

The heritage of war and state collapse in Somalia and Somaliland: local-level effects, external interventions and reconstruction

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If you want to dismantle a hedge,
Remove one thornbush at a time.

Somali proverb

ABSTRACT *Somalia and Somaliland are both inhabited basically by Somalis—with small Oromo minorities in both, and a large Swahili minority in the latter. Both have multiple clans, sub-clans, lineage and blood groups and in both Islam is central to social values. Somalia had no history of a stable state before Italian rule but Somaliland did (Haud-Hargeisa-Berbera-Arabia trade axis centred). The United Republic of Somalia (rejected in the referendum by Somaliland) passed from political instability to two decades of Said Barre's increasingly centralised and repressive dictatorship which waged war against the North-west (Somaliland) and North-east (Bosaso) as well as against Ethiopia. The dictatorship collapsed in 1991 basically because of the 1987–91 Somaliland Liberation war. The economies of SomalialSomaliland turn on pastoral production, commerce and remittances. These have recovered in part in Somalia and fully in Somaliland. However, only a fraction of the Barre regimes dissolution of service delivery and user friendly law and order capacity has been made good in Somaliland and virtually more in Somalia. USA/UN intervention did limit starvation and—for a time—open violence. That was at a high cost in finances, in the reputation of peacekeeping and to Somalis. UNOSOM answered political and civil questions before having any real grasp of civil, political and economic realities. The price was to entrench warlords and militias and to marginalise 'peacelords' (elders and merchants). Somaliland, never occupied by UNOSOM, has engaged in a series of large, long peace conferences of elders from all parts of its territory leading to a real if fragile nationalterritorial identity with personal security in most areas, an elected president and two house parliament, a user friendly police force and court system and the beginnings of a restored professional civil service.*

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Early political history and social structure

For centuries nomadic pastoralism provided a livelihood to the Somali people in the Horn of Africa. Before the colonial partition of the Somali 'territories' in the middle of the 19th century, the history of the region had been dominated by massive migration of Somalis into areas originally inhabited by other populations. By successfully capturing large parts of Abyssinia under the guidance of Ahmed Gran (1506–43), Somali clans joined to realise a common cause for the first time. But the subsequent evaporation of the newly expanded state and its highland conquests—which reached within 50 miles of present-day Addis Ababa—foreshadowed the implausibility of a strong state enduring within the realities of Somali national identity. There is evidence that the earliest city-states scattered along the Eastern Somali shores emerged with distinct Swahili Arab influences.

The Somali social and political structure consists, loosely, of clan families and clans which subdivide into sub-clans, primary lineages, and 'dia-paying' groups. The dia-paying group (*Jilib/Bah*) is the most stable unit with a membership of groups of families ranging from a few hundred to more than a thousand. The members of each dia-paying group have an informal contractual agreement to support one another and to share payments. The term 'dia-paying' implies that families within the group have a collective responsibility for settling acts committed by, or against, their members. Membership in a clan does not automatically give one certain rights and obligations, rather they are negotiated and agreed in unwritten contracts. The groups rarely have single 'traditional leaders', opting instead for a council of elders who have collective responsibilities. Throughout the colonial administration, elders were appointed and paid to act as the legitimate representatives of their respective groups.

The dia-paying groups also function as mutual aid groups during periods of emergency. Members have an obligation both to help those who are undergoing severe hardship during crises and to observe traditional wealth-sharing mechanisms. In times of crisis, each member is expected to observe an appropriate code of conduct. This manifests itself in activities such as mixed herding, loan sharing, *Xoola Goyn* (giving animals), and alms giving. Such coping strategies can, up to a point, effectively limit individual risks and facilitate rehabilitation after periods of crises.

Understanding social divisions and state collapse

A majority of the more recent examinations of the Somali political crisis are based on fallacies and simplistic generalisations of the supposed uniqueness of the Somali people as a culturally homogenous entity.¹ They often tend to fall into a reductionist trap, ignoring the intricacies of Somali political reality, while engaging in a one-dimensional exploration of 'conflict based on clanship'. The classical argument is that all Somali people belong to one ethnic group, speak the same language, follow the same religion and share the same culture and tradition. However, a closer examination of this assertion shows that it is inaccurate and misleading. According to Mukhtar, it is a myth invented by

outsiders. Somali society has always been divided into nomadic pastoralists in the north and southern agro-pastoralists 'which have distinctively different cultural, linguistic, and social structures'.² The importance of livestock in relation to subsistence agriculture is regionally variable; with rural households in the south depending on agriculture and northerners relying more on remittances and livestock. Indeed, people inhabiting the inter-riverine regions speak a different language, known as *Mai Mai*, a combination of colloquial local dialects, Swahili and Somali. Throughout the colonial period, there also grew up distinct territorial, linguistic and administrative traditions in the original territories. Their official languages were French in Djibouti, Amharic in Ethiopia, English in Somaliland, Italian in Somalia and Swahili and English in the NFD (Northwest Frontier District). Moreover, some territorial boundaries also roughly corresponded to clan boundaries.

Concentrating exclusively on clans and lineage structures, many observers have elevated clanship to the most dominant factor in the analysis of the current crisis.³ Understanding clan and lineage in the contemporary Somali politics, while necessary, is not sufficient to unlock their social and political organisation. Elaborate charts illustrating clan genealogy, superimposed over acronyms of the many factions, litter the literature on Somali society. These charts have become an operational lexicon for many agencies, imperiously displayed in virtually every regional NGO or UN office. Indeed, visitors often use them as 'road maps'. Understanding state collapse in Somalia requires looking beyond clanism and ongoing factional intrigue, which is a symptom of state collapse rather than its cause.

The question of the compatibility of the Somali civil society structure with the postcolonial (centralised) state has recently featured in some analyses of the Somali state collapse.⁴ It is argued that institutional structures that incorporated concepts entirely alien to the existing Somali institutions were imposed under colonial rule. As a result, a discrepancy emerged between the highly decentralised pastoral structures and the highly central nature of the postcolonial state. It is not simply a coincidence that the strongest opposition to the centralised state has come from the north, where a pastoral mode of production is still predominant. This incompatibility was intensified by the transfer of power and authority from pastoral groups to centralised and urban-based political structures. As a result, pastoralism was 'treated less as a distinct way of life and more as an economic resource to be tapped'.⁵

Others disagree with this approach of analysis, describing it as 'historical' and not particularly relevant to current problems, as it assumes that the social structure of the Somali society remained intact following its integration into the world economy.⁶ They argue that the 'contemporary' commercialisation of pastoralism transformed society as early as the 1920s, and that traditional structures have changed even more dramatically since independence.

Serious economic mismanagement has also played a key role and has been one of the instrumental causes of state collapse.⁷ Since abandoning the experiment of Scientific Socialism in 1980, the government lacked a coherent development strategy. Its macroeconomic policy was described as 'erratic, inconsistent, and often moved from one set of objectives to another, thereby

confusing the domestic market'.⁸ In 1990 the external debt was \$US1.9 billion, which was equivalent to 360% of GDP, excluding 'frozen debt' to some eastern Europe countries.⁹ The public sector crisis originated from massive expenditure on defence and security services.

The regime was also highly successful in obtaining military support. Somalia was one of the most heavily militarised states in Africa and one of the top recipients of US and Soviet military aid during the Cold War.¹⁰ Moreover, more than 80% of refugee aid, which in 1986 together with other non-military aid accounted for 25% of GNP, was diverted to the army.¹¹

Origins of the conflict

A hasty union

A root cause of the crisis can be traced to the rapid union of the two Somali territories to form the 'United' Somali state in 1960. Soon after independence, the Somalilanders became disillusioned with the way the union was proceeding and indeed voted 'No' in the unification referendum.¹² In the interest of preserving a 'union', Somaliland initially (while briefly independent) accepted conditions demanded by southern leaders. Mogadishu became the capital and the base of the newly created Somali parliament. Southern Somalis also held all major posts in the new government, and a majority of seats in the parliament. In spite of the increasing discontent, southern officials adopted measures aimed at enforcing rapid integration, serving to further alienate their northern counterparts.

The government's development programmes also failed to tackle the serious problems of underdevelopment and socioeconomic stratification in the north, problems inherited from the colonial administration. Despite the integration of the two administrative systems, latent corruption has been attributed to the residual Italian influence (the 'Italian factor') in the public sector. However, northerners were not the only group disillusioned with the union. The Rehanwein from the inter-riverine region, who had an equal number of seats with the two other major clan families of Hawiye and Darod in the south before unification, became marginalised.¹³

Military coup in 1969 and socialist policies

The constitution of 1960 guaranteed not only the unity of two Somali territories but also democracy and a forum that sanctioned multipartyism with guarantees to *de jure* freedom of expression. Significant political differences encouraged a proliferation of parties 'to the point where Somalia had more parties per capita than any other democratic country except Israel'.¹⁴ In the country's last multiparty elections, held in March 1969, more than 60 parties contested. Little civil governance or service delivery existed. It was against this background that the successful coup, which brought Barre to power in 1969, took place.

Taking his place among Africa's 'Big Men', Barre immediately suspended the country's constitution and banned all forms of political and professional

association. ‘Promising to cure all of the country’s ills’, he also decreed in the following year the adoption of Scientific Socialism, an ideology that was (he claimed) ‘fully compatible with Islam and the reality of the nomadic society’.¹⁵ Under the slogan of ‘socialism unites, tribalism divides’, clan and kinship ties were officially banned and the new government promised to root out any reference, verbal or written, to clanship. In an effort to limit the tradition of blood money payments between groups, the regime introduced the death sentence for those convicted of homicide.

Sweeping political and legal changes were also introduced in the first few years of the coup. These included the establishment of a repressive security apparatus accountable to Barre himself. To consolidate power he established a formidable propaganda machine. ‘Countless posters, poems, songs of praise, and speeches proclaimed his sublime role as the “father” of a nation whose “mother” was the Revolution.’¹⁶ The leadership’s political propaganda machinery was particularly effective in misleading the outside world. Some observers took its spin seriously, confusing rhetoric with reality.

In the first few years most sectors of the economy were brought under government ownership. A wave of nationalisation (*qarameyn*) of all medium-size business, including banks, schools, insurance firms, imports, and wholesale trade started in the early 1970s. Many new state-owned agencies, maintaining absolute monopolies, were created as a foundation for a socialist economy. Private traders were prohibited by law from importing, storing, purchasing or distributing food items. It became increasingly clear that nomads and agro-pastoralists, including wealthy nomads and farmers who owned large herds, were to be treated as *lumpenproletariat* rather than capitalists. But in spite of erecting cooperatives for rural communities, the government found nomads largely uncooperative.

1974–75: ‘prolonged’ famine (Abaartii Dabadheer)

The socialist experiment—and perhaps more crucially, the political hostility to an ‘opposition’ area—turned the 1974–75 drought into a major famine in the north, resulting in over 20 000 deaths, forcing 10% to 15% of the entire pastoral population to register in relief camps.¹⁷ There was a serious shortage of food and sudden collapse of entitlements throughout the northern regions. The nationalisation process and the introduction of price controls seriously disrupted food markets in the northern regions. Even more damaging was the effective shutting down of the major historic Arabian–Somaliland–Ethiopian trade axis, with closure of the Ethiopian border and tight controls at the Red Sea port of Berbera. This was further exacerbated by the failure of the food rationing system, introduced by the government to replace the free market system. Hundreds of government-owned shops selling food items at fixed prices were opened in major towns and villages. Residents were issued with identity cards to buy fixed amounts of food every week, but because of a shortage of supplies, only small numbers of people managed to buy sufficient food in these shops. In rural areas, unregistered pastoralists relied on food purchased on the black market at exorbitant prices.

The widespread crop failure and the subsequent food shortages in neighbouring Ethiopia also contributed to the food crisis in the region. The toll of the drought was enormous, killing an estimated five million animals in Somalia/Somaliland and having far-reaching consequences on the rural economy in both Somaliland and the adjoining Haud area of Ethiopia. While the effects of the drought were received differently throughout Somalia, the rural population has never fully recovered from the disaster. Pursuing its objective of settling and converting pastoralists to farmers, the government carried out a resettlement experiment involving the transfer of over 100 000 nomads from relief camps in the north to three sites in the more arable lands of southern Somalia.¹⁸ Although pastoralists resisted the idea of suddenly changing their way of life and engaging in a farming livelihood in which they had no experience, they were forcibly coerced into accepting their new host environment.

Ogaden war and refugee problems

The Ogaden war has been interpreted by some as the single most important turning point for the regime.¹⁹ At the outset the conflict caused a flood of mainly ethnic Somali refugees. By 1979 there were officially 1.3 million refugees in the country.²⁰ More than a half were settled in the north, where one in four of the population were refugees. The arrival of forced migrants intensified pressure on limited physical resources and services, further aggravating tensions between local inhabitants and refugees. Resentment intensified as the Issaqs were reduced to second-class citizens in their own territory.²¹ The government's policy of recruiting refugees into the army also spurred on tensions. More generally the failed war wholly eroded the credibility of the army and police, the asserted guardians of Pan-Somali nationalism.

Formation of opposition groups and government reaction

Somalia's defeat in Ogaden led to an attempted coup in April 1978 by senior military officers from the Majerteen clan. Although the government crushed the rebellion, some senior officers who escaped after the coup formed the first opposition movement, called Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), with its headquarters in Ethiopia. With support from the Ethiopian army, these groups carried out guerrilla warfare across the border. The government's reaction to both the coup attempt and the formation of SSDF was repression and vicious reprisals against the Majerteen clan in the northeast.

The second opposition movement, the Somali National Movement (SNM) was formed in 1981 by a group of businessmen, religious leaders, intellectuals and former army officers drawn from the Isaaq clan. Following its formation, the government intensified its repressive policies against the Isaaq. To create enmity between clans, senior military officers in the Somali army from Isaaq clans were deliberately posted in the Majerteen regions where the government was waging war against local people.

The Hawiye-dominated United Somali Congress (USC) was formed in Italy in 1987, by which time the formal service provision role of the state had virtually

ceased to function.²² It was immediately divided into two rival factions based on different sub-clans. The armed faction had an alliance with the SNM, which provided arms to General Aideed who was to become the leader of the faction. The Ogadeni-led Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) was formed in 1989 following the arrest of General Gabyo, the then minister of defence and the highest ranking Ogadeni in government. A few more opposition movements were formed during the civil war in the south, but the large number of factions with S-prefixed acronyms appeared after the intervention of UNOSOM.

The impact of the war in Somaliland

Loss of life and displacement of population

The number of deaths in the northern towns has been estimated at around 100 000.²³ Up to 50 000 people are believed to have lost their lives in the capital city, Hargeisa, as a result of summary executions, aerial bombardments and ground attacks carried out by government troops.²⁴ Gersony, who conducted one of the first investigations for the US State Department, maintains that the troops conducted systematic attacks against the civilian population.²⁵ Some of the more brutal acts occurred in rural villages and were carried out by special troops known as the 'Isaaq Exterminating Wing' (Dabar-goynta Isaaqa) who were believed to have been recruited from among the Ogaden refugees. Targeting herders and farmers perceived as being affiliated with the SNM, they destroyed or poisoned wells—vital for the pastoral economy—seized livestock and burned down entire villages to deprive the rural population of its basic means of livelihood.

Loss of livelihoods

Although the exact number of animals lost as a result of the war is still unknown, it is estimated that more than half of the country's total livestock population was killed either directly or indirectly. The troops also destroyed water sources by blowing up or draining water reservoirs. In some areas open wells were poisoned, while others were contaminated with corpses.²⁶ The extensive planting of mines in rural areas was also partly responsible for animal losses.

Another contributing factor was the distress sale of livestock by pastoralists. The war also disrupted the merchant-based network that transmitted remittances from Gulf states. Crop production was even more devastated by the war since all farmers were forced to abandon cultivation for the four years of conflict.

Social and economic costs

The war destroyed market centres while mining of transport routes virtually shut down trade. This was accompanied by the closure of the Berbera port for animal exports from the second half of 1988 to 1991. An average of 1.2 million animals used to be exported per annum through Berbera.²⁷ Because market exchange was

central to the survival of rural households, the closure of Berbera port and the collapse of local markets for meat had a devastating effect, forcing many to dispose of large numbers of their animals.

Ironically, the community insurance and transfer systems that had originally played important roles in the collective coping strategies of households triggered social crisis during the war. There was a sudden increase in the social obligations, forcing many households to sell their assets. The blood money payment, for instance, which played an important role in preventing and containing localised conflicts, also forced many households to liquidate some or all of their productive assets. Because neither the SNM nor the Ethiopian authorities controlled the refugee camps there was massive violence and lawlessness, caused in part by the proliferation of light weapons. As a result there were many deaths and injuries attributed to freelance bandits. The absence of central authority meant that these had to be settled through traditional means of compensation. Because of a fear that any internal conflict would hinder their common struggle against the regime, the council of elders had constituted emergency laws demanding any outstanding blood money to be settled within a short period of time. Arrears in blood money payments forced many households to default on payments for the first time, jeopardising the functioning of the whole system.

A further social obligation which households had to meet during the war was contribution to the war effort. Two types of contributions were required from individual households: a male member was required to join the SNM forces, in addition to making a payment of one sheep (or its equivalent in cash) at least once a year. These obligations were strictly applied during the war.

The crisis had a differential impact on men and women among the rural households. While comparatively less severe in the north than the south, the threat of physical violence contributed everywhere to a heightened sense of insecurity. There was a significant increase in the number and type of tasks performed by women during the crisis. As men became increasingly involved in the community-level activities associated with the war, the burden of labour shifted to tasks such as queuing up for food rations, fetching water from distant sources and engaging in petty trading to supplement their incomes.

Famine and loss of life and livelihoods

Even after their defeat, the remnants of Barré's forces maintained a strong base in the inter-riverine region for nearly a year, destroying villages and crops. Animals were killed or stolen, forcing hundreds of farmers to flee to the regional capital Baidoa which later became the epicentre of the 1991–92 famine. With the exception of Mogadishu, this region suffered the most severe devastation. As a result, 'the inter-riverine people were trapped between Aideed's forces in the north, Barré's in southwest, and Morgan's—Barré's son-in law—in the south, in what became known as the "triangle of death". Baidoa, the capital of the region became also known as the "city of the walking dead".'²⁸

At the height of the civil war in 1991–92 a major drought hit the area, leading to a devastating famine which killed between 300 000 and 500 000²⁹ and affected as many as three million. The large number of deaths resulted from

the outbreak of infectious diseases as thousands of people gathered in relief camps.

Population displacement and economic costs

The war in the south created a huge displacement of people, uprooting an estimated 1.7 million, over one-third of the entire population in the south.³⁰ As many as a quarter of a million people from rural areas poured into Mogadishu, where aid agencies had set up relief camps. As the war in Mogadishu and the surrounding areas intensified, most of the city residents and internal refugees were displaced, again creating massive flows of moving populations. Heavy fighting along the surrounding state borders prevented most of them from fleeing to Ethiopia and Kenya.

The residual services and institutions that had survived the radical erosion of the late Barré years collapsed in the ensuing civil war. Key infrastructure, essential for economic activities, such as water and power generators, refineries, air and sea ports, telecommunications installations, bridges and parts of most tarmac road were destroyed or ceased to function because of non-maintenance which has been an endemic Somali problem even in peacetime. Schools and hospitals were targeted during the initial factional fighting in Mogadishu and surrounding areas. What was not destroyed in the war was looted and shipped to surrounding countries.

UN and NGO interventions

Belated international media coverage of the crisis played a key role in triggering an international response. But the first reports of impending major disaster by the very few NGOs that remained in the country when Barré was overthrown during the development of the crisis did not receive sufficient attention. The decision by the USA and UN to intervene in the famine was tragically late.

The agencies faced a multitude of problems in delivering humanitarian aid. Because of extreme levels of insecurity, agencies were forced to rely on expensive armed protection by militia to distribute emergency relief. For example, CARE, which was responsible for the delivery of food supplies, spent \$100 000 per month on bodyguards to carry out its relief distribution activities.³¹ The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) had a much higher protection bill of \$100 000 per week which it paid to factional militias to provide security for the distribution of emergency relief.³² Not only was this an expensive way of providing relief, but by paying large amounts of money to militias, as even the UN found itself doing involuntarily, the war economy was encouraged and disarmament discouraged.³³

There was a general lack of preparedness and information about the disaster, which contributed to the delays in launching the intervention. Only a handful of agencies including the ICRC, Save the Children Fund and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) stayed in the country when all the UN agencies and most NGOs withdrew from the country following Barré's demise. The absence of most UN agencies during the critical period of the crisis meant that they lacked extensive

and accurate information necessary to organise and carry out large-scale humanitarian operations.³⁴ It was difficult to collect detailed information and most agencies failed to consult the few NGOs already in the country. As a result, local food markets and household entitlements were destabilised when emergency food flowed into the region.

Intervening in a country without a state structure was something new to the agencies which were used to dealing with central authorities. Moreover, the operational guidelines of agencies were more applicable to natural disasters than to complex emergencies that require creative and flexible programming under conditions of continuing conflict. Questions over impartiality, accountability and appropriate codes of conduct added to the confusion. This was a nearly unprecedented intervention (in terms of scale) even for those agencies such as the ICRC and UNICEF that had a long experience of working in conflict situations. Matters were made worse by a near total loss of both written and human historic records of previous Somali experience. UN agency records were lost when the Mogadishu UN compound was overrun and virtually no staff with pre-1991 Somali experience were redeployed. Indeed the central UN civil operation under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) seemed to view prior territorial experience with disdain, in a territory in which it proposed and attempted to create a proxy civil governance network.

The multitude of agencies with contrasting mandates, structures, procedures, operations and capacities to operate in Somalia complicated the coordination of the intervention in an already complex disaster.³⁵ Many NGOs were in the theatre primarily to curry favour with the media, in an effort to mobilise name recognition and funds. Doubtless they were concerned with saving lives but also with bolstering their budgets via increased government and UN agencies transfers and public donations. The high profile media coverage of the crisis also created other problems, which undoubtedly affected the quality and delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Operation Restore Hope, launched in 1992 under UN resolution 704, resulted in a contradictory multi-mandated intervention involving peacemaking, peace-keeping and peace-enforcement activities. With an annual expenditure of \$1.5 billion, the intervention was the most expensive humanitarian operation ever undertaken.³⁶ A Life and Peace Institute (1995) study points out that:

The Operation's mandate was vague, changed frequently during the process and was open to myriad interpretations. The mandate changed from protecting the delivery of humanitarian assistance, to encouraging and maintaining a 'secure environment', to capturing a leader of one of the factions at one stage and, later, to encouraging negotiations with that same leader ... As a consequence UNOSOM was bedevilled with disagreements among the various players.³⁷

Earlier in the intervention, as demobilisation and control of weapons was deemed essential, the UN's first Special Representative, Mohamed Sahnoun, initiated a food-for-arms programme aimed at reducing the widespread availability and use of light weapons.³⁸ This was an important initiative that had wide support among Somalis, including most faction leaders and elders.³⁹ However, this approach to controlling arms was soon replaced by a new strategy (after

Sahnoun resigned), which suggested disarming the militia by force as the only means of successfully curbing the widespread availability of weapons. The new strategy was abandoned when UN troops met fierce resistance from faction leaders. It was, fortunately, never attempted in Somaliland, where tentative UNOSOM plans to seize Berbera and Hargeisa by force were abandoned.

The concentration of the humanitarian aid in and around Mogadishu further limited the operation's impact; drawing people from rural areas to urban centres where relief camps had been established. Despite the rhetoric of capacity-building, UN agencies and international NGOs generally implemented emergency relief activities with little or no involvement of local actors. They perceived the local NGOs—not always correctly—as clan-based contractors.⁴⁰ No constructive attempts were made to engage local networks and mosque-related groups as channels, bases, or sources of legitimacy, despite their local and national legitimacy and proven capacity to mobilise domestic resources. Nor were clan elders recognised as constituting genuine, historically rooted community conduits; nor was it realised that by strengthening them, peace lords would have been supported.

There were, however, a number of positive outcomes. The ICRC's humanitarian relief work, for example, at the height of the famine, provided wet and dry rations to over one million people throughout southern regions of the country. This is believed to have averted starvation of tens of thousands of people. ICRC's operation included a clear mandate; extensive local experience; the existence of a national counterpart (the Somali Red Crescent); and political impartiality accepted by the local people.⁴¹ In contrast, UNOSOM's operation was widely regarded as party to the conflict, following its war with one of the factions, and the cause of the deaths of countless innocent civilians.

Conflict resolution and peace-building

Traditional peacemaking in Somaliland

A series of grassroots reconciliation conferences have been held since early 1992 in the cities of Burao and Berbera. The elders embarked on a peace-building endeavour aimed at resolving all major outstanding issues between communities across the country. Conflict resolution in the north has always been the responsibility of elders who have authority to represent their clans. Unlike the tribal chiefs in many African societies, elders in Somaliland are 'chosen by virtue of their personal attributes such as age, expertise in the political arts of compromise and persuasion, powers of oratory, skill as a poet, religious knowledge, piety, wealth, generosity, courage and reputations for fairness'.⁴² In other words not all old men are elders, nor are all elders aged. The assemblies, or *Guurti*, promote democratic participation and their deliberations are held publicly. Because of their dual kinship, women are engaged as 'clan ambassadors' and play a key role in the mediation of disputes. They are often the only means of communication between warring groups.

Soon after the ending of the war significant differences over trade access and land, grazing, and water rights emerged within and between the Isaaq clan

family and the Dulbahante and Warsangeli clans in Erigavo.⁴³ The elders managed to resolve the conflicts in Erigavo and Burao and, up to a point, the differences within the Isaaq clan family. These local level peacemaking efforts reduced the tensions between clans, restored trust and harmonious relations between communities, increased interactions and trade between clans and re-established the traditional means of resolving disputes.⁴⁴ In some areas joint committees were formed to resolve minor disputes and prevent freelance banditry, ensuring to some degree that peace agreements between communities were observed. It is worth underlining the role of the Gadabuursi (non-Isaaq) elders from Borama, formed for their peacemaking in conferences in Somaliland. While the UN sponsored conferences were highly publicised, the grassroots peacemaking process was out of the limelight. With the exception of some very limited logistical support for the Borama conference, the UN and other agencies did not provide support for (in fact opposed) many successful local level initiatives.

'Forging' a settlement: UN-style reconciliation in Somalia

The UN has organised over 10 highly publicised and costly reconciliation conferences since 1993. Faction leaders, who have played the central role in these reconciliation conferences, have dutifully signed agreements at every meeting. But each settlement collapsed soon after it was agreed, sometimes within hours. The central tenets of UN-brokered peacemaking are fundamentally different from local peacemaking techniques employed in northern Somalia. Virtually every UN reconciliation conference was held outside the country with agendas often set by their sponsors. Conferences have been held in each of the neighbouring countries—Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Yemen and Egypt. A major problem with these high profile affairs is that legitimate representatives of the affected communities, such as elders, merchants, women's groups and other genuine stakeholders, are not included. Furthermore, cost considerations have often determined the duration of these conferences; consequently, they are short with fixed timetables. While the Borama conference lasted four months, the longest UN-brokered conference lasted well under two weeks! Although the mandates of these conferences have been termed 'peacemaking' and 'reconciliation', they often focus solely on reconstituting a central state. Promoting 'quick fix' solutions, they 'faltered where it mattered—on the ground. Problems were to be "solved" before UN officials understood the nature of the problem'.⁴⁶ The first reconciliation conference in Addis Ababa in January 1993 was held less than a month after the UN troops arrived in Mogadishu.

Rehabilitation

Economic and livelihood rehabilitation

With the exception of Somaliland and the northeast region, rehabilitation efforts have been limited and international aid is still largely confined to emergency assistance. Reconstruction initiatives suffered the same problems as the emergency aid programmes led by the UN and no coherent framework for

rehabilitation has yet been developed. Bryden argues that ‘many of today’s “reconstruction” and “rehabilitation” programmes are designed to do little more than to repair, piecemeal, the ruins of the former system’.⁴⁷ In Somaliland, perhaps the single most external rehabilitation programme has been the restoration of the water system to the city of Hargeisa by Oxfam and UNICEF. An estimated two-thirds of the city’s population now have running water, compared to less than a third before the onset of the conflict.

In Somaliland the informal and medium-scale enterprise sectors have proven resilient. The economy is buoyant; livestock and crop production, and public service provision have since recovered. This is less true of the northeast, which never had much production. The current stable free-market environment has facilitated the re-establishment of remittance flows from Somali expatriate workers in the Gulf, Europe and North America. There has been a shift from a war- and survival-orientated economy to a functioning market economy. Encouraged by the absence of excessive regulations, corruption and market intervention, the private sector has started providing a whole range of new services that the country had never seen before. The economic boom in Somaliland is partly reflected in the foreign trade that goes through Berbera. The current merchandise exports and imports are estimated to be at least twice the level of those before the war in 1988. The small port of Bosaso in the northeast has experienced a similar increase in the volume of foreign trade; it is used by traders to export livestock and other commodities such as incense and hides from Somalia, and to handle imports because Mogadeshu port is hazardous.

The resilience and success of the informal sector is not new. Even during Barre’s regime it ‘demonstrated considerable resourcefulness and resilience by weathering frequent policy reversals, persistent high inflation and worsening security problems in the 1980s’.⁴⁸ In many areas it has proved to be an engine for economic reconstruction and has increasingly become an incentive for peacemaking and political rehabilitation. It is a factor that aid programmes would do well to understand so as to promote an environment for the continued growth of the domestic commercial and transport sectors.

Political rehabilitation

Perhaps the most critical of all reconstruction efforts in Somalia is the question of political rehabilitation. Views diverge greatly on how to reconstitute the Somali state. Some argue that the question of state reconstitution should take its own course, in the hope that new state (or states) structures will emerge from the civil society once hostilities end.⁴⁹ Indeed, ‘the fact that Somalia did for some time constitute a state cannot be considered a sufficiently convincing reason to go back to it again, unless one finds that there were elements in it that are still worth retaining or building upon’.⁵⁰

Still, under UNOSOM’s broad mandate to rebuild Somalia, the UN has persistently endeavoured to reconstruct a central state. The influence of the UN model has trickled down into subsequent non-UN Conferences on political rehabilitation. The Cairo peace talks held in late 1997 and their subsequent agreement was challenged by Ethiopia over Egypt’s apparent hijacking of

the peace negotiations and failure to consult Intergovernment Authority on Development (IGAD) member countries. Although neighbouring countries have a vested interest in a peaceful settlement to the Somali conflict and have supported reconciliation initiatives, their role has been limited in the past by UN intervention. The surrounding states have been burdened by both the overflow of insecurity (including light arms) and a significant flow of Somali refugees. The only apparently successful state reconstitution is in Somaliland—the old British Somaliland. It has peace and personal security almost everywhere, an elected two-house Parliament and President, a functioning civil police/magistrates' court system, municipal government and some—albeit limited basic service delivery by a professional public service.

Conclusions

The 'ineluctable' decline of Somalia over 20 years, the failure of UN-sanctioned interventions, and the unsuccessful attempts at reconstituting a centralised state were not written in stone. Recently, indigenous-led peace-building, decentralised local governance, and institutions that respect the regions' heterogeneity appear to illuminate a more positive path towards reconstruction. Although Somalia still suffers, Somaliland, illegitimate in the eyes of the world, has emerged from the ashes with phoenix-like activity. Its rehabilitation efforts provide insights that the international aid community would do well to appreciate. Building on traditional systems of conflict management and partnerships with non-secular institutions, and encouraging local markets could limit the international community's frustrating exercise of writing in shifting sands.

Notes

¹ M H Mukhtar, 'The plight of the agro-pastoral society in Somalia', *Review of African Political Economy*, 23(70), 1996, pp 543–553.

² *Ibid.*

³ Waldron & N Hasci, State of the art literature review on Somali refugees in the Horn of Africa, Refugees Studies Programme, Oxford University and the Swedish International Development Authority, 1994.

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⁵ Doornbos & Markakis, 'Society and state in crisis', p 84.

⁶ A Samatar, *Socialist Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988; Samatar, *The State and Rural Transformation in Somalia, 1884–1986*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

⁷ J A Mubarak, 'The "hidden hand" behind the resilience of the stateless economy of Somalia', *World Development*, 25(12), 1997, pp 2027–2041; and World Bank, *World Development Report 1997*, Washington, DC: World Bank, 1977.

⁸ Mubarak, 'The "hidden hand"', p 2028.

⁹ World Bank, 'Somalia: country strategy paper', Africa Division, World Bank, 1990; IMF 'Somalia: framework for planning of long-term reconstruction and recovery', 1993.

¹⁰ J G Gross, 'Towards a taxonomy of failed states in the new world order: decaying Somalia, Liberia, Rwanda and Haiti', *Third World Quarterly*, 17(3), 1996, pp 455–471.

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- ¹⁴ D D Laitin & S S Samatar, *Somalia: Nation in Search of a State*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987, p 69.
- ¹⁵ Lewis, *Blood and Bones*, p 150.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*, p 152.
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- ²¹ R Omaar, 'Somaliland: one thorn bush at a time', *Current History*, 1994, pp 232–236.
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- ²⁸ Mukhtar, 'The plight of the agro-pastoral society in Somalia', pp 341–551.
- ²⁹ *Ibid*, p 341.
- ³⁰ While the Barré regime in 1987–88 claimed a population of over eight million, the actual (Swedish managed) census suggests 5.5 million—four million in the south, 1.5 in the north. On reasonable guesstimates of births, deaths and crossborder movements that suggests perhaps 4.5 million in the south and 1.8–2.0 million in Somaliland today.
- ³¹ P Hillmore, *Observer*, January, 1995.
- ³² J Prendergast, *Crisis Response: Humanitarian Band-Aids in Sudan and Somalia*, London: Pluto Press, 1997.
- ³³ M Bradbury, *Aid Under Fire: Redefining Relief and Development Assistance in Unstable Situations*, Geneva: The United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs, 1995.
- ³⁴ A few agencies, including UNICEF, returned fairly rapidly to the northwest and maintained a limited Mogadishu presence via Somali staff.
- ³⁵ Netherlands Development Cooperation, *Humanitarian Aid to Somalia*, The Hague: Netherlands Development Cooperation, 1994, p 18.
- ³⁶ I Lewis & J Mayall, 'Somalia', in J Mayall (ed), *The New Interventionism 1991–1994: United Nations Experience in Cambodia, Former Yugoslavia and Somalia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- ³⁷ Life and Peace Institute Comprehensive report on lessons-learned from United Nations Operation in Somalia, 1995.
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- ³⁹ As could be expected, some war leaders did not support the measures, nor did young men who saw the gun as their only capital asset and ticket to 'productive' self-employment.
- ⁴⁰ M S Abdillahi, *Somaliland NGOs: challenges and opportunities*, London: Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR), 1997.
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- ⁵⁰ Doornbos & Markakis, 'Society and state in crisis', p 87.