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ARTICLE

**Somalia's turbulent path to peace and stability**

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Fantahun Ayele

## Review

# Somalia's turbulent path to peace and stability

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After gaining its independence in 1960, Somalia tried in vain to unite all Somalis in the Horn of Africa. As part of that project, Siad Barre launched a full-scale invasion of the Ogaden in 1977 in an attempt to take this vast territory from Ethiopia. But Somalia's crushing defeat in the 1977/78 war brought about far reaching repercussions. Armed resistance against Siad Barre's government eventually led to state collapse in 1991. While the former British Somaliland declared its independence, civil war and anarchy began to rock Mogadishou and southern Somalia. To make matters worse, a devastating famine claimed the lives of thousands of Somalis. The UN and US intervention to mitigate the humanitarian crisis ended in disaster. Neighbouring countries like Djibouti, Ethiopia and Kenya made their own efforts to set up a new government in Somalia. Ethiopia's intervention in support of the Transitional Federal Government triggered armed resistance by al Shabaab. On its part, the US government has been very much worried that Somalia has become a safe haven for terrorists. As a result, the Horn of Africa became a battle ground in the war on terror. The United States has been using unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) to hunt down al Shabaab leaders and destroy the terrorist groups. Using both secondary and primary sources including archival documents of the Ministry of National Defence based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, this paper attempts to examine Somalia's thorny path towards peace and stability. The findings show that Somalia's clan based politics, the stockpiles of arms acquired during the cold war that eventually fell into the hands of the warlords and the inability of the international community to put an end to anarchy and civil war, have contributed to Somalia's insatiable for over two decades.

**Key words:** Somalia, Ethiopia, al Shabaab, anarchy, civil war, war on terror.

## INTRODUCTION

Mainly due to its strategic importance, the Horn of Africa witnessed intensive super power rivalry during the Cold War. Ethiopia and Somalia proved to be strategically essential for the United States and the former Soviet Union, respectively. While Ethiopia concluded a mutual defence agreement in 1953 with the United States, Somalia signed a treaty of friendship in 1974 with the

Soviet Union. Whereas the former was expected to last for 25 years, the latter was a twenty year deal (Natufe, 2001: 354; Bahru, 2002: 185).

At a time when Somalia was preparing to invade Ethiopia in an attempt to realize its dreams of creating "Greater Somalia" by uniting all Somalis in the Horn, the United States government

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suspended its military assistance to the Ethiopian military regime that came to power in 1974 following a socialist revolution. That brought an end to the Ethio-American mutual defence agreement in April 1977. In May 1977, the Ethiopian military government turned to the Soviets and concluded an arms deal (Fantahun, 2014: 101-104).

Although, the Soviets tried to keep both Somalia and Ethiopia as strategic allies, they could not stop Siad Barre, the Somali dictator from invading Ethiopia in July 1977. Between July and November 1977, the Soviets were arming both states. Infuriated by the growing shipment of arms to Ethiopia, Siad Barre expelled all Soviet and Cuban military advisers from Somalia in November 1977. That incident resulted in a shift in superpower alignment - the Soviets embracing Ethiopia and the United States allying with Somalia (Sauldie, 1987: 42; Lewis, 1989: 573-579). But the expulsion of the Soviets did not bring about immediate American arms shipment to Somalia. The State Department made its military assistance conditional: Somalia could get American arms only after the withdrawal of its forces from Ethiopian territory (Fantahun, 2014: 115).

In March 1978, eight months after its invasion of Ethiopia, Somalia suffered a crushing defeat. Scholars rightly trace the origins of the 1991 state collapse to that devastating defeat. Although, the attempt to topple Siad Barre was aborted in 1978, defeat led to the emergence of opposition groups. One of these was the Somali National Movement (SNM) created by the Issak clan members who felt alienated and mistreated by Siad Barre. The SNM was supported by Ethiopia, the former South Yemen and Libya. According to confidential reports from the archives of the Ethiopian Ministry of National Defence (MOND) (1977), it had 5,608 fighters in 1985 who received military training in the Ogaden region. The SNM received uniforms and rations from Ethiopia and arms from Libya and South Yemen (MOND Archives, Folder No. 4635, 1985: 33-36). Likewise, disgruntled officers from the Majerten (Darod) clan formed the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF). On its part, the SSDF received heavy weapons from Libya and small arms from Ethiopia. Its fighters were also given military training in the Ogaden and they waged their armed resistance along the frontier areas of Lembel and Geladin against the Siad Barre government (MOND Archives, 4635: 30-31; Clark, 1992:93: 111; Besteman, 1996: 581; Lewis, 1989: 575-576).

As SNM stepped up its guerrilla operation against the Somali government, Siad Barre received American arms worth \$1.4 million in 1988. In an attempt to suppress the rebellion, Siad Barre's forces devastated the town of Hargeisa and massacred "at least 5,000 unarmed civilians predominantly from the Issak clan members. Issaks ..." in 1988/89 (Volman 1993: 5; Clark, 1992: 111). That did not stop the SNM from waging its armed resistance in northern Somalia that encouraged other clan-based rebel groups to take up arms against the

regime. These included the United Somali Congress (USC) and the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) supported respectively by the Hawiye and the Ogaden clans (Schraeder, 1993: 13; Gilkes, 1989: 53-58).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a historical research to investigate Somalia's contemporary history. Attempts have been made to consult pertinent primary as well as secondary sources. In addition, priceless documents from the archives of the Ethiopian Ministry of National Defence have been used. The information gathered from all those sources was carefully examined, cross-checked and interpreted.

### State collapse and anarchy

As a result of mounting resistance from various rebel groups, Siad Barre abandoned Mogadishu in January 1991 and retreated to southern Somalia. The collapse of the government led to a bloody division within the United Somali Congress USC. While General Mohammed Farah Aideed moved south in pursuit of Siad Barre, Ali Mahdi Mohamed, a business man from Mogadishu proclaimed himself president of Somalia. As Siad Barre's own Darod clan members formed the Somali National Front (SNF), the two Hawiye leaders of the USC, General Farah Aideed of the Habar Gedir sub-clan and Ali Mahdi Mohamed of the Abgal sub-clan began to fight a bloody civil war in Mogadishu. While civil war, looting and destruction rocked Mogadishu and southern Somalia, the SNM declared Northern Somalia (former British Somaliland) independent on May 17, 1991 (Schraeder, 13; Besteman, 582; Clarke, 112). That was followed by Puntland, northeastern Somalia which declared its autonomy from the rest of Somalia in 1998 (Anonymous, 2002: 251). The newly created Republic of Somaliland has its own justification to declare its independence. To begin with, it was formerly a British colony with its own colonial boundaries. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) had already declared that existing colonial boundaries should be accepted by member states to avoid conflict among African countries. Secondly, Somaliland has managed to create quite a stable government and has been holding relatively fair elections. However, the international community has so far denied recognition to the Republic of Somaliland.

Whereas, Somaliland and Puntland experienced relative peace and stability, southern Somalia was gripped by a dreadful famine and bloody civil war. Within a matter of four months, 14,000 Somalis were reportedly killed and about 27,000 were wounded as a result of the brutal civil war. In and around Mogadishu, fighting raged between General Farah Aideed militia units and that of Ali

Mahdi Mohamed. In southern Somalia, the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) led by General Morgan fought a brutal civil war against Colonel Omar's forces. Whereas, the SPM included the Marehan, Mijerteen and other clans, Colonel Omar's militiamen were predominantly from the Ogaden sub-clan (Menkhaus, 2003: 410; Volman, 30). Even more alarming was the death of over 300,000 Somalis due to famine. To make matters worse, 80% of the relief food was reportedly looted by armed militiamen (Clark, 120).

Clan militias (who came to acquire stockpiles of all sorts of light and heavy weapons Somalia had received during the Cold War) fought against each other and looted relief food. The warlords seemed to be indifferent to preserve the state structure in Somalia. For them, what was more important was their clan interest than the state. Each warlord was determined to advance his own clan interests as opposed to his rivals. As the civil war and famine continued to claim thousands of lives, the United Nations decided to alleviate the problem. Consequently, the UN managed to persuade the two war lords, Ali Mahdi and Farah Aidede to accept a ceasefire on March 3, 1992. However, the UN mediated ceasefire did not include other clan leaders and warring factions (Ibid., 112-115). That proved to be one of the principal predicaments of the peace process in Somalia. Had the UN and the US hoped to bring about peace by bringing the two warring warlords to a negotiating table disregarding the other clan and faction leaders, they were wrong. Other clan leaders and head of militia units should have been consulted and included. In the final analysis, the March 1992 ceasefire proved to be only a temporary respite.

### **The UN and US intervention and withdrawal**

Despite the ceasefire, the famine continued to claim more lives every day. In order to avert the humanitarian disaster, the Security Council approved the deployment of a UN force of 3,500 men in August 1992. But the Somali war lords agreed to allow only 500 peace keepers. The leading warlords seemed to have anticipated that a larger peace keeping force would weaken their power and eventually disarm their militia units. Accordingly, 500 Pakistani peace keepers were deployed in early October, 1992 (Volman, 7-8; Bolton, 1994: 58). In the meantime, the outgoing US president, George W. Bush decided to send 24,000 troops to support the humanitarian effort of the UN. In early December 1992, the Security Council approved the US plan named "Operation Restore Hope." Soon afterwards, US marines led by "three teams of Navy SEALs (Sea-Air-Land Commandos) landed on the beaches of Mogadishu and secured the airport and the port." Their original mission was to "establish a secure environment" for the distribution of relief food among starved Somalis

(Volman, 8; Schraeder, 15).

Meanwhile, General Farah Aidede rejected the Security Council's resolution of sending additional "peace keepers" totaling 3,000. Before the arrival of UN and US peace keepers, an aide to General Aidede had prophetically warned that coffins should also be sent to Somalia along with the troops (Bolton, 58). General Farah Aidede believed that the arrival of additional peace keepers would undermine his power and influence in Somalia. Besides, the peace keepers were authorised to take all necessary measures including fighting against armed groups which meant armed clash with his men. Despite opposition from war lords, the UN force in Somalia (UNOSOM) was much more increased to 38,000 troops, contributed by more than 20 countries including 28,000 from the United States (Allard, 1995: 14). The substantial increase in the number of UN and US forces was hoped to reverse the ever worsening security threat and to carry out an efficient relief operation.

The UN and US intervention in Somalia which had originally been purely humanitarian began to assume more ambitious roles of rebuilding state structures (Bolton, 62). Accordingly, the Security Council authorized in its March 1993 resolution the plan of nation rebuilding. Scholars attribute the change in the mission of the UN and US intervention mainly to the policy of "assertive multilateralism" policy of the newly elected president, Bill Clinton. This policy was put into effect during the 1991 Gulf war to end the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces. In 1993, Bill Clinton attempted to revive that policy to solve the crisis in Somalia. In both situations, the US tried to spearhead multinational forces to achieve specific objectives. It became abundantly clear that the US was dominating UN decisions (Bolton, 62; Clarke and Herbst, 1996: 72). In this regard, Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst rightly concluded that "In fact, all the major Security Council resolutions on Somalia, including the "nation-building" resolution, were written by U.S officials, mainly in the Pentagon, and handed to the United Nations as fait accomplis." (Clarke and Herbst, 73).

One of the daunting tasks of rebuilding state institutions was disarming war lords and their clan militia groups. The US initially used the "carrot", that is, food and cash for arms in an attempt to disarm clan militias. But the disarmament plan was half-heartedly applied. The US troops allowed war lords to "keep their weapons if they moved the arms out of Mogadishu..." That proved to be another grave mistake. It sent a wrong signal to the war lords that they could maintain their power and influence (Ibid., 75-76). It seems naive to believe that allowing militias to get out of Mogadishu with their arms could bring about peace and stability in Somalia. In the first place, given the availability and proliferation of arms in the region, a person could keep more than one rifle. One may handover one of his rifles and keep another one. In addition, one could not be certain that a militia would not buy a new AK-47 assault rifle with the money he received



for handing over his weapon. In the end, the whole exercise was a complete failure.

As a result, once again violence erupted in and around Mogadishu in the middle of 1993. The UN and US troops were thus authorized to use force if necessary. The changing role of the international force from peace keeping to fighting triggered armed clashes with General Aideed. Accordingly, on June 5, 1993, Aideed's militiamen mounted an attack on UN peace keepers which resulted in the death of 24 Pakistani troops. On the next day, the Security Council passed a swift resolution to arrest General Aideed. Determined to launch a punitive campaign against General Aideed, the US government sent elite forces. But the big manhunt for General Aideed was to cost more civilian lives and American rangers (Bolton, 63-64).

On September 25, 1993, clan militiamen brought down a US Black Hawk helicopter with three American troops aboard. The worst was yet to come. Fierce firefight between US troops and General Aideed's militiamen resulted in the death of 18 American soldiers on October 3, 1993. What appears more disturbing was the dragging of a naked body of a dead American ranger in the streets of Mogadishu by angry Somalis. The incident shocked not only the American public and the international community, it also brought an end to the US and UN intervention in Somalia (Ibid., 65). The US government came to conclude that the mission in Somalia was a failure and a longer presence in the country would only make the situation worse. In addition, the American public at the time favoured an immediate withdrawal from Somalia.

For the next seven years, apart from attempts by Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya and other actors at state rebuilding, Somalia was left to its own devices. The complete state collapse and continued anarchy gave rise to the appearance of a terrorist group in Somalia known as Al Ittihad al Islamiya (Islamic Union). Between 1994 and 1996, al Ittihad was actively operating in the Ethiopian Somali region particularly in Degehabur, Qebri Dahar and Qelafo areas. In 1996, in addition to attempting to assassinate Abdul Mejid Hussen, the Ethiopian Minister of Transport and Communication, it carried out bomb attacks in Addis Ababa, Harar and Jijiga. In retaliation, the Ethiopian government crossed the border into Somalia and attacked Al Ittihad's bases and destroyed its training camps on several occasions (Prendergast and Thomas-Jensen, 2007: 63; Anonymous, 2002: 256).

### **Attempts at state building**

After September 11, 2001, the US government identified al-Ittihad as a terrorist group linked to Al Qaeda. Al Ittihad is believed to have supported those terrorists who carried out bombing attacks on the US embassies in Nairobi and

Dar es Salaam in 1998. Besides, al Ittihad is suspected of being responsible for the 2002 attacks in Mombasa. Although, al Ittihad's capability to carryout terrorist activities in Ethiopia and Kenya was considerably weakened, it was still operating in Southern Somalia, a region with no functional government since 1991 (BBC news, 30 November 2002).

Between 1991 and 2004, not less than 14 attempts were made by neighbouring states and the international community to bring all war lords and factional leaders to an agreement so as to form a new national government (<http://www.orfonline.org/research/somalia-a-failed-state/>). Unfortunately, however, most reconciliation efforts were doomed (Ibid., 4 July 2013). In 2000, Ismael Omar Guelleh, the President of Djibouti, began a new initiative. In August 2000, he invited 2,500 clan leaders and civil society representatives to a conference at Arta in Djibouti. War lords were deliberately excluded for they had failed to form a national government in all earlier reconciliation attempts. The Arta Conference was concluded with the adoption of a transitional charter and the election of a Transitional national Assembly consisting of 225 members. Abdiqasim Salat Hasan was elected president of the Transitional National Government (TNG). But his image was tarnished by his association with the Siad Barre regime for which he had worked as a minister. On the other hand, a considerable number of the delegates were members of the Somali Diaspora. Despite such problems, the new president faced no opposition while he attended the UN Millennium Summit in New York, the Arab League meeting in Cairo, the Islamic Conference in Doha and the IGAD meeting in Khartoum in the fall of 2000. Although, the TNG controlled no territory in Somalia, it managed to continue Somalia's membership in the OAU (Anonymous, 2002: 252-254).

However, TNG's close association with some Islamist factions in southern Somalia and its heavy reliance on financial assistance from Arab states unfriendly to Ethiopia made the Ethiopian government deeply suspicious of the new Somali government that had just moved to Mogadishu in October 2000 (Ibid., 255).

In early 2001, the TNG began to face new challenges. Defectors from the TNG turned against the fledgling government which could not even control Mogadishu. The TNG claimed that the Ethiopian government was responsible for inciting dissent and arming factions against the new Somali government. Though the Ethiopian government denied the allegations, its soldiers were repeatedly seen in southern Somalia since 1997 (Prendergast and Thomas-Jensen, 2007: 66).

Ethiopia's heavy involvement in the Somali politics became evident when it invited the leaders of major factions in southern Somalia and the head of the autonomous region of Puntland, Colonel Abdullahi Yusuf to a conference in Awassa on March 20, 2001. The establishment of the Somali Reconciliation and

Restoration Council (SRRC) at the Awassa Conference enraged the TNG. It claimed that Ethiopia was creating a bloc of opposition against the TNG. However, the SRRC soon became a victim of boycotts and divisions which made it a very loose alliance against the TNG. As hostility towards Ethiopia grew, angry protesters burned the Ethiopian flag during demonstrations held in Mogadishu and Puntland. The TNG's friendly relations with Djibouti and Eritrea added fuel on the already tense relations between Ethiopia and the new Somali government in Mogadishu (Anonymous, 2002: 260, 266-267).

A year after the formation of the TNG in Somalia, al Qaeda carried out unprecedented terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. Soon afterwards, the US government declared a global war on terrorism. The inability of the TNG to control any territory led the US and other governments to suspect that southern Somalia would be a safe haven for terrorist groups (Ibid., 269).

Following the collapse of the TNG in 2003, the Inter Government Authority on Development (IGAD) initiated the formation of a new transitional government, that led to the birth of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in Kenya in 2004. When the TFG moved to Baidoa in 2004, the Union of Islamic Courts established itself in and around Mogadishu (Prendergast and Thomas-Jensen, 2007: 62).

The TFG's request for Ethiopian military assistance was skillfully used by the Islamic Courts to win the support of many Somalis. In the spring of 2006, Mogadishu once again became a battle ground between the Islamic Courts and war lords. In the ensuing battle, the Islamic Courts succeeded in defeating not only the war lords but also the American supported militia groups known as the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism (ARPCT). The Islamic Courts managed to restore law and order in and around Mogadishu by disarming militia groups and hunting down war lords. For the first time in 15 years, Mogadishu witnessed relative peace and stability (Ibid., 63; Menkhaus, 2007: 365-70).

In the summer of 2006, the Islamic Courts consolidated their power and brought more areas in southern and central Somalia under their control. The Baidoa based TFG on the other hand remained very weak. The Ethiopian government deployed more troops to Baidoa, Bakool and Gedo areas to support the TFG. That prompted the radical elements within the Islamic Courts to declare a jihad against Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government, on its part, decided to launch a full-scale intervention in support of the TFG against the Islamic Courts. The Islamic Courts' declaration of jihad was not the only driving force that precipitated the Ethiopian intervention. There were other much more serious considerations. The Islamic Courts had not only established strong ties with Ethiopia's arch enemy, Eritrea, but also revived the old Somali irredentist dreams

and supported the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), a rebel group fighting for the separation of the Somali region from Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government thus decided to nip the Islamic Courts Union in the bud before it could destabilize the region (Menkhaus, 378).

### **The war on terror in the horn**

A few weeks before the outbreak of fighting in late 2006, there was an alarming flow of arms into Somalia. According to a UN report of November 2006, 10 countries were involved in supplying arms to the different Somali groups in violation of the arms embargo. What was more worrisome for the United States was the fact that the Islamic Courts had closer links with al Qaeda and they had already been joined by foreign jihadists. As a result, the US government fully supported the Ethiopian intervention in Somalia. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attack, the US government had already declared Ethiopia its "principal counterterrorism ally" in the strategically important region - the Horn of Africa (Ibid.; Prendergast and Thomas-Jensen, 66).

On December 24, 2006, the Ethiopian forces launched a major offensive against the Islamic Courts. Resistance collapsed within a few days. Division within the Islamic Courts between moderates and hardliners as well as lack of support from the residents of Mogadishu speeded up the collapse of the Islamic Courts. With the support of the Ethiopian forces, the TFG entered Mogadishu. The remnants of the Islamic Courts fled toward Kismayo. Ethiopia and the US carried out air strikes against retreating jihadists in January 2007. Although, the Ethiopian government promised an immediate withdrawal, it could not pull out its forces according to schedule. A couple of reasons could be cited for that delay. Firstly, other African countries were not willing to deploy their peace keepers. Secondly, the fledgling TFG was still weak to stand by its own feet. It was feared that the Ethiopian withdrawal would lead to its collapse. As a result, Ethiopian forces stayed there for three years. But the prolonged Ethiopian presence brought about far-reaching consequences. Most Somalis thus viewed Ethiopian troops as occupiers but not as liberators (Ibid). The TFG was viewed as a "puppet of Ethiopia." Meanwhile, public opposition to Ethiopian occupation was so bitter that Mogadishu residents dragged the "burned corpses of Ethiopian soldiers" in March 2007, a chilling reminder of the 1993 tragic incident (Menkhaus, 376, 385).

American support to Ethiopian troops was essential if not decisive. During the Ethiopian intervention, the US government provided intelligence to the Ethiopian army and carried out air strikes with AC-130 helicopter gunships flying from a nearby Ethiopian base (Washington Post, 27 October, 2011).

The collapse of the Islamic Courts did not, however,

result in the end of the war in Somalia. The Ethiopian intervention triggered a new insurgency by al Shabaab, a former armed wing of the Islamic Courts (Menkhaus, 385). In February 2007, al-Shabaab confirmed its association with al-Qaeda. It declared war not only against Ethiopia and the TFG but also against western NGOs and their relief workers operating in Somalia. Its insurgency included suicide missions, ambushes, assassinations and hit and ran tactics. As the ferocious fighting between the Ethiopian troops and al Shabaab fighters raged in Mogadishu, about 400,000 residents fled the capital. Between 2008 and 2009, al Shabaab is reported to have killed 42 relief workers. It also killed 30 people in Somaliland (New York Times, 10 December, 2012).

Al Shabaab had three zones of operation in Somalia. Some of its fighters were based in the Bay and Bakol areas. A second and third group of fighters have been operating in the self-declared independent state of Somaliland and the more autonomous region of Puntland respectively (Ibid). Worried by the worsening situation in Somalia, the US government began to take serious measures. In Early February 2007, the US government announced the establishment of Africa Command (AFRICOM) (Volman, 737). As early as October 2002, the US Central Command has already set up the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) with its base at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti. Initially 1,400 US troops were stationed at the new US base in Djibouti. Later, that was raised to 3,000 military personnel (Washington Post, 27 October, 2011). In a speech delivered in Arlington, Virginia, AFRICOM commander, General Carter Ham candidly outlined the objectives of America's war on terror in Africa: "The absolute imperative for the United States military is to protect America, Americans and American interests... from threats that may emerge from the African continent." "... Fighting them over there, so we do not need to fight them here," he adds "has been a core tenet of American foreign policy for decades, especially since 9/11." (www.tomdispatch.com/post/175567

Following the declaration of war on terror, the Bush administration was looking for bases in the Horn of Africa for its military operation. One of those bases selected by American military experts was the Arba Minch airfield in southern Ethiopia located 600 miles west of the Somali border. Subsequently, the US government spent "millions of dollars to upgrade the airfield in Arba Minch. Since early 2011, the Pentagon and the CIA have been flying armed Reaper drones from Arba Minch air field to strike Al Shabaab targets in Somalia (Washington Post, 27 October, 2011; BBC News, 28 October, 2011).

In the mean time, Al Shabaab was trying to swell its ranks by attracting new fighters. For instance, members of the Somali Diaspora from North America and Europe as well as jihadists from the Middle East began to join al Shabaab. For instance, between 2007 and 2009, 20

Somali Americans from Minneapolis are reported to have joined al Shabaab. One of these militants was Shirwa Ahmed who blew himself up in northern Somalia in October 2008 in a suicide mission. The US government that had already labelled al Shabaab as a terrorist group began to target its leaders. Accordingly, one of al Shabaab's top leaders Adan Hashi Ayro was killed in 2008 by American air strikes (Ibid). The US government did not, however, want to commit ground forces in Somalia mainly due to the 1993 terrible incident in Mogadishu that killed 18 American rangers. In stead, in addition to drone strikes, Americans provided "intelligence, training, raiding prowess and air cover, while Ethiopian, Ugandan and Kenyan troops did most of the day to day fighting inside Somalia" (www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/08/somalia-drones).

Despite American airstrikes and Ethiopian ground operations, the TFG was still weak. Unable to deliver peace and stability, the TFG president, Abdullahi Yusuf was eventually replaced by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed in 2008. The subsequent Ethiopian withdrawal in 2009 emboldened al Shabaab to step up its insurgency against the TFG as well as Ugandan and Burundi peace keepers. As a revenge on Uganda's involvement in peace keeping mission, al Shabaab carried out suicide bombing in Kampala on July 11, 2010 killing 76 people. The casualty included Ethiopians, Eritreans and one American. Following the Kenyan intervention in Somalia, al Shabaab started attacking Kenyans in Nairobi and Mombasa (Time, 3 July 2012). In September 2013, it attacked the Westgate shopping mall that claimed the lives of more than 67 people (BBC News, 21 September 2013). Again in early April 2015, Al Shabaab fighters mounted another attack on the Garissa University Collage killing 147 and injuring 79 people (CNN, 2 April 2015).

In response to the growing threat, the African Union mission in Somalia (AMISOM) had already launched a campaign against al Shabaab since 2011 (Reuters, 29 September, 2012). In August 2011, the TFG supported by AMISOM forces took control of Mogadishu by driving al Shabaab out of the capital. The relative stability and improving security encouraged Somali politicians to meet in Garowe, Puntland in February 2012 to discuss the end of the transitional period and the establishment of a permanent state structure. That led to the adoption of a new constitution in June 2012 (BBC News, 19 February, 2012). Finally on September 10, 2012, Somali parliamentarians elected Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, an activist and academic, as president of the federal government (Ibid., 11 September 2012).

Two days after the historic election, al Shabaab carried out a suicide attack at the gates of the Jazeera Hotel where the newly elected president was staying. In addition to the two suicide bombers, five people lost their lives. But there was no reported injury on the president (Ibid., 12 September 2012). Following this latest attack, the AMISOM forces and Somali soldiers resumed their

operation against al Shabaab. Finally, a relentless assault by Kenyan and Somali forces forced al Shabaab to abandon one of its last strongholds, the port of Kismayu on September 29, 2012 (Reuters, 29 September 2012).

In the meantime, the US government continued its air strikes in Somalia. Thanks to latest advances in intelligence gathering, American drones and manned jet fighters managed to hunt down a number of militants in Somalia. For instance, in January 2012, Bilaal al-Barjawi who coordinated the 2010 Kampala bombing was killed in a drone strike on a convoy near Mogadishu ([www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/08/Somalia-drones](http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2012/08/Somalia-drones)). Very recently, American intelligence officials managed to spot the whereabouts of Al Shabaab's leader, Ahmed Abdi Godane. Then on 01 September 2014, he was killed in an airstrike near a place called Hawaay not far from Barawe town. A year earlier, Godane claimed that he had masterminded Al Shabaab's raid on the Kenyan shopping mall (Chicago Tribune, 06 September 2014; Washington Post, 5 September 2014).

Emboldened by the latest setback on Al Shabaab, Somali government forces and African Union troops managed to drive Al Shabaab out of the port town of Barawe on 4 October 2014 (CNN news, 6 October, 2014; Aljazeera, 6 October, 2014).

The intriguing question worth addressing is why the Somalis miserably failed to rebuild a strong state for two decades. During the pre-colonial times, state structure was unknown to Somalis. The society was structured along clan lines and all the six major clans and the numerous sub-clans within them had their own traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution. The imposition of the state structure by the colonial powers and the commercialization of the economy greatly undermined the social fabric and the traditional values that had enabled the Somali clans to co-exist peacefully. Still worse, in the post-liberation period, greedy politicians who came to power relied on blood ties not only to distribute power and resources to their clan members but also to suppress opposition from other clans. Following the collapse of Siad barre's regime, the war lords were "engulfed in a struggle over whatever was left of the carcass of the state" (Samatar, 1992: 637). In other words, no war lord tried to rebuild the state. Instead, rival faction leaders were determined to grab whatever resources that could enhance their own power and influence. Particularly, in southern Somalia, competition over land and resources was so fierce that repeated attempts to rebuild the state through external mediation failed miserably for two decades (Adam, 1992: 11-26).

The UN and the US efforts to arrange a ceasefire by bringing leading warlords to a negotiating table did not deliver peace. Other clan leaders and militia commanders felt that they were ignored by the international community. The attempt to disarm the unruly militiamen was also a failure. On the other hand, because of its

inherent weakness and the assistance it received from Ethiopia, the TFG was not greeted with public support. It was rather regarded as a puppet of foreign powers. That greatly undermined its legitimacy, thereby contributing to instability.

## Conclusion

The two decades following the 1991 state collapse have been the most destructive and violent years in Somalia's recent history. The stockpiles of arms acquired during the cold war by Siad Barre fell into the hands of warlords. The civil war among warlords was attended by a cruel famine that claimed the lives of thousands of Somalis. The UN and US peace keepers that intervened to solve the humanitarian crisis ended up in a firefight with General Aideed's militiamen. The dragging of the body of American soldiers in the streets of Mogadishu triggered the withdrawal of US and UN troops from Somalia.

Between 1993 and 2000, renewed fighting among warlords created more death and large scale displacement. Following the 2000 Arta conference, a Transitional National Government (TNG) was formed but it soon collapsed and was replaced by a Transitional Federal Government (TFG) in 2004. In an attempt to oust the Islamic Courts and install the TFG, Ethiopian forces intervened in Somalia in late 2006. The Ethiopian intervention triggered the beginning of Al Shabaab's insurgency. The US government which identified Al Shabaab as a terrorist group began to deploy its drones to hunt down its leaders and destroy its terrorist networks.

Somalia's quest for peace and stability has been to a great extent undermined by its own clan-based politics. The warlords who fought among themselves for power and resources gave much priority to their own clan based interests rather than working towards a national goal. It is therefore, paradoxically strange that despite the existence of a common religion, language and ethnicity, it took the Somalis well over two decades to form a stable national government.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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