Somali products preferential access to its market. What the Soviet Union gained in exchange, besides an unreliable political ally, was access to facilities it had built in Berbera port: oil storage, transshipment, Africa's longest runway and a secret missile-handling area. The Soviet fleet also had access to Kismayo port.

Barre's decision to invade the Ogaden in 1977 inverted the Cold War alliances in the Horn. Although the details of how the decision was made were never elucidated, it seems most likely that Barre seized what he sensed was a final opportunity. In 1974, a radical left-leaning military committee, the 'Derg', had deposed the pro-Western Haile Selassie in Ethiopia. In 1975, Barre started propping up the Western Somali Liberation Front for guerrilla warfare. It was widely rumoured that there were Somali Armed Forces covertly operating in the Ogaden. The Somali leadership hoped Ethiopia would fall apart under pressure of the armed opposition to the Derg (in Tigray, the Bale mountains of Oromia and other areas) and would relinquish the Ogaden and Haud to Somalia.

What probably tipped the balance for Barre, who by then was taking most decisions alone, including that of going to war, was the gradual rapprochement between the Soviet bloc and the Derg. In August 1976, Mengistu visited Moscow and received assurances of support; Castro had visited in February and conveyed his favourable impression of the revolution to Moscow. Meanwhile, the Carter administration, concerned by the Derg's radical politics and human-rights abuses, was backing out of its alliance with Ethiopia⁷⁰. It seems Barre gambled that the Soviet Union would either support its ally (the treaty of friendship was three years old), or remain neutral in an armed conflict between its erstwhile and new allies⁷¹. Somalia, with one of the strongest armies in Africa, thought it could wrestle control over the Ogaden from the enfeebled Ethiopian regime.

There was a last-ditch attempt by Cuba to avoid a confrontation between the two neighbours. In February 1977, Fidel Castro met all parties concerned in Aden, proposing an anti-imperialist federation of Ethiopia, Somalia and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, with an autonomous status for Eritrea and the Ogaden, but this suggestion was turned down by the Somalis⁷².

In July 1977 the Somali army crossed the Ethiopian border in full strength; over the course of the next months they advanced on Harar, briefly took Dire Dawa and occupied Jigjiga as well as most of the Ogaden. They stayed put until early 1978. The Soviet Union sided with mainstream international and

⁶⁹ Laitin, D., *The War in the Ogaden: Implications for Siyaad's Rôle in Somali History*, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 17 No. 1, March 1979. He gives the following breakdown of Soviet military assistance: "By mid-1974, about 1,725 Somali soldiers had been to the Soviet Union for training, and the army's inventory [included] an estimated 150 T-35 and 100 T-54 tanks, mostly fitted with 105-mm guns. Also, over 300 armed personnel carriers, 200 coastal batteries, 50 MIG fighters, a squadron of Il-28 bombers, and an SA-2 ground-to-air missile complex now belonged to the Somalis. Up to 3,600 Soviet advisers supported this effort", p. 99.

⁷⁰ President Carter announced in Feb. 1977 that he was cutting military aid to Ethiopia by \$100 million because of the Derg's poor human-rights record. Wright, G.V. Jr, "President Carter's Response to the Horn of Africa Conflict: The Selling of Cold War II", p. 373-374, in Labahn, ed., 1988.

⁷¹ Laitin, 1979, p. 100,

⁷² Brind, 1983, p. 77. See Castro's account of his mediation attempts to DDR chancellor Erich Honecker on 3 April 1977. The [transcript](#) was retrieved on 21 May 2018 from the digital archive of the Woodrow Wilson Center.

African opinion by condemning the invasion of July 1977, and, with a massive donation of Soviet military materiel and 20,000 Cuban troops from Angola, turned the course of the war that initially seemed favourable for Somalia. Barre then broke with the USSR and Cuba, expelling them from Somalia in November 1977. The public celebrations in Somalia that followed this announcement clearly indicated that the Russians had not endeared themselves to the Somali public.

Barre turned to the USA instead, in a volte-face that stunned the entire international community by its hypocrisy⁷³. But the USA did not risk a confrontation with the USSR, even in a proxy war. Barre seems to have been delusional about how important Somalia was to the USA⁷⁴. Somalia lost the war, and by mid-1978 had withdrawn all its troops from the Ogaden.

Over the following years a lukewarm relation developed between the Barre regime and the USA. If it were not for the Iranian revolution and the Soviet participation in the Afghan civil war, US President Carter might not have been moved away from his détente-minded approach of Cold War politics; but given the regional context, he followed the containment policy advocated by his national security advisor Brzezinski and started investing in the USA's relationship with Somalia.

To become more acceptable to the West, Barre, who had lost a lot of popularity in the war, in 1979 quickly instituted some reforms, such as a new constitution spelling out civil rights and general elections. However, the constitution was suspended by a state of emergency declared in 1980, and only one party was allowed to contest the elections. Barre had already garnered some European support, especially the promise of security assistance, not only by expelling the Soviet bloc but also by allowing a West German squad to liberate a Lufthansa plane hijacked by Palestinians in Mogadishu in October 1977. (This betrayal of the Palestinian cause, incidentally, dented Barre's standing among Arab public opinion).

In 1980, the US signed a deal with Somalia delivering military aid in exchange for use of the Soviet-built facilities in Berbera. It was to be home to a Rapid Deployment Force unit set up to deal with Cold War emergencies, and to be used as an emergency landing strip for the Space Shuttle. In the decade of the 1980s, Somalia received 'well above' \$100 million per year from the USA, most of it military assistance, the rest humanitarian relief (feeding the Ogaden refugees) and development assistance⁷⁵.

This was less than Barre had hoped for. As Chart 1 shows, US official development assistance remained relatively modest throughout the 1980s. However, US political support to Barre did not waver. A declassified Pentagon document from 1983 sums up the US position: *"Since President Siad's rise to power in October 1969, Somalia's problems have become so extensive that his position could easily weaken, making Somalia an even more fragile and troubled ally for the US (...) if he were overthrown, it probably would result in the surfacing of leaders who would request substantially more outside military and economic aid. In Siad's absence, the United States would face difficult policy choices as the struggle*

⁷³ By then Barre's international standing was already very low, among Africans, Arabs and the West. He lost the last vestiges of support when he replaced the internationally respected Foreign Minister Umar Arteb (1969-1977) by his close relative Jamaa Barre (1977-1991), who had no international experience.

⁷⁴ Barre may have been swayed by informal declarations of support to Somalia by the Carter administration, made between April and July 1977. Laitin (1979, p. 106) mentions, *inter alia*, a press statement by the State Department spokesman in July 1977 *"We do think it is desirable that Somalia knows it does not have to depend on the Soviet Union but can obtain arms from other sources."* See also the account by then US ambassador Raymond L. Thurston, *The United States, Somalia and the Crisis in the Horn*, Horn of Africa, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April/June 1978), pp 11–20. But by 1979 the cash-strapped Barre regime was so upset at the lack of substantial Western assistance that he unsuccessfully approached the USSR again, with the suggestion for a new entente.

⁷⁵ This estimate comes from Laitin, 1985.

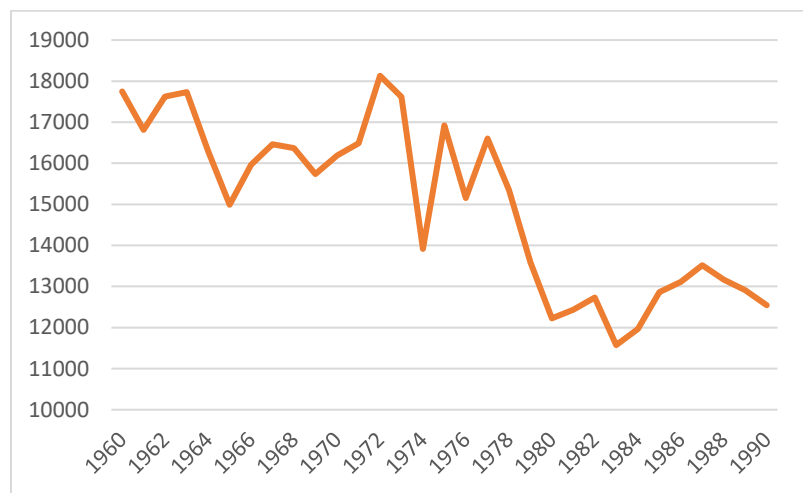
to consolidate power evolved and rapprochement with the Soviets became a possibility, particularly if US aid were not forthcoming.”⁷⁶

Western financial intervention

Somalia’s economy had been negatively affected in the 1970s by Siad Barre’s command-economy policies of collectivization, nationalization, state monopolies and price controls. Agricultural output had not kept up with the population growth⁷⁷. Industrialization, even of the most elementary ‘light’ kind, had never taken off. GDP per capita dropped by a third from 1960 to 1990 (see Chart 4). Moreover, some 700,000 refugees from the Ogaden had stranded in refugee camps in Somalia as a result of the war⁷⁸. They were entirely dependent on external assistance as Somalia could provide them with nothing.

In the 1980s, the Somali economy was therefore in shambles⁷⁹. In 1987, the journalist and writer Graham Hancock observed that “almost every international aid agency is represented in one form or another in Mogadishu”⁸⁰. Another observer noted that “the economy survives on the remittances of Somali migrants to the Arab Gulf and the commissions that go to Somali officials and merchants who can act as middlemen for foreign aid contracts”⁸¹.

Chart 4: Evolution of GDP per capita in constant US\$, Somalia 1960-90 (source [World Bank](#)).



It was therefore unavoidable that Somalia accept structural adjustment policies of the IMF and the World Bank, a precondition to further loans not only from these institutions but from most Western

⁷⁶ US Department of Defense, *Defense Estimative Brief: Somali Democratic Republic*, 3 June 83.

⁷⁷ See for example Al Samatar’s study on the banana sector, showing production fell by 65% from 1973 to 1981, mostly as a result of command-economy related policies. Samatar, 1993.

⁷⁸ Figure given by Al Samatar, 1988, p. 139. Other sources, in particular Western aid agencies, often mention the figure of 1 million.

⁷⁹ For example, in 1987 export earnings were \$135M, debt service \$216M and aid in cash and kind \$400M (Hancock, 1991, pp 23 ff).

⁸⁰ Hancock, 1991

⁸¹ Laitin, 1985

donors. In 1981, a structural adjustment program was signed with the IMF, followed by a structural adjustment loan from the World Bank. These required privatization of public assets (notably real estate, collective farming facilities, industries – all that had been nationalized in the early 1970s), a shrinking of the public sector, a currency devaluation, and export-oriented growth.

Although all observers agree that the Somali economy needed profound reform, the standard recipe of the International Financial Institutions was not adapted to the Somali context. The economic reforms did thus not produce the expected results. The privatization mostly benefited Siad Barre's family, clan and loyalists⁸². Shrinking the public sector gave Barre a chance to purge the ranks of all potentially hostile clans. The loan was used to pay interests on debt and finance imports, mostly consumed by the wealthy class⁸³. By 1985, the Somali government was so deeply lacking in foreign exchange that the IMF, the World Bank and other experts virtually ran the Ministry of Finance⁸⁴.

The fiscal policies imposed by international financial institutions and Western lenders on Somalia arguably had more of an impact on the evolution of state and society than the Cold War, although few scholars focus on it when examining the causes of collapse of Barre's regime. One of the consequences was that Mogadishu came to look like a coveted prize, a foreign bride, 'the Pearl of the Indian Ocean' as the town was known because of its languid beauty. A semblance of Western modern life could be upheld in the capital, further divorcing the regime and its foreign supporters from the rest of Somali society⁸⁵. The disparity between life in the capital and the war, drought and general hardship outside of it may explain the large-scale looting that took place in Mogadishu in the early 1990s – in fact, much of the initial fighting seems to have been motivated by booty as much as clan animosity⁸⁶.

Indeed, the 'Sultanist'⁸⁷ type of regime that emerged under Barre was financed largely from external sources, as national resources dwindled (see Chart 4). Besides grants and loans from the international financial institutions, the military assistance provided by Western powers was routinely skimmed by Barre's cronies, who also captured a share of humanitarian aid and development assistance. For example, despite announcing that Ethiopian Somali refugees had the same citizen rights as other Somalis, Barre's regime kept them living in refugee camps to ensure the continued flow of international assistance⁸⁸.

⁸² Samatar, 1993, "Although only a handful of the senior members of the government (including the President's wife and daughter) became plantation owners, most took advantage of their offices to lead the charge toward the privatization of public resources".

⁸³ World Bank structural adjustment loans in the 1980s posited many conditions before receiving the loan (political, economic, fiscal reform), but very few conditionalities on spending.

⁸⁴ Laitin, 1985, p. 33

⁸⁵ see the description of luxurious expat life in 1987 by Hancock, 1991, pp 23-31.

⁸⁶ Ingiriis, M.H., *The Suicidal State: The Rise and Fall of the Siad Barre regime, 1969-1991*, 2016, p. 226 notes that "Western embassies became sites of booty". The same happened to the UN compound, the National University, and residences of foreigners, Kapteijns, L., *Clan Cleansing in Somalia: The Ruinous Legacy of 1991*, 2013, p. 125.

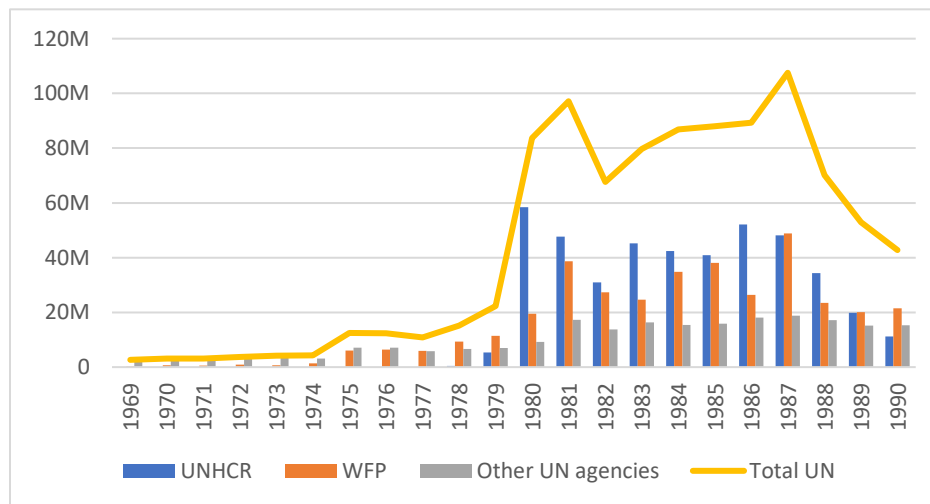
⁸⁷ "Sultanism tends to arise whenever traditional domination develops an administration and a military force that are purely instruments of the master... Where domination... operates primarily on the basis of discretion, it will be called Sultanism... The non-traditional element is not, however, rationalized in impersonal terms, but consists only in the extreme development of the ruler's discretion. It is this which distinguishes it from every form of rational authority", in Max Weber, *Economy & Society (Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft)*, 1922.

⁸⁸ The antecedents for later warlord abuse of humanitarian aid, up to today's 'gatekeepers' of IDP camps, clearly lay in this era.

Therefore, the international community was not a neutral bystander, but complicit in the regime and its exactions on Somali society⁸⁹. Of course, not all foreigners were enjoying pool parties in the Lido beachfront area of the capital. But even those foreign NGOs toiling away in rural districts to implement development projects or provide humanitarian assistance, were, in a way, enabling Barre's regime by taking over state functions without engaging in oppositional politics and grudgingly allowing the regime to take its cut.

Over the course of the 1980s, Siad Barre's support base in Somalia dwindled; he attacked the Majerteen (Puntland) from 1982, the Isaaq of North West Somalia from 1986, but other clans were also being purged from the government. As the corrupt, unpopular and illegitimate nature of Barre's regime became ever clearer, Western political support decreased. This generally did not affect financial support—as Chart 1 shows, some donors, in particular Italy, kept up high levels of aid—although the UN started scaling down its operations in 1987 (Chart 5). However, the West avoided confronting the dictator or alienating him entirely. A new US ambassador who arrived in September 1990, while the Barre regime was in its final throes, “continued the policies of promoting the Siad Barre regime as part of cold war politics”⁹⁰. However, there was no love lost on both sides. The US embassy was mainly looted by Barre's 'Red Berets' in January 1991 and Western embassies and diplomatic personnel in general had at least as much to fear from uniformed personnel as from clan militias and armed criminals in the early phases of the civil war⁹¹.

Chart 5: UN agencies net flows to Somalia in current US\$ (source [World Bank](#)).



The sudden and massive increase of UN aid in 1980 is related to the influx of refugees from the Ogaden, as well as Somalia joining the Western bloc. In 1987 there was drought in the central rangelands (Mudug and Galgaduud), which explains the important WFP contribution that year.

⁸⁹ Compagnon, D., *Political Decay in Somalia: from Personal Rule to Warlordism*, Refuge, Vol. 12, No 5, 1992.

⁹⁰ Ingiriis, 2016, p. 226.

⁹¹ On the other hand, expat personnel in general felt little sympathy for Somalis. Writing about the events of July 1989, Anna Simons writes: “For expatriates, the expectation was that if there was more unrest, they would be finally forced to leave the country that none of them particularly cared for and that many of them had assumed, from their first day, would sink into chaos. Indeed, on my second full day in Somalia eight months previous [i.e. 1988], a USIS bureaucrat told me that I should not bother to begin any research; she kept one bag always packed, ready for flight; Somalia was going to blow”. (Simons, A., ‘The Beginning of the End’, in *Fieldwork Under Fire: Contemporary Studies of Violence and Survival*, Nordstrom & Robben, ed., 1995).

Desperate to find new allies, Barre even approached South Africa for support. In the late 1980s the South African regime had been ostracized by almost the entire international community, but given its military industry and comparative wealth, Barre hoped to gain some advantage from improving bilateral relations. This further cooled already frosty relations between Somalia and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Barre used the international stage to project an image of strength and control on domestic audiences⁹², but in the international arena his regime was markedly unsuccessful, a fact not lost on the Somali elites⁹³.

Most foreign scholars of Somalia downplay the role of the superpowers' strategic objectives in the fall of the Barre regime, pointing to internal factors instead⁹⁴. But President 'Farmaajo' put forward a perspective that many common Somalis seem to share: *"When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, so too did the polarization of the world. The United States no longer had any real need for Somalia. It was now convenient to withdraw the support that had long enabled Barre's rule and the illegalities that characterized it. When the United States suspended all financial aid to the Barre regime, his security apparatus swiftly collapsed"*⁹⁵. Although, as we have seen, it was true that the US was propping up the Barre regime, blaming it for the collapse of Barre's government may be factually incorrect – even if the Soviet Union, the Cold War and US support to Barre would have survived, it is difficult to imagine how Barre's regime itself could have survived. But this perspective is evidence of the prevalent sentiment among Somalis, from the 1980s to now, that the USA is an untrustworthy ally. The US is reticent to commit and whatever support it gives is often 'too little, too late' according to its allies, and misguided or purposefully undermining, according to its detractors.

Reflections on the Cold War period in Somalia

- * The international community and the USA in particular were not a neutral actor but were clearly responsible for propping up the Barre state as it degenerated into a predatory organ, killing and looting its own population. The principal means by which Barre and his cronies enriched themselves was the IMF-imposed privatization and the absence of accountability on the use of the resultant loans. Here again we see the principle at work: external support decreases incentive to build internal support.
- * The humanitarian sector was already very present in the 1980s, and it was identified as part of the international alliance supporting the Barre regime. The predatory skimming or looting aid and 'capturing' vulnerable populations in camps to facilitate these practices, which became such a well-known feature of the humanitarian disaster in the 1990s and again in the late 2000s, were already an assumed part of aid delivery before the collapse of the Somali state.
- * Although Somalia had a relatively strong state in terms of its international power projection, it had isolated itself completely by 1990, through a behaviour that was seen as aggressive, arrogant and uncooperative. It ruined its reputation by its insistence on 'redeeming the lost Somali territories' and

⁹² Simons, 1989, p. 53.

⁹³ See note 73. Laitin, 1979, explains in detail how Barre's lack of diplomatic prowess soured relations with all parties, one by one: the Soviet Union, the Arab world, the African states, Western Europe and the USA.

⁹⁴ E.g. Ingiriis, 2016 "The catastrophe that confronted with Somalia had its roots in the psychological effect of the legacy left behind not by colonialism, but considerably by the ideology of the Siad Barre regime" p. 272.

⁹⁵ Mohamed, M.A., *U.S. Strategic Interest in Somalia: From Cold War Era to War on Terror*. Master's thesis, Buffalo State University, June 2009. Excerpt from p. 13.

invading a fellow African state. It was arrogant towards the rest of African nations, pretending it was Arab, but it never invested much in developing friendly ties with other Arab nations. The opportunistic switching from non-aligned to Soviet bloc to the West, made it lose any semblance of integrity, and it was by all counts an embarrassing ally to have. In contemporary parlance, Somalia was a rogue state. Diplomats may have seen the collapse of the Somali state with a sigh of relief. It is puzzling that attempts to reconstruct the Somali state don't seem to take these facts into account.

* Siad Barre is still admired today by some Somalis for his sheer longevity in power. He seems to have single-handedly changed the Somali regime from (corrupt) parliamentary democracy to socialist development⁹⁶, to personal rule ('Sultanism'). This is blatant proof of the weakness of the Somali state institutions; at the same time, the Somali state remained strong enough until 1990 to keep all competitors at bay, for example rival generals or clan elders. This contradiction remains to be resolved.

1.5 UN intervention after the collapse of the Somali State (1991-95)

Note: The following four sections apply to Somalia as defined by the international community, but do not cover Somaliland. That is a different story, as we will see later.

By the time the Siad Barre government fell in January 1991, its authority was restricted to parts of Mogadishu and some Marehan lineages. The Northwest had been taken by the Somali National Movement, who would shortly thereafter declare the full independence of Somaliland; Puntland and the rest of Somalia were controlled by various militia groups, including the remnants of Siad Barre's personal forces who retreated to Gedo after being expelled from Mogadishu. Mogadishu fell to several Hawiye clan factions, the best-known being Mohamed Farah Aideed's faction of the United Somali Congress, USC.

It is surprising how effectively Siad Barre's regime manipulated the clan element, despite it having been officially proscribed from Somali politics. Maybe the denial favoured the eruption of clan identity as a force of political destruction, leading to what some scholars have termed clan cleansing of genocidal proportions⁹⁷. As a result, the popular uprising did not target Barre's regime as much as his clan and clan family. Hawiye ministers and advisors of Siad Barre and other non-Darood regime figures as well as businessmen had little to fear. They could use their erstwhile government and security connections to hunt down and kill Darood clansmen, even if the latter had been in the opposition to Barre.

The Darood were expelled from Mogadishu and other locations in South-Central Somalia and their properties looted or confiscated by Hawiye clansmen. The next rounds of fighting, which were at least as deadly, pitted Hawiye groups against each other for control of Mogadishu, mainly Abgal vs. Habar Gidir, but later also sub-clans against other sub-clans over control of a neighbourhood. Outside Mogadishu, many clan groups fought over territorial control. Sedentary groups in the towns and farmlands (minorities, Rahanweyn, Bantus) almost systematically lost confrontations against the better-armed pastoralist clans.

⁹⁶ Admittedly, Siad Barre was not alone behind the regime change in 1969; but he was, from the beginning, the *primus inter pares* in the new revolutionary government and by 1975 his hold on power was unshakable.

⁹⁷ The heated debates provoked by Lidwien Kapteijns' book *Clan Cleansing in Somalia* (2013), seem to be motivated by Somalis (and some postcolonial writers) protesting against Western scholars reducing Somali politics to clan. However, most Somalis would not deny the fact that clan cleansing did take place, but object to her supposedly partial treatment of the Darood clan as the main victim.

Tens of thousands of civilians died in the clan killing in Mogadishu, Baraawe, Kismayo and elsewhere, throughout Southern Somalia. Rape, mutilation and all kinds of other cruelties were committed by the 'mooryaan', the undisciplined young clan fighters that composed the bulk of most militias. Up to a hundred thousand Somalis fled over the border, to Kenya, Ethiopia or Yemen, often walking all the way from their home areas. The disruption of most trade networks, the repeated looting by armed militias of food supplies on farms, the extortion taking place at roadblocks erected all throughout Southern Somalia, and the fact that many farmers and pastoralists were fighting or fleeing, instead of working, led to famine in 1992.

The UN-led intervention in Somalia

Surprisingly, the year 1991, which was the most intense period of the Somali civil war, elicited almost no international reaction. The first UN Security Council resolution on Somalia in the post-Barre period was taken in January 1992. 1991 was a busy year, internationally: the first half of the year was dominated by the Gulf War, and the second by the break-up of the USSR and Yugoslavia, and the starting of the Balkan War. The diplomatic lassitude caused by Somalia's rogue behaviour, noted above, may also have played a part in the initial lack of reaction of the international community.

By January 1992 it was clear that a massive famine was in the making⁹⁸. The international community decreed an arms embargo—that has lasted at least until 2018—and agreed to 'start a large-scale humanitarian operation'. After an official cease-fire between the warring parties in Mogadishu in March 1992⁹⁹, this led to the establishment of UNOSOM in April 1992 (UNSCR 751), whose main purpose was to deliver humanitarian aid. The mission was unarmed¹⁰⁰ and by UN charter had to respect Somalia's sovereignty¹⁰¹, so it needed guarantees from the militias controlling the capital, posing the problem of fictitious sovereignty: what should the UN do in such a case?

The intervention started hesitantly and by July 1992 the UN Security Council, angry at the lack of progress, in UNSCR 767 used threatening language to force Somalis to facilitate aid: *"In the absence of such cooperation [by all parties, movements and factions to assist in general stabilization] the Security Council does not exclude other measures to deliver humanitarian assistance to Somalia"*.

These measures were the militarization of UN aid delivery by means of US Army support provided under the umbrella of a United Nations International Task Force (UNITAF). Under Operation 'Provide Relief' (Aug.-Dec. 1992) aid was being delivered directly by US cargo planes from Mombasa airport to the areas of operations. This was still not sufficient. Faced with massive looting of aid and deliberate attacks on organizations and people delivering it, the UN ratcheted up the intervention, despite Somali hostility.

⁹⁸ January 23rd, 1992: UNSCR 733 proclaims an arms embargo, urges all parties to agree to a cease-fire and find a political solution, and instructs the UN to start a large-scale humanitarian operation.

⁹⁹ March 3rd, 1992, faction leaders signed a cease-fire in Mogadishu to allow humanitarian assistance; like all subsequent cease-fires intended to lure international aid, it was soon broken by all parties.

¹⁰⁰ It started with the arrival in July of 50 unarmed military observers.

¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, with UNSCR 751 (April 24th, 1992) the UN decided to establish a mission in Somalia (UNOSOM), and it was agreed the UN would send 50 (unarmed) observers to monitor cease-fire agreements. A 90-day plan of Emergency Humanitarian Assistance was agreed on too.

UNSCR 794 of 3 December 1992, for the first time in the UN's history appealed to Chapter VII of the UN Charter¹⁰² to mandate the application of force to maintain or restore international peace and security. The fiction of Somali sovereignty and the integrity of the state was finally abandoned after resolutions 733, 746, 751, 767 and 775 had failed to deliver the expected results. The third phase of the intervention (Dec. 1992 to Oct. 1993) was called 'Operation Restore Hope'. Outgoing President Bush (senior) pledged 30,000 US troops to support this operation¹⁰³.

That seemed like a large amount in a country like Somalia. On 8 December 1992, the first US troops landed by amphibian invasion in and around Mogadishu. With the US troops came media coverage, and with that coverage – dubbed the 'CNN effect'¹⁰⁴ – came additional funding for humanitarian operations. NGOs started flooding into the country; many of those that had left in 1990/91 came back in 1992 for the relief effort. In one account, there were 40 international NGOs operating in South Central Somalia by 1994¹⁰⁵.

Emboldened by the apparent success of UNITAF, the Secretary General, when writing to the Security Council to request their endorsement of UNOSOM II¹⁰⁶, envisioned a vast scope of responsibilities for the revamped UN mission. Besides a force under UN command of 28,000 international troops, it went far in its state-building ambitions: disarmament, setting up a Somali police force to eventually take over security provision, settling IDP issues, and continuing aid delivery, restoring a civil administration throughout the country and economic revival.

What UNSCR 814 didn't broach was the future of the Somali state. The SC meeting happened before the Addis Ababa meeting between Somali factions¹⁰⁷ was finished, and the UN likely wanted to avoid pre-determining the political outcome. In its rapidly succeeding Security Council resolutions of 1992 and 1993, the UN repeatedly called for a 'cessation of hostilities' to be followed by 'a political settlement', based on 'national reconciliation', although the wording changed slightly from resolution to resolution. There was no specification of what such a political process should lead to (e.g. elections or a 'broad-based government') and often the state-building objective was secondary to that of delivering aid. The

¹⁰² **Article 41** of the UN charter: "The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.

Article 42: Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations."

¹⁰³ At full deployment, UNITAF consisted of 37,000 soldiers: 25,000 US, the others provided by 27 countries.

¹⁰⁴ The 'CNN effect' refers to the influence that the media have over the policy agenda. Once networks start providing saturation coverage to a specific crisis, it becomes impossible for politicians not to address them. The term started being used in the early 1990s, and the Somali crisis – together with the Gulf and Balkan Wars – was one of the first instances of its use. See Livingston, S., *Clarifying the CNN effect. An examination of media according to type of military intervention*, Joan Shorenstein Center, John F Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, June 1997.

¹⁰⁵ Bradbury, M., 2010, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Letter 'S-25354' by UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to the Security Council, dated 3 March 1993.

¹⁰⁷ In March 1993, a conference on National Reconciliation in Somalia was held in Addis Ababa under the auspices of the UNECA; the agreement signed between 15 factions on 27/03 had little effect on the ground.

parties in conflict had to cease fighting and start talking to allow the UN to deliver assistance, while a more permanent political settlement had to be reached by local forces.

One of the reasons the Addis Ababa agreement didn't hold was the opposition by General Aideed, who, among the faction leaders, was gradually becoming the main enemy of the international community¹⁰⁸. Aideed had repeatedly spoken out against the presence of international forces in Somalia, even warning the Security Council. He desired to be recognized as the president of Somalia, contesting the legitimacy of Ali Mahdi, who had been proclaimed President by a USC congress in January 1991. Ali Mahdi was internationally seen as a more acceptable representative of Somalia than Aideed.

The killing of 24 Pakistani peacekeepers of UNOSOM II¹⁰⁹ on 5 June 1993 as they were inspecting one of Aideed's weapon depots was a turning point; the following day, the Security Council issued resolution 837, calling for a UN-led investigation into the killing, calling to account those factional leaders responsible, and increasing the striking and deterrent capacity of UNOSOM II. The UN and the USA together declared war on Aideed's faction¹¹⁰.

This led to the infamous 'Black Hawk Down' incident on 3 October 1993, in which 19 US servicemen were killed (as well as 800-1000 Somalis¹¹¹). The televised images of the US soldiers' bodies being dragged through the street by Aideed's clan militia struck a raw nerve in American public opinion. The 'CNN effect' did the rest: a few days later President Clinton announced the withdrawal of the US contingent, which was the backbone of UNOSOM II's enforcement arm.

UNOSOM dragged on until March 1995, when it was officially ended. A year before that, not only the US, but also other Western nations¹¹² had withdrawn their armed forces, leaving the operation very diminished¹¹³. Up to the end, the UN forces were involved in conflict throughout the country and could not tip the scales in favour of a peaceful resolution¹¹⁴.

¹⁰⁸ General Aideed was frequently singled out for criticism in reports by the UN Secretary General on the situation in Somalia; see for example S24992 (of 19 Dec. 1992), S25168 (26 Jan. 1993) and S26317 (Aug. 1993).

¹⁰⁹ 3-4 May 1993: UNOSOM 2 ('Continue Hope') takes over from UNITAF. It will operate until March 1995.

¹¹⁰ Aggressive operations by UNOSOM forces also caused civilian victims. For example, a group of elders meeting in a house on 12 July 1993 was killed in a US strike. This led to a popular uprising against the intervention. Four foreign journalists investigating the 12/7 incident were killed by an angry mob. Emboldened by their success, the militias took over more areas of Mogadishu. UNOSOM 2's troop contributing countries developed tensions among themselves, with Italy taking the lead in criticizing the US approach.

¹¹¹ Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Mogadishu_\(1993\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Mogadishu_(1993)).

¹¹² Besides the US, Italy, Belgium, France and Sweden also withdrew their contingents in March 1994.

¹¹³ Nov. 1994: UNSCR 954 extends the mandate of UNOSOM II until March 1995. By now, UNOSOM has scaled down and only operates in Mogadishu, Kismayo and Baidoa; it focuses its attention on reaching a political settlement.

¹¹⁴ See SG report S/1994/1068 of September 1994, paragraphs 25 to 27, for a sample of incidents faced by UNOSOM: "On 7 September a UNOSOM logistics convoy of 18 trucks was ambushed near Wanlaweyn. Only one vehicle reached Baledogle (...) On 29 July, in Belet Weyne, troops of the Zimbabwean contingent were completely overrun by a strong militia force. One UNOSOM soldier was killed and the UNOSOM troops had to abandon all their equipment to the militia (...) On 22 August, an Indian unit escorting a supply convoy was ambushed by armed militia near Burlego, on the Baledogle-Baidoa road. Seven Indian soldiers were killed during this incident. On 31 August, three Indian doctors were killed in Baidoa when a rifle grenade exploded as they were leaving the officers' mess (...) During a ceremony [in Balad on 9 September] to hand over some United Nations equipment to the local authorities, the latter demanded that all United Nations equipment be handed over to them. In the afternoon of the same day, approximately 100 militia, supported by "technicals", attacked a UNOSOM position protected by troops of the Zimbabwean contingent, with a view to seizing all the

Despite its unprecedented scale, UNOSOM failed to create a safe operating environment for humanitarian aid delivery, or to reach a political settlement. With crises in Rwanda and the Balkans claiming the attention of the international community, and with Somalia being perceived as of no strategic interest, political engagement diminished. With no “acute” emergency and no peacekeeping forces, foreign aid declined, from a budget of US\$1.5 billion for UNOSOM II in 1993, to \$20-25 million in the second half of the 1990s (Chart 6). Overall, Western aid fell to below pre-war levels by 1997 (Chart 2). Many international agencies closed their operations or contracted them out to local Somali NGOs.

Reflections on the UN intervention in Somalia, 1992-1995

* The net result of UNOSOM II was:

- Somalia henceforth was seen as a ‘basket case’, and the international community disengaged.
- Somali trust in UN impartiality was broken, as the UN often became a party to the conflict.
- Somali faction leaders came to see themselves, and to be seen by foreigners, as the heirs to Somalia’s sovereignty.
- The UN’s reputation was tarnished globally as it did not achieve the objectives it had set itself.
- US public opinion turned against the UN, as it was believed that ‘our soldiers have fought bravely’ and that they were the victim of a political quagmire caused by fuzzy UN planning.
- The US and the international community came to fear military intervention in civil conflicts, like in Rwanda and ex-Yugoslavia.

All observers and experts agree that UNOSOM was a resounding failure, from beginning to end. The mission left in 1995 without having achieved any of its objectives. What are the lessons that can be learned from this experience?

* The initial response was ‘too little, too late’. By January 1992, the famine that claimed around 300,000 lives, and the conflict which had claimed tens of thousands of lives¹¹⁵ and sent hundreds of thousands seeking refuge outside the country, were far too advanced to stem. The principal reason for this late reaction was the UN principle of non-interference and respect of sovereignty. The intervention that resulted from UNSC resolutions 733 and 751 still sought to base itself on these principles; it was only in December 1992 that Chapter VII of the UN Charter was invoked for another type of response.

* The muscular approach advocated by the UN and the USA in a second phase backfired spectacularly when it was applied to eliminate ‘spoilers’, in this case General Aideed. Although the UN claimed it was retaliation against an attack on its peacekeepers, the long-standing enmity between Aideed and international forces made it seem, to Somalis in any case, that the UN was attacking the Habar-Gidir clan of the Hawiye. This allowed Aideed to mobilize a number of Somalis that the UN could impossibly defeat, even with 28,000 troops.

equipment before the troops withdrew. UNOSOM troops reacted immediately in self-defence. Four militia members were killed and 39 captured during this incident. No casualties were incurred by the UNOSOM troops. The Zimbabwean contingent finally left Balad with all equipment and stores intact. Immediately upon their departure, some 300 men, women and children rushed into the camp to pick up leftovers.”

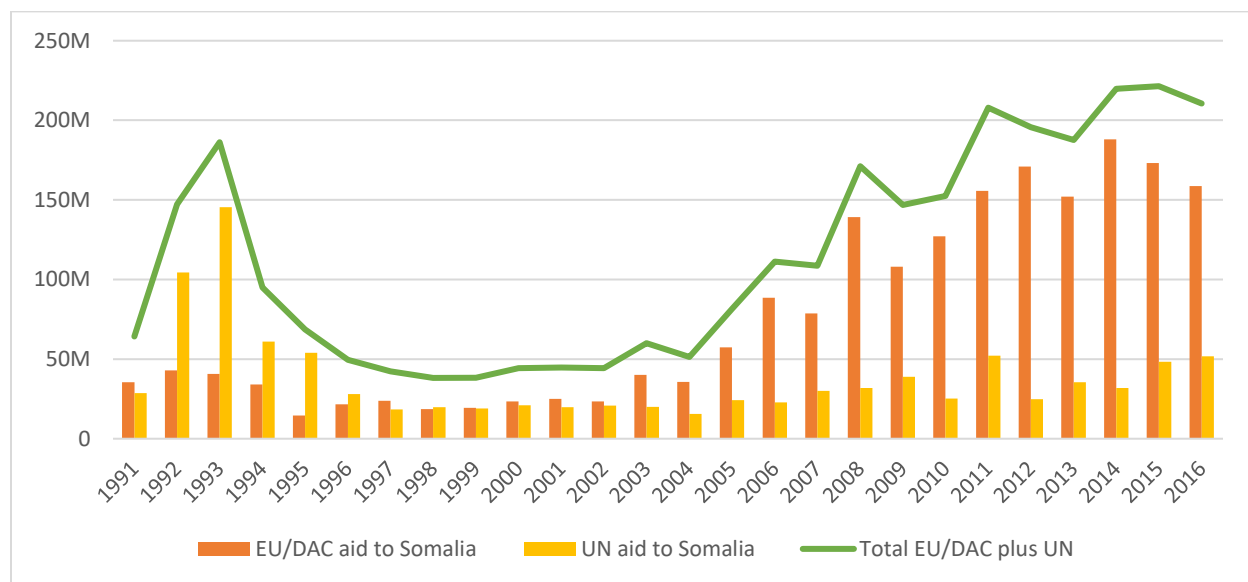
¹¹⁵ Bradbury, M., 1994, p. 16, estimates that 400,000 Somalis died in the first three years of the civil war from famine, epidemic outbreaks and from war violence.

* The reason this clash came about was the disarmament effort by the UN against clan militias. In March 1993, in a classical case of ‘mission creep’¹¹⁶, the UN secretary general, bolstered by favourable impressions of the new muscular approach, decided to go to the root of the Somali problem and to vastly expand the UN mission and help Somalis rebuild a functioning polity. This overstretch fatally affected UNOSOM II.

1.6 The International Community withdraws to the side lines (1995 – 2005)

After the failures of the UN led mission, international leadership in Somalia passed to donor governments, coordinated through the Somalia Aid Coordination Body (SACB) and chaired by the European Commission (EC). As the largest donor to Somalia, the EC exerted considerable influence on the direction of aid policy in the mid-1990s. In the absence of famine or large-scale conflict, the country was judged to be moving towards recovery and Somalia’s problems were redefined in developmental terms. The focus of international aid switched from “relief” to “development” and “local solutions”¹¹⁷.

Chart 6: Net flows of the EU/DAC and UN to Somalia in current US\$ (source: The World Bank)



Note: DAC stands for Development Assistance Committee of the OECD; it regroups all main developed donor nations plus the EU institutions¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ This is the term used to indicate shifting and generally expanding goals of a mission that was originally much more succinct. For example, ‘protecting humanitarian aid deliveries’ becomes ‘disarming all militias and including them in a political reconciliation process’.

¹¹⁷ Bradbury, M., 2010.

¹¹⁸ Figures from the Somalia Aid Coordination Body (SACB) give as total assistance to Somalia in fiscal year 2002 \$174.4 million, and for 2003 \$271 million. It is not clear to this author what the base for this discrepancy is.

Humanitarian Assistance

Chart 6, above, clearly indicates how the UN role as major donor to Somalia in the early 1990s was gradually eclipsed by the EU and bilateral donors. From 1996 to 2004, absolute funding levels were very low, compared with the 1980s (see Chart 2) and the post-2005 period. From 2005 onwards, the UN contribution again increased – from an average of \$20 million/year in the decade from 1995 to 2004, to \$34 million/year in the following decade (2005-2014). In the same period, the net flows from DAC countries increased from a yearly average of \$29 million to \$138 million.

Chart 6 does not include security assistance, for example the payment of AMISOM troops, the cost of anti-piracy operations, and bilateral security assistance and related costs. The international community did not incur any such costs from 1995 to 2007; AMISOM started in 2007-2008 and anti-piracy operations were set up in 2008 (EU-NAVFOR) and 2009 (UN-mandated CTF-151 and NATO's Operation Ocean Shield), while capacity-building of the Somali Security Forces accelerated in the second decade of the 21st century.

The focus of intervention in Somalia in the 1990s was almost strictly humanitarian. Somalia scored near the bottom (161 of 163) in The Human Development Report of 1998, for which, for the first time, a separate publication was made covering Somalia¹¹⁹. Although there was relative peace in most of the country, socio-economic indicators were still terrible¹²⁰. Donors worked through NGOs to continue to provide humanitarian relief where needed, but also start development work where possible.

In the UN 1996/97 consolidated appeal for funding, the country was divided into three zones: of *crisis* (most of South Central Somalia), of *transition* (Central Somalia and parts of South Central) and of *recovery* (Puntland and Somaliland)¹²¹. Besides, donors supported the IDP camps in Kenya, Ethiopia and Yemen. But funding for Somalia was hard to get by, as Kofi Annan noted in a report to the Security Council in December 2000, mentioning “lack of media coverage and donor fatigue” as part of the problem¹²².

Given the lack of security for aid workers in Somalia, nearly all international NGOs and even some Somali ones relocated to Nairobi following the withdrawal of UNOSOM; the UN agencies and embassies, and most donors covering Somalia were already based there. Their programmes in Somalia were all remotely managed, with field staff or local partners implementing much of the actual work. This had several consequences¹²³ that continue until today:

- Most of the aid overhead is spent in Nairobi; the peripheral benefits of expatriates renting houses, buying cars, doing their shopping and accessing local services accrue to Kenya, not Somalia. In fact, the percentage of funding earmarked for Somalia and actually spent there might dwindle to about 20-30%¹²⁴.

¹¹⁹ Bradbury, Menkhaus & Marchal for UNDP – *Human Development Report Somalia 2001*.

¹²⁰ In particular the mother and infant mortality rate. UNDP HDR Somalia 2001.

¹²¹ Le Sage & Majid, 2002, *The Livelihoods Gap: Responding to the Economic Dynamics of Vulnerability in Somalia*, Disasters 2002, 26:1, pp 10-27

¹²² Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Somalia S/2000/1211, Paragraphs 52 and 56.

¹²³ Partially based on Menkhaus, K., 2003a, *Somalia: A Situation Analysis and Trend Assessment*; commissioned by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Protection Information Section (DIP), 2003; and partially on my own observations working for a NGO covering Somalia but based in Nairobi.

¹²⁴ Menkhaus, K., 2003, p. 56

- Decisions made in Nairobi, among staff that rarely visits the field and has no intimate knowledge of Somali sociocultural realities, may have limited or adverse effects in the field.
- Field staff in Somalia, trying to bridge the gap between the reality they operate in and the decisions made remotely in Nairobi, may have strong incentives to hide certain failures or adverse effects of the programmes they run. This disconnect may also allow field staff to skim the budgets and steer programmes in ways that benefit themselves (for example, recruiting friends and family or providing aid to their own community).
- To remedy adverse effects of remote management, programme directors in Nairobi and their donors may put in place costly 'third-party monitoring' mechanisms, further reducing the amount of funding actually spent on the programmes; while for the monitors, who can also not access field operations, the incentive to report positively is strong, so actual problems go unreported.

The net effect was that Somalis, already suspicious about the true motives of the aid community, grew even more disenchanted with the whole international aid sector and NGOs in particular.

The Political Process

The fragmentation that characterized Somalia was reversed, according to expert observers, in the late 1990s¹²⁵. With the formation of Puntland (1998), a state in Bay and Bakool¹²⁶ (1999) and the Transitional National Government (TNG), centrifugal forces were checked. This was mirrored in the growth of cities such as Hargeisa, Garowe, Bosaso and Baidoa.

While the UN and the international community had all but disengaged from the local political front¹²⁷, they did back regional initiatives taken by Kenya (1996), Ethiopia (1997), Egypt (1997) and Djibouti (2000) to reach a political settlement in Somalia; generally, however, the country was relatively peaceful in the second half of the 1990s and external powers were not strongly inclined to intervene until the onset of the Global War on Terror, which kicked off in Somalia with the Ethiopian invasion in 2006.

The regional and international efforts to rebuild a Somali state seemed a logical response to the analysis that most of Somalia's problems stemmed from state collapse. But in fact, such international conferences provoked conflict rather than peace. For potential participants the stakes were high: peace talks were a way to access international funding (starting with a visa, a plane ticket and a room in a luxury hotel) and gain political ascendance within one's community. Menkhaus, for example, notices that, with each successive 'national reconciliation' conference, new military factions would appear that claimed to represent a population group, but often had no such mandate¹²⁸.

¹²⁵ Marchal, Bradbury & Menkhaus in the UNDP Human Development Report Somalia 2001.

¹²⁶ The rich agricultural lands inhabited by the Rahanweyn had been wrecked by continuous strife until the Rahanweyn Resistance Army, with Ethiopian backing, established its authority over Bay and Bakool in 1999. This allowed the return of humanitarian workers, until Al Shabaab expelled most of them in 2009.

¹²⁷ Although the UN was not involved in the Arta Conference, the SG did request the Security Council to implement a trust fund for Somalia and to consider a new UN assistance mission in the country, and he requested the World Bank and IMF to re-engage with Somalia. He also suggested that the UN agencies relocate from Nairobi to Mogadishu, if and when a single authority had been established in that city and the harbour and airport would re-open. S/2000/1211, final paragraphs

¹²⁸ Menkhaus, K., *State Collapse in Somalia: Second Thoughts*, Review of African Political Economy 97, 2003, p. 409

The announcement of a new round of peace talks typically prompted factional or regional leaders to fight for supremacy over a clan or region. The Arta peace talks of 2000, and later the Eldoret talks of 2002, thus clearly led to conflict in the Jubas, Bay and Bakool, and Puntland¹²⁹. The outcomes of these peace talks led to even more conflict.

The Arta conference in Djibouti brokered by Omar Guelleh, the President of Djibouti (himself a Somali/Issa) attempted a novel approach, inviting clan elders and civil society groups for consultations to avoid relying on faction leaders (warlords). A new formula was invented for clan representation in politics, namely the '4.5 formula'. This gives one equal part of representation to each of the four major clan families: Hawiye, Darood, Rahanweyn and Dir/Isaaq, and half a part for the minorities (Bantu, coastal communities and professional minorities). This formula is still used in 2018; for example in the 275-member federal parliament there are 61 seats each for the major clan groups and 31 for the minorities.

The TNG decided on in Arta in 2000, led by Mohamed Hassan 'Salad', most strongly represented the interests of the Mogadishu business class and their Hawiye protectors. It was immediately opposed by many regional strongmen, who had not participated in Arta or dropped out before the end. As the TNG included (business-friendly) Islamist elements and was from the onset supported by Gulf states, Ethiopia also opposed it and convened the dissidents in a new organization, the Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council (SRRC). The dominant figure in this alliance became Abdullahi Yusuf, the President of Puntland since 1998¹³⁰.

The TNG established itself in Mogadishu in December 2000; it set up the trappings of a government and appealed for foreign funding. It had already secured international legitimacy, and Somalia was for the first time since 1991 again represented by a state. However, donors adopted a 'wait-and-see' approach, and only Saudi Arabia and Libya provided some funding. Since the TNG had few warlords and thus no armed forces, and most of the territory – including much of the capital – was controlled by its opponents, it soon became clear that it would not be able to govern. It also did not try to reach out to the SRRC or other opponents, or to improve the situation in Mogadishu, for example by reopening the harbour and airport. Instead, its members immediately engaged in conflict over the spoils of government¹³¹.

Therefore, the international community pushed for a new round of peace talks that were held in Kenya (in Eldoret, 2002-2003, and Mbagathi, 2003-2004) to reconcile the parties in conflict. After nearly two years of expensive conferences, a new parliament was elected along the '4.5' formula, reflecting the growing consensus among the international community that real political power in Somalia had reverted to clan elders and local politics. The 275 MPs then elected Abdullahi Yusuf as President of a new Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in October 2004. This surprise election result – the sitting president Salad Hassan was another main contender – was reportedly obtained by Ethiopia's vote-buying among MPs¹³². Ethiopia (with tacit Western backing) thus ensured that a pro-Ethiopian, anti-Islamist warlord would lead a new government based on clan balance.

¹²⁹ Menkhaus, K., 2003, p. 410

¹³⁰ These included Shatigaduud (RRA faction), 'Morgan' (Majerteen in Bakool), Hussein Aideed (Habar-Gidir/Sacad), Abgal/Warsangeli and Biimaal clan militias

¹³¹ Menkhaus, K., 2003b, p. 418

¹³² Menkhaus, K., 2007, p. 361. The going rate of an MP's vote was \$ 3000-5000.

Yusuf, instead of reaching out to his opponents from the ex-TNG, pressed his advantage by appointing a PM close to Ethiopia, who presented an 82-member cabinet. The European Union agreed to pay for the ministers and the MPs, most of whom remained in Nairobi claiming they would be unsafe in Somalia (and Nairobi was where the international donors were), but the TNG faction returned to Mogadishu. Tensions soon rose between both groups, and Yusuf didn't manage to reach Mogadishu until 2007; instead he settled first in Jowhar, and then in Baidoa. He attempted to convince Ethiopia to send peacekeepers, to allow him to recapture the capital and most of the rest of South and Central Somalia from his rivals, but the international community was hesitant to fund this venture.

Yusuf's government made no attempt to actually govern, even in the town of Baidoa, and the TFG would have joined the long list of failed attempts to rebuild a Somali government (let alone state), were it not for a factor that played in its advantage: the Global War on Terror.

Reflections on the period of minimal international involvement

- * Although the consensus in 1995 was that after UNSOM's withdrawal the country would slip back into chaos and war, the reverse happened. Various forms of local governance emerged, involving clan elders, faction leaders, businessmen, Islamists, Sharia courts, professionals and intellectuals. Fighting continued in some areas, but at a low level with, for example, very little displacement. When the international community again became involved, mainly through neighbouring countries, local conflicts increased, though remaining still modest compared to the violence levels after 2006.
- * Successful local governance and peace initiatives led observers to advocate for a 'building-block' approach instead of a top-down effort to rebuild a national state. This could account for the greater autonomy of Somaliland and Puntland, but also allow for Rahanweyn and other aspirations in a future structure. This is why the current federal model came to be seen as the most appropriate.
- * The 4.5 formula was adopted in 2000 to give traditional leaders a larger share of power, hoping that this would render the government more stable. Until then, self-proclaimed political leaders, heading the largest factions, had been reluctantly seen as the repository of Somalia's sovereignty. The MPs selected by the clans in the 4.5 system were, however, often not clan elders or their representatives, but political entrepreneurs, so the parliaments elected in 2000 and 2004 were not representative of Somali society.
- * The assumption of international actors that Somalis invited to peace talks would represent their constituency proved erroneous. In successive rounds, different selection criteria were used to ensure better representativity. But, what if the *principle* of political representation was not shared between Somalis and foreigners? If a participant to a negotiation has not been vested with a mandate, however symbolically, by the people he/she is supposed to represent, how can he/she speak in their name? What is the tradition of political representation among Somalis? Does it exist outside the clan context?
- * In the second half of the 1990s, donors and humanitarian agencies led the intervention in Somalia. Despite plans to support development in areas that were recovering and to spread the aid more intelligently, aid seems to have had little impact in these years. Remote management from Nairobi was part of the reason. Somalis in general show little respect for the aid sector.

1.7 Somalia in the Global War on Terror (2005 – now)

Immediately after 11 September 2001 ('9/11'), Somalia was identified as a possible hotbed for Islamic terrorism. The only known Islamist faction in Somalia, Al Itihaad Al Islamiyya ('Islamic Union') and its leader Hassan Dahir Aweys were put on the list of designated terrorist organizations by the US on September 23rd because of presumed links with Al Qaeda and the 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Of more immediate consequence for Somalis, however, the main financial remittances (hawala) company, Al Barakaat, was shut down by US fiscal authorities, and its \$8.5 million reserves impounded. This killed many small Somali businesses and complicated the transfers that kept many Somali families afloat and allowed small investments¹³³, the more so because *all* Somali remittances companies could be closed on the same grounds (that terrorists supposedly used them to transfer funds).

The decision to put Somalia on the terror watch list was based on assumption, not fact. While 'failed states' had hitherto been considered a humanitarian dilemma, post 9/11 it became a global security threat. With the reasoning that Afghanistan had provided Al Qaeda with an operational base *because* it was a failed state, Somalia automatically also became suspect, as a failed Muslim state with a known Islamic political faction¹³⁴. But there was no hard evidence that terrorists were hiding in Somalia or that Somalis abetted international terrorism. As Le Sage noted at the time, "*to many Somalis and international observers, the spotlight that has shined on Somalia as part of the war on terrorism has come as a surprise.*"¹³⁵

The US administration had little direct knowledge of Somalia. Since the 1993 Black Hawk Down incident, it had disengaged almost entirely from Somalia. When media (falsely) reported, in October 2001, that Al Qaeda was transferring its arsenal and leadership from Afghanistan to Somalia, US intelligence and military officers scrambled to the region to establish operations. They did not heed expert opinion that there was no sign of AQ implantation in Somalia, and that it was highly unlikely to happen¹³⁶.

As in Afghanistan¹³⁷, the US was often misled by local partners, particularly its Ethiopian ally. Ethiopia considered that any (possibly) anti-Ethiopian group, including the Transitional National Government, Al Itihaad, the Sharia courts and local warlords, were terrorists¹³⁸, and provided US officials with hit lists of

¹³³ Besides Al Barakaat, Al Haramain charitable organization was also closed down under Executive Order 13224, ('to block the assets of individuals and entities that provide support, services, or assistance to, or otherwise associate with, terrorists and terrorist organizations...'). Later investigations showed that both groups could not be held responsible for the charges against them, see for example Associated Press, '*Italian prosecutor says no basis for terrorism charges in probe of alleged Somali financial link to al-Qaida*' (07 Jan. 2004), but the fear it struck in all other hawala operations led many of them to discontinue their operations in Somalia and other risky countries.

¹³⁴ For a typical exposé of Somalia as a terrorist threat, see Phillips, J., 2002, *Somalia and Al Qaeda: Implications for the War on Terrorism*, in The Heritage Foundation #1526, April 2002.

¹³⁵ Le Sage, 2004, p. 5.

¹³⁶ Ken Menkhaus, in a 2002 testimony to the US Congress Foreign Relations Committee, stressed that Al Itihaad (AIAI) was not related to Al Qaeda, that the TNG was not a front for AIAI, that AIAI had no military training bases within Somalia, and that Somalia was an unlikely 'safe haven' for Osama Ben Laden, and in fact for any foreigner. Other experts (i.e. Hoehne, Bryden, Elliot & Holzer) wrote policy papers that argued against a US anti-terror campaign in Somalia, but their influence seems to have been scant.

¹³⁷ See, e.g., Anand Gopal on the extent to which US forces were misled by local partners.

¹³⁸ Ahmed I. Samatar and Abdi Ismail Samatar, 2002, describe the four-pronged strategy by Ethiopia to unseat the TNG, including diplomatic efforts to withdraw recognition from the TNG, organizing an opposition front (the

targets (Le Sage, 2004, Ch. 1) including terrorist training camps. However, when the US surveyed these targets from an air base hastily established at Gode in Eastern Ethiopia, they found nothing to bomb.

The main target, Al Itihaad, proved particularly elusive. US commandoes searched in vain for its training camps. Although AQ had established links with small Islamist groups including Al Itihaad in the early 1990s, it had left Somalia in 1995¹³⁹, leaving local Islamist groups to their own devices. Al Itihaad had established a local administration in Luuq and other towns of Gedo, and maintained a small military presence at Ras Kamboni in Lower Juba, Ceel Waaq in Gedo and Laas Qoray in Puntland. The areas it controlled were among the better-governed of South Central Somalia and NGOs generally appreciated their presence.

The Itihaad branch in the Ogaden conducted several impressive attacks against Ethiopian targets, even in Addis Ababa, and in 1998 and 99 Ethiopia invaded Gedo, routing Al Itihaad from all its positions and setting up a buffer zone it still controls in 2018. Al Itihaad then gave up warfare as a strategy¹⁴⁰. Instead, it focused on delivering social services in areas where it had influence and used its good connections to the business community and the Sharia courts to play an increasing role in security and politics in Mogadishu and the Lower Shabelle region.

In 2002, the USA established a Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HoA) at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, whose focus was on monitoring and eliminating the terrorist threat in the Horn of Africa, mostly using covert action¹⁴¹. It built security capacities among the governments of Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya with joint military Counter-Terrorism exercises, security training, improved control at the airports and seaports, and torture¹⁴² techniques. Finally, the US also sought to directly engage potential Somali allies in the War on Terror, including the very willing anti-TNG coalition of Ethiopian-supported warlords regrouped in the ‘Somali Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Council’, which—as we have seen above—were the beneficiaries of the 2002-2004 talks to establish a Transitional Federal Government. The US plan may have been modelled on Afghanistan, where the Northern Alliance reconquered power in 2001 with the help of US airpower and commando teams.

According to the US National Security Council’s strategy of 2003¹⁴³, “*The principal objective of our collective response will be the rebuilding of a state that can look after its own people – their welfare,*

SRRC), military supplies to SRRC warlords and ‘actionable intelligence’ provided to the US and international allies on supposed links between the TNG and international terrorism.

¹³⁹ In those years, Al Qaeda was itself a very minor player and Somali Islamists might not even remember having met them at the time.

¹⁴⁰ In 2001, Al Itihaad had split into three groups: the militant Ethiopian/Ogaden wing, which had committed most of the terrorist attacks, had become autonomous; those that sought to establish an Islamic state in Somaliland and Puntland (without violence) formed a movement named Al I’tisam; while the wing led by Aweys continued to rely on its projection of force to play a role in Mogadishu and Lower Shabelle.

¹⁴¹ Le Sage (2004) gives a few examples of such US covert actions, including raiding internet cafés in Mogadishu, installing underwater surveillance cameras near Ras Kamboni, and targeted killings of senior Islamist political, judicial and intellectual leaders.

¹⁴² I actually wrote ‘*enhanced interrogation*’ but Microsoft Word prompted me to ‘avoid using euphemisms’ and suggested the word ‘torture’ instead. The US Embassy person in Kenya in charge of the security cooperation programme with the Kenyan government once privately admitted to me that teaching ‘*enhanced interrogation*’ was one of the ways the US helped Kenya fight terrorism, noting that existing Kenyan practices (inherited from the British during the Mau Mau rebellion) were rougher.

¹⁴³ National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, 2003.

health, prosperity, and freedom – and control its borders” (this point will be further pursued in Chapter 3). But in fact the US did not engage in Somali state-building during this period.

The decisive, yet ill-informed, US action to counter a non-existent global terrorist threat in Somalia¹⁴⁴ by bolstering the traditional opponents of the Islamists had adverse results. The coalition of anti-TNG warlords regrouped in the SRRC that captured the power of the new TFG in 2004, was thoroughly unpopular in Somalia. The TFG’s pro-Ethiopian and anti-Islamist discourse may have helped it gain acceptance in the international community, but it made anti-Ethiopian and pro-Islamist sentiment seem nationalistic among the Somali population¹⁴⁵.

President Yusuf Abdullahi’s insistent request for Ethiopian troops to help him recapture Mogadishu from the ‘Mogadishu group’ that had split from his government, angered many Somalis. Throughout Somalia, the official transfer of power from local to national institutions brought confusion; as we have seen, national political processes often revived local tensions about representation, which easily degenerated into armed clashes. Into this political void stepped the Sharia courts.

The rise and fall of the Islamic Courts Union

Sharia courts were an innovation in Somalia, where religious law was traditionally part of customary law (*xeer*) and dispensed by clan elders. The first court appeared in Mogadishu in 1994, supported by businessmen and other local strongmen. It resolved family, property, contract, criminal and other cases based on Sharia, and its decisions were enforced with the help of militias paid for by local businessmen. Although the Sharia courts could only resolve issues within their communities – not among communities – and they were thus by necessity constricted to the clans and sub-clans living in their area¹⁴⁶, they expressly avoided clan politics and were perceived as a neutral, effective justice-dispensing force.

The fortunes of the Sharia courts waxed and waned over the years. Local warlords would try to dismantle them, and in 2000 the TNG tried to integrate them into its own justice sector, which existed on paper only, effectively disintegrating them. Finally, the US accusation that the Sharia courts were radical organizations harbouring terrorist elements made them undesirable allies to the TNG. But, given the lack of TNG’s real power, some of the principal Sharia courts simply continued functioning, and they remained popular. These were the departing points for the swift comeback of Sharia courts from 2004 to 2006.

Besides lawlessness and lack of governance caused by the TNG – TFG fiasco, criminality in Mogadishu was maybe at its worst in 2004-2005, when, according to Marchal (2009), *‘kidnapping was the best business in town’*¹⁴⁷. Between 2004 and 2006 Sharia courts were established in many localities in

¹⁴⁴ In an extensive analysis in his doctoral dissertation, Le Sage concludes that, although AQ may have had some presence in Somalia, it amounted to very little, most of their operatives and activities being in Kenya. Other experts agree; more distant observers (in US security think-tanks and the global media), however, painted a very different picture, where Somalia was deeply penetrated by Al Qaeda.

¹⁴⁵ This is also the assessment of current President Farmaajo in his 2009 Master’s thesis: “Washington committed another foreign policy blunder. As allies, it solicited none other than the Somali warlords who had effectively feudalized and starved the country. Thus, against its policy and ideals, the United States effectively legitimized their reign of terror.” (p. 20)

¹⁴⁶ Given the location in which they appeared, the original courts were mostly Hawiye – an argument used by the predominantly Darood SRRC to oppose them.

¹⁴⁷ Marchal, 2009, p. 387.

Mogadishu and throughout South-Central Somalia, on the initiative of Islamist activists, businessmen and clan elders. These courts then came together in a loose structure named ‘the Council of Islamic Courts’, or CIC (the movement became known later by the acronym ICU, or Islamic Courts Union), led by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Aden, who would become president of a new Transitional Federal Government in 2009. Although the courts’ primary function remained the enforcement of the rule of law, they also came to take on some political functions, similar to local governing bodies.

The Sharia courts had long been seen by both the USA and Ethiopia as harbouring radical Islamist elements. The influence of Al Itihaad and its leader Hassan Dahir Aweys within the ICU was real, which for the US was sufficient to define the ICU as ‘supporting terrorists’. The expansion of the courts’ influence gravely concerned the US, who saw them as akin to the Taliban. Besides targeted killings of court officials and associated politicians¹⁴⁸, the US encouraged the formation of a coalition of Hawiye warlords which they hoped could boot ICU out of Mogadishu.

Thus, in February 2006 the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT) was formed, including warlords such as Yalahow, Qanyare, Mohamed Dheere, Musa Sudi, Qeybdiid and Bashir Raage. They received \$150,000 each per month¹⁴⁹. The US may not have realized that most members of the ARPCT were Abgaal and Murusade, while their opponents were mostly Habar-Gidir, thus transforming this seemingly ideological ‘counter-terrorism’ fight into one more chapter in the struggle between Hawiye clans for supremacy in the capital¹⁵⁰. Fighting started immediately as a business dispute over the makeshift port of El Maan. Over the next four months the ICU, and notably its military wing Al Shabaab, defeated all the warlords and for the first time since 1990 Mogadishu was under one single authority.

What contributed to the ICU victory was the perception that the warlords of the ARPCT were foreign stooges¹⁵¹, a general civil-society exasperation about insecurity and lack of governance¹⁵², and the fighting prowess of Al Shabaab. In all areas controlled by the ICU, their security forces implemented draconian security and Sharia-based law and order. Although in some cases (women’s veil, prohibition to watch the 2006 World Cup) this went too far for most residents, all welcomed the improved security and governance. The ICU removed roadblocks, cleared the streets of rubble and rubbish, and reopened Mogadishu’s harbour and airport. For the first time since 1991, citizens could move freely and securely within Mogadishu and beyond.

Later, the months from June to December 2006 would be seen as a ‘golden age’¹⁵³, also by foreign aid agencies who could for the first time operate with minimal predation by warlord ‘administrations’ and the insecurity caused by the *mooryaan*¹⁵⁴. Concerns about enforced Islamic radicalization of Somali society subsisted among humanitarians, Somali intellectuals and human rights activists, but it appears

¹⁴⁸ Obviously, these assassinations were never claimed by the US, but it was clear to most Somali observers at the time that anti-ICU target designation by Ethiopians and associated warlords, together with US technology, were responsible for these killings. See Menkhaus, 2007, and Le Sage, 2004.

¹⁴⁹ ICG authored article in Foreign Affairs: *Blowing the Horn*, March 1st, 2007.

¹⁵⁰ ICG report, 2006.

¹⁵¹ At the time there were rumours that US forces were fighting on the side of ARPCT; see ICG 2006, pp 12-13.

¹⁵² Which had manifested itself in the March-June 2005 uprising, or *kadoon*. See Chapter 6 hereafter for more.

¹⁵³ The expression is taken from Barnes & Hassan, 2007, p. 6.

¹⁵⁴ Personal discussions (2016-2018) with several international NGO staff members who were present at that time. The ‘mooryaan’ are, as explained elsewhere, young Somalis with guns, either working for a faction or for themselves.

that actual radical implementation of, for example, corporal punishment or wearing the veil was not systematic; overall it was even infrequent. The ICU remained a broad-based coalition of Islamists of different persuasions, business interests and clan elders, united only in wanting an end to the civil war and efficacious governance based on Islam.

Within the ICU, the radical Islamist elements were gradually strengthened by US/Ethiopian and TFG efforts to neutralize them. In response to the targeted assassinations, Al Shabaab had started its own programme of assassinations of those they identified as traitors in the service of Ethiopia or the US. The battle to liberate Mogadishu from the ARPCT drew many young fighters to Al Shabaab. AS established a school targeting youth without—or far from their—family with a strong emphasis on doctrinal ‘orientation’ and combat training. In those years the jihad was being fought in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan. The leader of Al Shabaab, Ayro, had himself fought in Afghanistan.¹⁵⁵

The ICU, with Al Shabaab forces in the vanguard, quickly swept through the rest of South Central Somalia; by the autumn of 2006 the TFG only controlled an area around Baidoa (protected by Ethiopian troops) and Puntland. The international community continued backing its creation, the TFG, despite that government’s evident lack of capacity, even to govern Baidoa.

In early December 2006, the UN, in Security Council Resolution 1725, authorized an international intervention in Somalia, IGASOM¹⁵⁶, under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)¹⁵⁷. In a flagrant violation of the spirit of UNSCR 1725, which specified (Article 4) that troops from countries neighbouring Somalia would not be deployed¹⁵⁸, the Ethiopian army captured Mogadishu in December 2006. The US denied backing the Ethiopian invasion, but a later Wikileaks document has provided evidence for what many at the time suspected, that the US did give Ethiopia the green light¹⁵⁹ and very probably provided logistical support. To everybody’s surprise, the ICU did not oppose any resistance and disbanded instead, but Al Shabaab elements as well as former warlords remained in the cities and countryside to fight the Ethiopians and the TFG.

The period that followed was described, by many observers, as the bloodiest episode in Mogadishu’s history since the 1991-92 civil war. The Ethiopian army shelled neighbourhoods that were considered ‘hotbeds of resistance’, meaning they targeted most of the city. An estimated 20-30% of Mogadishu’s

¹⁵⁵ Marchal, L., 2009.

¹⁵⁶ Excerpts from Article 3, detailing the mandate of ‘IGASOM’: *To monitor progress by the Transitional Federal Institutions and the Union of Islamic Courts in implementing agreements reached in their dialogue / To train the Transitional Federal Institutions’ security forces to enable them to provide their own security and to help facilitate the re-establishment of national security forces of Somalia.* However it is article 1 that is almost comically far off the mark: *[The SC] Reiterates that the Transitional Federal Charter and Institutions offer the only route to achieving peace and stability in Somalia, emphasizes the need for continued credible dialogue between the Transitional Federal Institutions and the Union of Islamic Courts, and affirms therefore that the following provisions of the present resolution, based on the decisions of IGAD and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, aim solely at supporting peace and stability in Somalia through an inclusive political process and creating the conditions for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Somalia while at the same time deploying foreign forces.*

¹⁵⁷ IGAD is an intergovernmental agency dealing with issues in the Horn of Africa. It is composed of the following countries: Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and Somalia. It has been strongly involved in Somalia over the past years.

¹⁵⁸ In a report by the UN SG of 22 December 2006, mention is not even made of the presence of Ethiopian troops in Somalia; instead, it makes it appear only the TFG and the ICU are fighting together: UN doc S/PRST/2006/59.

¹⁵⁹ See wikileaks.org.

one million residents fled the city and thousands died¹⁶⁰. The TFG's troops that came with the Ethiopians were mostly Puntland Darood, and they took revenge for the Darood's expulsion from Mogadishu in 1991 by looting and harassing the local population. Meanwhile, the TFG made no attempt to govern the city or re-establish security¹⁶¹. The Ethiopian forces decided to withdraw in December 2008, but Mogadishu remained at war until mid-2011, when Al Shabaab withdrew its troops.

Renewed War in Somalia

After the Ethiopian invasion, the United States carried out several airstrikes against presumed Al Qaeda operatives in Somalia and Al Shabaab leaders, deemed guilty by association¹⁶². The UN was an impotent side-player, incessantly calling for dialogue. The European Union, which had footed most of the bill for the Transitional Federal institutions, also had little influence on the ground in Somalia. The IGASOM intervention force requested in UNSCR 1725 started as a small contingent of Ugandan soldiers, renamed AMISOM in Mogadishu in March 2007; they initially had negligible impact as they were supposed to keep a 'peace' that did not exist.

Throughout Somalia, the Ethiopian presence fostered a nationalist reaction with Islamic overtones. The Eritrean government, in its proxy war with Ethiopia, tried to capture this momentum by convening the ICU leadership, clan leaders and the heads of factions opposed to the TFG to Asmara in September 2007, to form the 'Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia', or ARS. Al Shabaab refused to participate in this political alliance and continued the fight on the ground, which gave it a clear resistance identity.

Between 2007 and 2009 Al Shabaab asserted its control over most of South Central Somalia. It received weapons deliveries from Eritrea (in violation of the arms embargo) and on the black market. *"It is the view of the Monitoring Group that the sheer quantities, numbers and diversity of arms, especially in central and southern Somalia, are greater than at any time since the early 1990s."* wrote the UN rapporteurs on the arms embargo in July 1997¹⁶³, noting that the Ethiopian army had ferried in and distributed to its allies weapons and ammunition without seeking an exemption from the UN Security Council. Ethiopia maintained thousands of troops in Somalia (in April 2008 a bracket of 5,000 to 20,000 troops was given¹⁶⁴), a presence that by itself was already a violation of the UN Arms Embargo. In the second half of 2008, the ENDF started withdrawing its troops and materiel, under a plan to hand over authority to the TFG. But the state was incapable of assuming that function. Ethiopia estimated that of the 17,000 Somali security forces it had trained by the end of 2008, 14,000 had deserted with their weapons and uniform¹⁶⁵.

Fighting broke out in many areas that had previously been peaceful. Some regional strongmen made alliances of convenience with Al Shabaab and others joined the movement. By late 2008, the Monitoring

¹⁶⁰ Menkhaus, K., 2007, p. 358. Marchal (2009) claims that 700,000 of Mogadishu's residents had fled by Nov. 2007.

¹⁶¹ Marchal, 2009, p. 393 states: *"Many inhabitants could have endorsed the TFG and the Ethiopian military presence in January and February 2007, had those two worked to normalize the situation, get economic activities on a new footing and secure the city. But, as mentioned above, that was not the plan of TFG officials who wanted to settle their own scores and enjoy the attributes of power without any concern for the people."*

¹⁶² See for example [this article in the NYT](#) from Feb. 2007, with examples of the US raids and their targets.

¹⁶³ Report by the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia S/2007/436, published on 18 July 2007.

¹⁶⁴ Report by the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia S/2008/274, published on 24 April 2008 (2008/1).

¹⁶⁵ Report by the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia S/2008/769, published on 10 Dec 2008 (2008/2) §22,

Group estimated that 90% of the territory south of Puntland was controlled or influenced by armed opposition groups. Besides Al Shabaab, these included local forces under nominal ICU/ARS command and JABISO, the military wing of Al I'tisam, a militant group that had branched off from Al Itihaad in 2008.

By the end of 2008, the Transitional Federal Government had also lost Baidoa to Al Shabaab, and it now only controlled parts of Mogadishu¹⁶⁶. It was kept alive by international injections of funding and security assistance, and by Ethiopian and AMISOM troops. Its own security forces (military, intelligence, police, presidential guard) were managed along clan lines, many of them Darood, making the TFG appear as an enemy organization by the Hawiye inhabiting Mogadishu and most of South Central Somalia. TFG Security forces often clashed internally, caused insecurity and crime¹⁶⁷ in the areas they influenced, and after training and rearming by a variety of foreign actors, they often deserted back to their clan.

The election of Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed as new president of the TFG in March 2009 returned peace to much of South Central Somalia. The followers of the ICU and other groups under the umbrella of ARS were now once again aligned with the government, leaving only Al Shabaab and Hizbul Islam in the armed opposition. Both¹⁶⁸, undertook an offensive in Mogadishu in May 2009 to boot out the new TFG, but they were stopped by a recently reinforced AMISOM backed by US weapons deliveries. Al Shabaab and Hizbul Islam remained in control of part of the capital city, and the urban war raged on. Mid-2009, the militant groups clashed, and by the end of 2009 Hizbul Islam had effectively disappeared, leaving Al Shabaab in control of the resistance. Ayro, killed by a US Tomahawk missile in 2008, was succeeded by Godane.

Aid delivery between state building and counter-terrorism

In 2008, one third of all casualties among aid workers in the world fell in Somalia. Despite the initial lack of security, aid agencies flocked to Somalia, encouraged by donors who made available considerable funding. But, despite a large-scale effort by NGOs, donors and the UN, a famine could not be averted in 2011-12, costing the lives of an estimated 250,000 civilians, a casualty tally similar to that of 1992-93.

During that previous famine, aid agencies had learnt to compose with forces on the ground, from the delivery point of aid to its distribution. Local NGO officials usually dealt directly with controlling clan factions to try and minimize taxation and confiscation, while maintaining the security of the NGOs and all involved in the humanitarian operation. It was no secret that NGOs, as well as UN agencies or the contractors they employed, had to pay some form of humanitarian tax to local authorities, also when they were affiliated to Al Shabaab, Al Itihaad or Hizbul Islam. Up to an extent, such 'support to local authorities' can be justified; for example, when the cash-stripped local authority is required to provide security to NGOs or their contractors, or needs a computer or fuel or funds for its own development projects, which serve NGOs. But it was well-known that many 'taxes' disappeared into private pockets or were pilfered at checkpoints by freelance militia. This is a reality aid agencies had to put up with.

¹⁶⁶ UN Monitoring group 2008/2 §57.

¹⁶⁷ There were reports of AMISOM and TFG commanders selling weapons and ammunition on the Mogadishu arms markets in several UN Monitoring Group reports published during this period.

¹⁶⁸ Hizbul Islam was created in February 2009 by several military groups under Aweys' leadership. In April 2009, he returned from his exile in Asmara, and the offensive together with AS started in May. By the end of the year the two groups had fallen out; some of Hizbul Islam joined Al Shabaab, the rest (including Aweys) disbanded.

In 2007, when the TFG had returned to Mogadishu with the Ethiopian army, the UN and donors decided to fully back it, hoping that this support would ‘make the TFG work’¹⁶⁹. They lavished support on federal institutions, notably a police force, and channelled funds through the nascent state institutions; the idea was that NGOs should contribute to ‘stabilization’ in areas the TFG controlled or conquered with the help of AMISOM; humanitarian aid thus became a kind of ‘peace dividend’. However, donors required NGOs to work through, or with, the federal government, to increase its capacity and legitimacy.

The problem was that those running the TFG had no desire to help either the aid community, or many of the people threatened by drought¹⁷⁰. Transitional authorities deeply mistrusted the humanitarian community, seeing them as spies in cahoots with the enemy¹⁷¹; indeed, many NGOs did not hide they preferred past arrangements with the ICU administration or any local authority that could ensure stability, security and low levels of corruption to working with the TFG. Predatory behaviour by government forces was worse than that by Al Shabaab¹⁷². The TFG thus seized the opportunity to impose strict and expensive licensing regimes on NGOs, and blocked aid deliveries that, it believed, were going to populations opposing it¹⁷³.

In the conflict between the TFG and the NGOs, the UN often chose the side of its ‘protégé’ and told NGOs to follow government directives. The UN even downplayed the threat of famine – in 2009 half of the population of South-Central Somalia, i.e. 3.5 million people, were threatened by famine according to aid agencies¹⁷⁴ – as a famine would reflect badly on the TFG and, by extension, on those who supported it. This situation contributed to the inadequate humanitarian response to the drought.

The other conundrum aid agencies in Somalia had to deal with, was counter-terrorism financing. The UN Special Representative of the Secretary General, Ould Abdallah, noted that the payments that NGOs were making to local authorities showed that “*those who claim neutrality can also be complicit*”, in other words, that ‘impartiality’ and ‘neutrality’, core values for the whole NGO sector, were already compromised, suggesting they stood on the side of the terrorists¹⁷⁵. For a few years, CT financing rules were not applied to humanitarian operators in Somalia, but that changed in 2009.

¹⁶⁹ Menkhaus, K., *Stabilisation and humanitarian access in a collapsed state: the Somali case*, in *Disasters* 34, 2010.

¹⁷⁰ Menkhaus, K., 2010, op. cit., p. 334, “*The state-building, stabilisation agenda only held up if a key assumption—namely, that the government was at least willing, if not yet able, to assist in the delivery of emergency relief to its own citizens—was true. That assumption was utterly untenable in 2007–08*”.

¹⁷¹ Menkhaus, K., 2010, op. cit., p. 333

¹⁷² Bradbury, M., *State-building, Counterterrorism, and Licensing Humanitarianism in Somalia*, Briefing Paper for the Feinstein Center, September 2010.

¹⁷³ Menkhaus, K., 2010, op. cit., p. 333, “*While it possessed almost no administrative capacity at all, the TFG insisted on exercising its sovereign right to control the flow and direction of international humanitarian aid. This was mainly driven by the desire to block aid delivery to populations that the TFG deemed sympathetic to the insurgency—namely, most of the Mogadishu population. In the midst of the massive exodus of Mogadishu residents from the war-torn capital in spring 2007, the TFG blocked convoys of food aid to internally displaced persons (IDPs), claiming some of the food might be old and that it had to inspect each truck to protect Somalis from the threat of expired grain. In reality, the TFG had no inspection capacity at all and merely sought to stop the aid shipments.*”

¹⁷⁴ My personal observation in 2016-18, including discussions with local Somali observers, is that the UN can grossly overstate the number of potential victims of humanitarian crises. For example, one could read in [Le Monde](#) that 25% of Somaliland’s population was in crisis or emergency situation in February 2017. My estimation would be that instead of 800,000, maybe about 8,000 Somalilanders needed humanitarian aid – 1% of the stated total.

¹⁷⁵ Ould Abdallah, A., *Why the world should not let Somalia go to the dogs* in Kenyan Daily Nation 25 June 2009.

That year, over US\$50 million of US humanitarian assistance programmed for Somalia through USAID and the Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance was suspended on the orders of the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, out of concern that it was at risk of benefiting Al Shabab.¹⁷⁶ This problem soon affected all humanitarian organizations working in South Central Somalia. How could they prove that none of the donor money was going toward Al Shabaab, especially when they knew the contrary was true?

Most of the estimated 250,000 fatalities of the 2011-2012 drought in South Central Somalia lived in areas controlled by Al Shabaab. Although part of the blame lies with Al Shabaab for worsening the crisis with inappropriate responses to the unfolding famine and contradictory policies toward aid agencies, all experts who wrote about this drama agree that counter-terrorism funding rules considerably hampered aid delivery¹⁷⁷.

The War on Terror as new matrix for intervention

Although Al Shabaab only pledged allegiance to Al Qaeda in 2012, the US considered it a terrorist organization from 2008 onwards. A report on Al Shabaab by the American Enterprise Institute from February 2010 is typical: *"The United States appears to be high on al Shabaab's list of international targets. The group began issuing threats against the United States in 2008, and it now professes an ideology resembling al Qaeda's. It has pledged allegiance to bin Laden and views itself as fighting the global Jihad led by al Qaeda."*¹⁷⁸ The report goes on to suggest AS was planning to attack the US presidential inauguration in 2009 and repeatedly warns its intended audience of US policy-makers to take the AS threat on US homeland security very seriously. These are either imagined threats or based on very flimsy evidence. In fact, until the time of writing Al Shabaab has never committed any attack, or planned one insofar as is known, outside East Africa.

As Roland Marchal puts it: *"The security approach structures the international response to the Somali crisis to the extent that there is little perceived need for an analysis of the situation on the ground, of its numerous grey areas and the contradictions habitually indulged in by all Somali actors. In this superficial understanding, Somali politics, once characterized by factionalism, ambitious politico-military entrepreneurs and shifting alliances, has become an arena where good guys endorsed by the international community fight against bad guys supported by Eritrea and al-Qaeda."*

The War on Terror since 2006 has drawn the international community to become more militarily involved in Somalia. From 2007 onwards, an African Union Mission (AMISOM) funded entirely by the EU has been growing; its mandate changed from purely defensive/training to offensive action in 2010. AMISOM helped the government secure Mogadishu (in 2011) and major towns (between 2012 and 2014), but since then the military confrontation has developed into a stalemate. An exit strategy is planned for AMISOM, contingent on the training of the Somali National Army. This task has been taken on by a host of actors, from private South African companies paid for by the UAE, to US and UK military contractors and a small EU training force; but the largest group of trainers comes from Turkey.

¹⁷⁶ Bradbury, M., 2010, p. 12.

¹⁷⁷ See for example Maxwell & Majid, 2016, *Famine in Somalia: Competing Imperatives, Collective Failures, 2011-2012*.

¹⁷⁸ Harnisch, C., *The Terror Threat from Somalia: The Internationalization of Al Shabaab*. A report by the Critical Threats project of the American Enterprise Institute, February 12th, 2010.

International military involvement in Somalia was further prompted by the rise of piracy in the mid-2000s. Three international naval missions, under NATO, EU and US command, were dispatched to the region:

- EUNAVFOR was set up in December 2008.
- The UN-mandated CTF-151 under US command was established in January 2009.
- NATO's Operation Ocean Shield, under revolving command, was founded in March 2009.

Besides patrolling the seas, these naval missions have been involved in building prisons in Garowe and Hargeisa, and other capacity-building work with local or national authorities. By 2018 the three naval operations patrolling the coast had come to an end.

In general, civil-military cooperation has become a key component of international involvement, and the security presence of the international community is larger than ever. Besides the multitude of military trainers, the US, the UK, Kenyans and Ethiopians all have their own military bases in Somalia, from where they pursue their counter-terrorism mandates. Foreign intelligence services are also very present, and bands of dodgy-looking foreign military contractors can be frequently found driving in cars with government plates. Unsurprisingly, the War on Terror matrix has produced a militarized form of intervention, where the security of intervening states is the paramount objective. A secondary objective remains building the security capacity of the host state for delegating tasks, such as surveillance and operations.

Political support for the Somali Government has been recalibrated, away from human security towards security based on national interests. Initial support to Sheikh Sharif's government was tepid. After the failed experience of trying to set up Abdullahi Yusuf's TFG, the international community was discouraged. The Islamic nature of the new government – in 2009 Sheikh Sharif announced that Somali law would be based on Sharia – scared some donors away, as well as Sheikh Sharif's past as leader of the Islamic Courts Union. The virulence of the insurgency, which controlled almost the entire South and much of Central Somalia, bode ill for future prospects of this government and donors hesitated to get involved.

But Sheikh Sharif succeeded where his predecessors had failed. He achieved clan balance in his government, resulting in more stability throughout South Central Somalia. Although his government was riddled with political infighting and corruption like the previous and following ones, it also gained some legitimacy by initiating some public services. For example, current President Farmajo's prime ministership, from 2010 to 2011, inspired hope among the Somali public that good government was a possibility¹⁷⁹. So did the surprise election in 2012 of President Hassan Sheikh, a person with a technocratic, NGO, background and not a warlord.

By 2012 the international community was satisfied that the Somali state-building project was on the right track, and direct bilateral support to the Somali Federal Government increased. The role of the UN has again increased dramatically, to the point that many Somalis see the federal structure of the current Somali state as a UN creation. The World Bank and other international institutions have cautiously returned to advise Somali authorities. Multilateral and bilateral donors, especially from Northern Europe, fund large-scale relief and development programmes that are implemented by international and local NGOs. Financially, the Somali government is almost entirely dependent on foreign aid, through direct budget support (as its own revenue-generating capacity is still very low) and indirectly, by foreign

¹⁷⁹ He notably introduced compulsory registration for soldiers, paid their salaries and instituted a few other civilian reforms.

funding of essential social services like health and education. Somalia still tops the list of failed states by many counts.

Reflections about the War on Terror intervention

- * Somalia was identified as a global terrorist threat on the basis of a ‘failed state’ assumption, probably laced with a ‘clash-of-civilizations’ logic of ‘Islam vs. West’. The evidence was anecdotal at best: Somalia simply *had* to harbour terrorists with evil intentions toward the West. But, although Western special forces and drones only could find occasional targets from 2001 to 2007, their presence may have contributed to the rise of Al Shabaab, exactly that what they had come to fight in the first place.
- * Counter Terrorism Financing measures have harmed the Somali economy: by restrictions on the *hawala* remittance system and by cutting off aid to areas controlled by Al Shabaab. Simultaneously, through the presence of World Bank advisers and international auditors, donor flows are directed more carefully. In the latest phase of international intervention, finance has become a more precisely used tool.
- * In 2005-2006, grass-roots mobilization of all Somalis in Mogadishu and the war-racked South-Central region brought to power a government of sorts that immediately improved security and governance in all areas under its control. This was also the opinion of international aid workers then present in the country. This government was violently evicted from power by a Western-backed Ethiopian invasion. The international community then sought to impose the government it had created in exile as the only legitimate one. This resulted in constant conflict and the gradual implantation of Al Shabaab in Somalia.
- * There was already tension between the humanitarian agenda of aid agencies and the state-building agenda of the UN and donors¹⁸⁰. Now a third form of intervention has complicated the landscape: military intervention. Security forces are not *a priori* interested by either government capacity building or the humanitarian situation in a country, and their actions can harm both. How does this dynamic play out in the field? Are Somalis aware of these three competing objectives? Besides working at cross-purposes, do these forms of intervention also work together to produce a common outcome?
- * To answer the question above, we may wonder what the purpose is of humanitarian assistance in Somalia today. As was apparent in 2007-08 and 2011-2012, the aid sector cannot respond adequately to a humanitarian crisis. This is partially due to contradictory objectives of interveners, but also because the entire international community is narrowly associated with one of the parties in conflict: the state. Failing to meaningfully improve human security, the aid sector enacts, in Somali eyes, the enforced modernization agenda imposed by the West. Gender-based violence and female-genital mutilation, individual human rights and the rule of law – common themes of donor-driven ‘development’ programs – justify this view. The modern Somali state that interveners are seeking to build is also part of the modernization agenda. Can the humanitarian intervention still be distinguished from the political one?

¹⁸⁰ “One hand of the ‘international community’ was strengthening the capacity of the TFG security forces while the other was trying to alleviate the humanitarian disaster those very forces helped to perpetrate”: Menkhaus, K., 2010, p. 334.

1.8 Patterns of international involvement

The historic survey of international interventions in Somalia provides us with some interesting insights:

1. The Somali state has been a wholly international creation, from the 1950s onwards. As the state was not a local project, Somali politicians did not even try to achieve independence from external support. This would not make sense because, for them, the state has always been the primary instrument to access external wealth, which in turn confers local power. In any case, the Somali state has always been dependent upon external support.
2. For Somali politicians, the state is thus a resource that can be captured. Barre had captured and then exhausted this resource as he fought against his rivals. The vestiges of the state—its property of land and buildings, weapons, personnel, reserves, monopoly position regarding taxation, etc.—were either destroyed or divided among many Somali factions in the civil war. Without a state to fight about, Somali society stabilized into forms of local governance in the 1990s.
3. The state being an instrument to acquire wealth and power, it has been used in predatory fashion. This was true internationally, where by 1990 Somalia was a rogue state with no allies. But also domestically. Somali experiences of the state have been overall negative, from Siyad Barre's time to today, when a checkpoint manned by government forces is more likely to result in extortion, rape or intimidation, than one manned by Al Shabaab or clan militia. This negative Somali perception of the state is not addressed in international state building plans.
4. There is a clear correlation between levels of external financial support and civil strife in Somalia: The more aid, the more war. This makes sense in the light of the first two points above, as both humanitarian and 'state-building' assistance is seen as a resource to be captured.
5. The one time that a home-grown system of governance was established in most of Somalia, the Islamic Courts Union, it was rapidly destroyed by external intervention. The international acquiescence of the Ethiopian invasion was manifest. This may have given Somalis the impression that the international community is not interested in peace and stability *per se*, but only on its own terms, through a state it controls; and that control is thus the international objective.
6. The international community has sustained a constant effort to make Somalis accept the federal government it backs, first created in Nairobi in 2004. Many Somalis still contest the UN-backed federal state, but it appears that acceptance levels are gradually rising, as the Somali state, while still quite powerless, is becoming increasingly stable. The insistence may be paying off, but Somalia remains a failed state by all definitions.
7. The international community has always been coy about its involvement in conceiving, building and sustaining the Somali state, making it seem like either a developmental necessity (in the 1950s), or as a request by Somalis themselves (since 1992). Given the systematic dependence on external support, the donors of the Somali state could claim ownership over it, but instead they maintain the fiction of sovereignty and independence, which confuses many Somalis.
8. There is little historical evidence that the colonial period was a traumatic one in Somalia, and it would be hard to argue that the roots of Somalia's troubles lie in the colonial period. In fact, colonial administrators made more efforts to understand and work within the Somali context than interveners do today. British, Italian and other European colonials often offered positive assessments of 'the Somali' and his future prospects, warned about imposing values, and seemed to be the result of genuine efforts to understand Somalis. (This is contrary to the harsh racist perspective of colonial domination generally assumed by public opinion worldwide, which postcolonial literature also appears to take as standard). The colonial period *was* disruptive because it was the first contact between Somalis and the 'modernized' world, but not because of colonial

policies, which usually built on the local balance of power. Italians did not involve Somalis in their half-hearted effort to create a fascist colonial state.

9. Until the 1990s, there was a degree of frankness within and among international organizations when discussing the situation in Somalia; since the 2000s, international discourse about presence and objectives in Somalia has become increasingly out of touch with reality. This is evident, for example, when comparing UN documents about Somalia of the 1940s, 1990s and 2010s. Today, international agencies' assessments of the context and the actions to be taken therein are often in contradiction with those made by independent experts.
10. The disconnect between international intervention and the Somali ground truth has notably increased with the Global War on Terror. Somalia was no threat to the international community, but it has been treated as such since 2001. It can be argued that the War on Terror has spawned radical Islam and extremism in Somalia, rather than preventing it. Despite – or because of – more than a decade of warfare, Al Shabaab has become an intractable problem, in terms of security and political control.
11. Intervention in Somalia has been justified mostly in humanitarian terms, both in policy documents and towards domestic public opinion. However, humanitarian action has been increasingly constrained and diverted for external state-building and counter-terrorism purposes. This has led not only to failure of international assistance when Somalia faced major crises (1991-1993, 2007-2008 and 2011-2012), but also to the loss of impartiality and autonomy, as the aid sector is now amalgamated to the overall Western agenda of forced modernization, and is incapable of accessing populations in opposition-held areas.
12. Somalia has been a test case where many of the assumptions underlying international community intervention have been broken. Both superpowers failed to make Somalia an ally despite considerable investments. The UN intervention failed spectacularly to bring peace and allow humanitarian aid delivery, despite its unique invocation of Chapter VII of the UN charter and the massive means deployed. The powerful US was routed militarily in 1993. The NGO sector lost its independence. Coordinated donor policies failed to make an impact on the ground. Despite being one of the theatres of the War on Terror, 40% of the country is controlled by Al Shabaab, which has progressively radicalized. And almost all state-building efforts by the international community have gone to waste.

The refusal to take stock of the situation is astounding. From the points given above, it should be clear that the less intervention in Somalia, the better. It seems Somalis can work out their own systems of governance. Why is the international community still supporting an externally defined state-building effort despite its consistent failure?